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Date: 23rd January 2025



Exeter City Council
Local Plans Teams
Paris Street
Exeter
EX1 1JN

By Email (planning.policy@exeter.gov.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam,

**The Exeter Plan 2021-2041: Publication Plan: Regulation 19
Exe Bridges Retail Park, Cowick Street, Exeter
Representations submitted on behalf of NT Properties Nominees 1A Ltd and NT
Nominees 1B Ltd**

We are instructed by our client, NT Properties Nominees 1A Ltd and NT Nominees 1B Ltd (c/o Legal & General Investment Management ('LGIM')) to submit the enclosed representations to the consultation on the Regulation 19 version of The Exeter Plan 2021-2041.

LGIM is a key stakeholder in the City, owing the freehold of Exe Bridges Retail Park ('EBRP'), which is located off Cowick Street, Exeter.

EBRP forms part of the wider St Thomas District Centre, as defined by both the adopted Development Plan and the emerging local plan. The District Centre provides an important established retail destination for residents in an accessible location. The retail park is fully let, with the longest lease not expiring until August 2031, with existing representation from Next, M&S, Boots, Poundland, TK Maxx and Burger King.

LGIM continue to look to maintain and improve the vitality and viability of EBRP, and ensure that it continues to provide an important anchor for St Thomas District Centre by providing retail choice in an accessible location, and a significant source of local employment.

It is also recognised that EBRP has the potential, in the medium to long term (10-15 years), for wider residential-led mixed use redevelopment. That redevelopment could potentially contribute to meeting the wider needs of the City, as acknowledged by Exeter City Council ('ECC') in the Regulation 19 version of the emerging Local Plan. It is therefore essential that there is an appropriate policy framework in place to ensure that the important role EBRP plays as part of a district centre function is maintained and enhanced over the plan period, whether redevelopment or not. It is imperative that the emerging policy framework does not undermine LGIM's ability to agree new leases or undertake wider asset management initiatives whilst also fostering greater redevelopment potential in the medium to long term, subject to market demand.

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It is within this context that these representations have been submitted.

1 Strategic mixed use brownfield allocation SBA 4

The emerging Local Plan (under Policy H1) seeks to deliver 13,975 homes over the plan period, against an identified need of 12,840 homes. The Local Plan therefore allows for a 'healthy headroom' with a potential surplus of 1,135 homes over the plan period.

To meet this housing target, Policy H1 identifies the sources of housing delivery. This includes approximately 5,369 homes to be delivered through a number of site allocations.

Draft Policy H2 sets out the housing allocations and windfalls for the provision of new homes and associated infrastructure. This includes five strategic mixed-use brownfield sites, where most of the development is intended to be focused. EBRP is proposed to be allocated as one of these strategic mixed-use brownfield sites, delivering approximately 201 homes over the plan period (i.e. 2021 to 2041).

Full details of how these strategic mixed use brownfield sites should be developed are provided in Section 16 ('Site allocations') of the draft Local Plan. The proposed allocation for EBRP is referred to as SBA4, which states¹ that this site *"provides an opportunity to redevelop the area for housing whilst **retaining significant retail provision** in a mixed use proposal"*. (our emphasis)

The draft allocation goes on to acknowledge² that EBRP is currently subject to various leases and that development is unlikely to come forward until after 2030 and that a key consideration³ will be:

"...the need to maintain the retail function of the site on the ground floor (the site is within St Thomas district centre) whilst providing significant, high quality residential development above. This will help to manage the impacts of flood risk which are a vital issue for the site, alongside future access and egress requirements."

The proposed site allocation recognises the District Centre designation of EBRP and the importance of maintaining its retail function. Such an approach is supported by LGIM. However, the proposed allocation also sets a number of criteria that 'will' be required as part of any future development for the site. These include, *inter alia*, the following:

- Serviced plots for custom and self-build homes (Criterion A.ii).
- New employment provision in the form of a collaborative workspace (Criterion C).

