

Exeter Plan Hearing Day 3: Thursday 5 March 2026

Matter 3 – Spatial Strategy and Distribution of Development

Issue 1 – Spatial Strategy and Liveable Exeter Principles – Policies S1 and S2

Q.3 How does Policy S2 relate to the Exeter St James Neighbourhood Plan and its principle of ‘community balance’?

Statement on behalf of Exeter St James Community Trust (R Connett)

As the Exeter Plan does not identify any of its designated strategic brownfield sites within the statutorily designated St James Neighbourhood Area, Policy S2, does not, (currently at least), apply to this neighbourhood. Indeed, ECC’s suggested amendment proposes to further clarify that this policy ‘*applies to the regeneration opportunity areas*’ only

However, the preamble to S2 confirms at 4.15 that Liveable Exeter Principles are not limited to these sites, and that:

‘...In adopting the Liveable Exeter principles, we aim to strengthen and reinvigorate existing communities and repurpose and transform other parts of the city which need to change’

ECC’s document ‘*Liveable Exeter Principles*’ is subtitled ‘*A city-wide initiative of transformational change*’. It makes it very clear that ‘*neighbourhoods are the building block of a city*’ and that in order ‘*[t]o deliver the Exeter Vision 2040, it is essential to strengthen existing neighbourhoods*’ alongside the comprehensive regeneration of the strategic brownfield sites to create new neighbourhoods.

So, if S2 doesn’t address the transformational Liveable Exeter Principles in relation to the non-strategic mixed use brown field development, which policy explicitly does?

The introduction to ‘*Liveable Exeter Principles*’ states:

‘The Exeter Plan...is entirely driven by achieving [Exeter Vision 2040’s] outcomes and they are embedded across all key policies and development sites within the draft plan’,

But the Trust doubts the effectiveness of this claimed embedding alone to achieve second bullet point at 4:15:

New development that contributes positively to an area’s character and identity, creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness

On what basis does ECC propose to define each neighbourhood’s character, identity and local distinctiveness, or determine the issues that may be addressed through steering development? Surely this requires input and shared ownership by each respective community if the outcomes are to be places that meet the needs and vision of the citizens who live there?

At 1:15 Exeter Plan acknowledges St James’ NP as the sole such plan within Exeter’s Development Plan, and its continuing role in helping ‘*to ensure that, as Exeter expands, it will keep its distinct identity and continue to serve its citizens’ needs*’.

The Trust believes that explicitly aligned with, and supported by, the Exeter Plan, the NP would be ideally placed to ensure Exeter Vision 2040 is achieved in this one existing neighbourhood, at least.

The NP continues to serve as the ‘joined-up’ planning policy specifically addressing the statutorily designated neighbourhood area of St James. It came about because the local community had a vision for strengthening and reinvigorating St James through a positively prepared planning policy that would steer the community’s desired transformational change into a vibrant neighbourhood with a balanced and diverse community, in line with national and local planning policy, and at the most basic level, securing its long term sustainability.

When the NP was prepared, with advice and support of ECC planning officers, and examined, there was no indication that there would be any problem with the interpretation of the overarching aim of a balanced and diverse community or its related definition (NP p.25) of:

The term ‘community balance’ therefore refers to the desire of the residents of St James to have a diverse population which includes people at all stages of their lives and which is not dominated by a single group of the population.

However, ECC’s subsequent insistence that the lack of a robust definition for ‘community balance’ anywhere in ECC’s development plan policies or guidance allowing the refusal of proposals NP policies do not support, has resulted in great disappointment, and has contributed in no small part to the worsening of community imbalance, counter to the NP’s key aim.

The replacement with such a term as ‘mixed’ community is entirely unsatisfactory as a mix can be grossly imbalanced. Similarly, focus instead on the concentration of a particular housing type is problematic, firstly as it begs the question of how an over-concentration is to be identified, and secondly, as it does not serve as a useful proxy the all-important demographic data.

If development proposals that would increase still further the proportion of the 19 – 25 year old demographic living in St James are to be refused, then it is vital that the Exeter Plan policies or guidance provide the robust wording required not only to help achieve Exeter Vision 2040 as it relates to St James, but to meet the NPPF requirement of sustainable development.

I look forward to discussing this matter further at the Hearing, on behalf of Exeter St James Community Trust.

