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Planning Inspectorate

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Historic England Post Hearing Note – Exe Bridges Retail Park flood egress

This note has been prepared as requested by the Inspectors to set out Historic England's initial position on a potential flood access and egress bridge for Exe Bridges strategic site allocation.

The Provisional Emergency Access and Egress Route Plan (Sept 2025) sets out the context and basic parameters for a flood egress bridge from the Exe Bridges Retail Park strategic site allocation, which is located in Flood Zone 3.

The report suggests a preliminary preferred route (option 9) of 'the River Exe Cycle Bridge'. This would launch from the southwest side of the River Exe at Alphington Street and land on the northeast side of the river at the lower end of New Bridge Street. The line of the bridge would be close to that of two former bridges which linked the west bank of the Exe with New Bridge Street / Fore Street. It would be located north of the remains of a third bridge - the Old Exe Bridge - and may transect its former route where it crossed the River Exe.

The medieval Old Exe Bridge is both a scheduled monument and a grade II listed building, while New Bridge Street also incorporates a grade II listed arch and balustrades. The Old Exe Bridge and New Bridge Street are both located within the Riverside Conservation Area.

From a townscape and heritage perspective, this is an area already hampered by a complex gyratory road system, which links with the two modern Exe Bridges and encircles the remaining parts of the historic bridges. Any additional infrastructure may add cumulatively to the harm associated with the existing road infrastructure.

We note that this is a strategic study and is not therefore supported by impact assessments at this stage. It does however contain a high-level assessment of route option 9. Unfortunately this assessment, contained in Table 3-1, does not acknowledge the interaction with heritage assets on the northeast side of the river, nor assess any impacts that may arise. There is potential for infrastructure of this sort to result in harm to the significance of these heritage assets. This could involve both physical impacts (including impacts on archaeological remains) and impacts arising from development in their settings. This is particularly so bearing in mind

the need for the egress bridge to clear Edmund Street by around 5m and ramp down to New Bridge Street.

Conversely, there may be an opportunity for a pedestrian and cycle link if well designed and integrated with other highway and public realm enhancements, to improve access to the scheduled monument (and New Bridge Street / Fore Street) and potentially deliver heritage benefits through improvements to the public realm. Were this to be combined with a comprehensive review and rationalisation of the highway infrastructure in this area, then this could be particularly beneficial.

We note that there are alternative options for flood access and egress that are not contained in the report. It would be helpful to have more information on these potential options to inform discussions between Historic England and the Council.

On this basis, while Historic England has some concerns about potential harm that may arise as a result of the flood egress bridge, this would depend on its detailed siting and design. We therefore encourage the Council and site promoter to seek pre-application advice at an early stage in design development to ensure that harm can be avoided or minimised and enhancements secured.

Location of scheduled monument

The map below shows the location of the scheduled monument known as *The medieval Exe Bridge, St Edmund's Church, and medieval tenement remains, lying between the River Exe and Frog Street*.

