



Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

Exeter: A Heritage Harbour

Water Lane (South), Exeter

Outline Planning Application, 23/1007/OUT, submitted August 2023

Design and Access Statement Addendum, May 2024

Response to the Addendum, and objection and solutions by the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal

What is a Liveable Waterside development if it doesn't contribute to the life of the waterway?

1.1 The steps by which the outline application has been made

The revised proposals for the Water Lane area redevelopment are welcome for the improvements that protect the operation of Exeter Ship Canal. Nevertheless, the amendments do not dispose sufficiently of the material objections to the original application as submitted last year. The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal accordingly maintain their overall objection to the application as it stands.

1.2 However, our objection is not presented in a negative spirit. We recognise the need for affordable and liveable housing. **Therefore, to make progress, we set out proposals for ongoing consultations on matters affecting the waterway to be a condition of outline planning approval and to mitigate the impact of the development.**

1.3 The Canal is central to the application by providing focus for the 'liveable waterside' development. At the same time the consequences of the application extend beyond the waterway adjoining the development itself, to the operation of the entire Canal and Basin and therefore to the capacities of the Port of Exeter as a whole.

1.4 The City Council is currently seeking a Harbour Revision Order that requires decisions to be 'conducive to the efficient and economical operation, maintenance, management and improvement of the Port'. Anything that is counter to this would

risk therefore infringement of the HRO. Gabriel's Wharf is designated 'port premises'. The water of the Canal and Basin is not separable in terms of use from the land that borders it. What happens on this land can indelibly affect the waterway's ability to function.

1.5 The Friends believe there are genuine opportunities for a 'liveable waterside community' which are compatible with an unimpeded working waterway next door, with advantages to both if consideration is given to both. We believe the new Water Lane community can be integrated beneficially with the working waterway through wider policies in a complementary Canal Plan by the City Council/Harbour Board that promote the Canal's function and maximise the buzz, interest and well-being that living by a thriving working waterway creates for the community. We propose this way forward to mitigate current objections and the impact of the proposals on the waterway's future.

2.1 The Water Lane Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The outline application for the Water Lane redevelopment relates to principal access requirements and a 'mix and quantum of uses', but it includes many additional illustrations and details – including of the future of the canalside.

2.2 The City Council produced a draft Water Lane Supplementary Planning Document and Design Code that went out for consultation at the end of last year. The Friends object that it is premature to consult on the present application before a decision is made on the SPD, which has not yet happened. The Supplementary Planning Document is a material factor in deciding the outline planning application. It should therefore be a material factor in the public consultation on the application.

2.3 The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal submit the above constitutes a material objection to the process by which the Council is dealing with the present outline application.

2.4 Pragmatically, however, consultation has already been extensive. The Water Lane Development Management Company (DMC) has listened to responses. Its statement on the Canal in the Addendum is welcome and significant: 'The Outline Planning Application proposals are not intended to restrict the operational capacity of the Exeter Ship Canal' (Addendum para 1.7).

2.5 We propose that, to clarify the situation and prevent any further delay to progress, a condition that embeds continuing consideration of the operational capacity of the Canal should be part of granting outline planning approval. It would require the developers to demonstrate they had consulted the Harbour Master and key stakeholders, including the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal, on the details of all

proposals affecting the waterway, basin and towpaths, and to record agreements and disagreements.

2.6 This would be a positive move to share understanding and knowledge of requirements. The following responses by the Friends to the Addendum illustrate the importance of maintaining consultation with stakeholders.

3.1 Gabriel's Wharf and space for maritime activities (Addendum paras 1.3–1.11)

The Friends welcome the DMC's amendments to reconfigure 'Water Square' to retain an area of multi-functional hard standing at Gabriel's Wharf as well as road access to the water's edge for large vehicles and cranes. It is a measure that will maintain the ability to lift vessels over 20 tonnes from the water in emergencies which is a basic essential to the ongoing management and operational capacity of the canal.

3.2 This has come about directly as a result of responses initiated by the Harbour Master and the Friends of Exeter Ship Canal supported by other informed groups to the original application.

3.3 But no details are given of how the area can be cleared at short notice, or large vehicles and cranes safely operate and turn, or boats be moved in and out of the water safely, if the area doubles as open space where people eat, drink and relax. Reaction times and alternative routes for pedestrians, cyclists and service vehicles need to be part of continuing consultation.

3.4 The viability and operation of the waterway depend also on its working future. The DMC's statement that the hard standing could 'double-up' for 'occasional drop-off of boats and trailers for canal users' as well as accommodating usable public realm and proposed commercial uses demonstrates an underestimation of the importance and functional status of Gabriel's Wharf.