¹ Paragraph 16.25

² Paragraph 16.26

³ Paragraph 16.27



- Public realm that provides space for community and cultural activities (Criterion D.i).
- A mobility hub to provide for public transport, active travel and shared mobility (Criterion E.iii)
- Green infrastructure provision, including contributions to off-site provision (Criterion F.i)
- Help to deliver, and connect to, a local energy network (Criterion G).

The provision of such detailed requirements for the site, which under the proposed wording will have to be delivered as part of a future scheme, represents a very prescriptive approach to potential future development that will not come forward until the latter end of the plan period – as acknowledged by ECC. Such a prescriptive approach allows for very limited flexibility and fails to fully acknowledge the site-specific characteristics of EBRP – an established retail destination within a defined district centre where there is a recognised need to retain “significant retail provision”⁴.

LGIM is open to the potential for redevelopment of the Site in the medium to long term. However, as currently worded the current approach, which imposes to set a number of stringent development requirements that ‘will’ need to be required, **cannot be supported**.

Furthermore, at this stage, given the active use of EBRP, which is fully let with long leasehold interests, LGIM is not able to fully commit to its future redevelopment to deliver mixed-use development, including housing. LGIM wants to stress the importance of the draft policy wording in recognising that the priority is to maintain and enhance the District Centre, rather than delivering new homes. Ongoing asset management initiatives should not be undermined by a wider aspiration to deliver “significant, high quality residential development above”, and the policy should be worded accordingly.

Within this context we strongly believe that the proposed approach, as set out in the emerging local plan, needs to be revised to be more flexible in respect of the future use and less prescriptive in its approach to future proposals at EBRP. EBRP differs from all the other proposed strategic mixed use brownfield allocations in that it is the only designated town centre⁵ site that is solely in active town centre use. This provides an important distinction between the five strategic mixed-use brownfield allocations, and this point should be reflected in the policy approach. Indeed, as recognised by ECC including elsewhere in the emerging Local Plan, the continuation of retailing at EBRP is both supported and recognised as being important in meeting residents’ shopping needs.

We propose the following revised wording to the proposed allocation. Text to be deleted is struck through and new text is bold and underlined.

“A site of 1.8 hectares at Exe Bridges Retail Park is identified for a mixed use development with the potential to deliver approximately 201 homes, retail and an attractive public realm in the”

⁴ Para. 16.25

⁵ As defined by the NPPF (2024)



latter stages of the Plan period. The development must support the achievement of net zero and accord with the Liveable Exeter Principles to deliver a compact and well connected neighbourhood, incorporating the highest standards of design.

Regard should be given to the following will be required as part of any future redevelopment opportunity that may come forward on the Site:

...

This revised approach allows for flexibility should future redevelopment proposals come forward at EBRP and better reflects the characteristics of this site.

In addition, we believe that additional text should be provided within the draft policy to ensure that potential future long-term redevelopment of EBRP does not impact on the site's existing and future retail use. In this respect, we suggest that the following additional text should be included under the proposed allocation of EBRP:

"The potential for future redevelopment of EBRP for mixed use development should not impact on the site's continued retail function, or the potential for that retail function to be enhanced in the short, medium or long term. The longer term redevelopment potential of the site should not therefore prejudice the continued operation of the site as a designated District Centre."

Such an approach will maintain the important retail function of EBRP as forming part of the defined district centre, as recognised by ECC. It is also significant that the delivery of housing at EBRP is not critical in ensuring that the housing needs in the City is met given the Local Plan identifies 'healthy headroom'. The flexibility proposed by LGIM does not therefore undermine the Council's housing delivery plans, rather it gives primacy to the policy objective⁶ of protecting and enhancing the viability and viability of EBRP as a town centre destination.

2 Policy RFC1 and Policy RFC2

Policy RFC1 outlines that ECC will work with partners to "protect and enhance the vitality, viability and resilience of the city centre, district centres and local centres" and "a mix of uses and activities" will be supported.

The supporting text and the Policies Map continue to identify St Thomas (including EBRP) as one of only three designated District Centres in the City. The supporting text also identifies that main town centre uses, including retail, will be focused on the city, district and local centres. This continued recognition of St Thomas as a District Centre is both welcomed and strongly support by LGIM.

⁶ As set out in draft Policy RFC1



Draft Policy RFC2 sets out the approach to be taken to retail provision in the mixed-use brownfield allocations and the supporting text (at para. 8.19) states:

“Proposals for larger scale and comparison retail are unlikely to be appropriate in the mixed use brownfield allocations because this type of development will draw customers from a wider area, encouraging longer travel distances and potentially competing with the centres.”

Significantly, EBRP is proposed to become a mixed-use brownfield allocation but also forms part of a defined district centre. Consequently, this approach of resisting large scale and comparison retailing is in direct conflict with other policies within the emerging Local Plan, including draft Policy RFC1, and site allocation SBA4 which requires retaining significant retail provision to be made alongside residential on upper floors. Indeed, the wording of draft Policy RFC1 specifically states:

“Development proposals for convenience retail provision of up to 500 square metres of net sales area will be supported as part of a wider mix of uses in the strategic mixed use brownfield allocations where it is demonstrated that the proposals will minimise the need to travel and provide access in accordance with the transport hierarchy.”

The wording of this policy suggests that at EBRP, which is proposed as a strategic mixed use brownfield allocation, would not be appropriate for convenience retail provision above 500 square metres. Again, such an approach would be at odds with other policies and not reflective that the proposed strategic allocation at EBRP will continue to form part of a defined district centre. As mentioned above, it is important that EBRP is recognised as being different to the other four strategic mixed-use brownfield sites given it is the only strategic mixed-use brownfield that forms part of the retail hierarchy.

As forming part of a wider defined district centre, EBRP provides an entirely appropriate location for retail development, including large-format convenience and comparison retailing. However, the proposed wording to draft Policy RFC2 and its supporting text suggests that, as a strategic mixed use brownfield site, EBRP would **not be appropriate for large-format retailing**. This approach is not justified or consistent with national policy, and is also in direct conflict with other draft policies in the emerging Local Plan. The NPPF⁷ fundamentally supports focusing retail development within established centres, as too does draft Policy RFC1. The draft Local Plan wording needs to be revised accordingly, and we have suggested amendments below. Again, additional text in bold and underlined.

Paragraph 8.19

*“Proposals for larger scale and comparison retail are unlikely to be appropriate in the mixed use brownfield allocations, **with the exception of Exe Bridges Retail Park (Site ref. SBA4),***

⁷ Paragraph 90



because this type of development will draw customers from a wider area, encouraging longer travel distances and potentially competing with the centres.”

Policy RFC2

***“With the exception of Exe Bridges Retail Park (ref.SBA4), which forms part of St Thomas district centre,** development proposals for convenience retail provision of up to 500 square metres of net sales area will be supported as part of a wider mix of uses in the strategic mixed use brownfield allocations where it is demonstrated that the proposals will minimise the need to travel and provide access in accordance with the transport hierarchy.”*

The suggested changes will ensure that the local plan is consistent with the NPPF and other policies within the Local Plan, which seek to focus retail development on defined centres.

3 Summary

LGIM is a key stakeholder in Exeter and welcomes the potential long-term development opportunity of EBRP. However, the proposed approach in allocating the site for future development is too prescriptive and fails to provide the flexibility necessary to ensure that policy primacy is given to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of EBRP which forms part of a designated district centre.

Instead, for the reasons outlined above, a more flexible approach should be provided for EBRP given its specific site characteristics. This can be achieved through the suggested revisions to the relevant policies referred to above. These changes will ensure the Plan is effective, justified and consistent with national policy. **Without these changes LGIM views the plan as being unsound and cannot be supported.**

We trust that these representations will be given full consideration by the Council and are helpful in progressing the Local Plan. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to us if there are any queries.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Rainbird
Senior Director

enc.

cc. NT Properties Nominees 1A Ltd and NT Nominees 1B Ltd (c/o Legal & General Investment Management)