3.5 Exeter is becoming a leading working Heritage Harbour. Vessels of considerable size (and interest) will be attracted again to the Canal and Basin for visits, restorations and moorings. Excursions, hires and charters, and future carbon neutral passenger and freight transport innovations will all be elements of the Exeter waterway of the future. Gabriel's Wharf and adjoining land is an important facility and necessary as an operational quay.

3.6 We object to the wholesale implications of the DMC's statement on maritime activities on land adjoining Gabriel's Wharf as 'not compatible with major redevelopment proposals in terms of land-take, noise and visual impact'.

3.7 The area has been the only site of high quality boatbuilding and work on sizeable vessels on the Canal. It is essential space, near the Canal and the Basin, for Exeter's maritime business to grow in the 21st century. The feasibility of different types of maritime-related use of the wharf and land at this point should inform both the DMC and canal management. The shipyard should be considered for reconfiguration as a location for traditional craft and small boat building, new waterway related skills and technologies, repairs, new businesses, and interesting water-related employment and community opportunities alongside attractive housing.

3.8 We look to other small ports and inland centres of maritime interest and water-related use and the attractions their activities add to the liveability of the immediate and wider areas and people's connections with the water. If functional maritime operations are lost to catering and retail uses at Gabriel's Wharf, they would be lost for ever and the operational aims and future of the Canal and Port and Heritage Harbour irreversibly damaged.

3.9 We propose that a mitigating condition of outline planning approval should be fresh evaluation of accommodating maritime activities in the context of new development on land around Gabriel's Wharf, and the impact on the future of the Heritage Harbour project and the Canal and Port as well as residents: this to include ongoing consultation with stakeholders.

4.1 No POPS

There is growing concern at the trend for Privately Owned Open Spaces (POPS). Despite appearing to be public realm, land is privately owned and controlled subject to rules set by the owners rather than local authorities. These include squares and thoroughfares that appear public but are governed by private regulations. They can be patrolled security personnel.

4.2 We would object to any such arrangement, if proposed, becoming part of the Water Lane development, in particular alongside or leading to the towpaths and Canal and affecting access to the water.

5.1 Canal Bridge and Slipway (Addendum paras 1.12–1.15)

Dropping proposals for a new canal bridge, which would have conflicted with canal traffic, navigation and growth, is welcomed unreservedly.

5.2 The Addendum refers to a slipway at Gabriel's Wharf 'providing access for boats' but there is no detail. As the development proposals stand at present, a slipway at Gabriel's Wharf would be of little general use except for leisure craft like kyaks and canoes. Our suggested location for a slipway for boats at Countess Wear gives access

to a longer stretch of navigable waterway and better space for trailers and vehicles. A solution for a boat repaired or built at Gabriel's Wharf would be carriage to the Basin for launch at an improved slipway there.

5.3. A slipway is more than a ramp into the water but needs to be planned according to levels of requirement. It is another reason for ongoing consultation with canal stakeholders which we propose as a condition of outline planning approval. This will help ensure any slipway and its access will be fit for the purposes required. These purposes need to be considered fully in advance, and accord with a Canal Plan identifying other sites where a slipway is needed. **These objections would be solved through ongoing consultation.**

6.1 Shadowing of the Canal (Addendum paras 1.22–1.23)

The assertion that leaving spaces between new buildings along the Canal to allow 'daylight and sunlight to pass through reducing their shadowing impact' will result in no adverse shadowing of the Canal is unconvincing unless supported by evidence. Seven and five storey buildings along the Canal from D1 to A1 will block light. **An appropriate modelling study is required and the results discussed with stakeholders.**

6.2 From a distance the buildings would present themselves more as a wall than as nicely spaced blocks. This would be visually damaging to Exeter's justifiably admired perspectives. Multi-storey blocks along the towpaths would upset the ambience of the Canal and its valuable sense of the 'rural' so close to the urban city centre. The Friends support Exeter Civic Society's call for designs to be less obtrusive in the environment.

7.1 Wind effect on the Canal (Addendum paras 1.24–1.25)

The 'Venturi' wind effect does not necessarily require buildings on both sides of the Canal in order to occur. It can be brought on in any confined section of waterway. The Friends believe that the addition of tall buildings along one side the waterway will make the Canal more vulnerable to this kind of wind turbulence. Spacing of the buildings would not necessarily deal with the channelling, effect.

7.2 Again, what is needed is detailed and authoritative modelling and consultation with stakeholders and users as part of the ongoing planning process.

Summary and conclusion

This response deals with the Design and Access Addendum to the Water Lane redevelopment outline application as it directly affects the Canal.

It is the case that any effect on the operation and future of the waterway as a result of the Water Lane redevelopment will have an impact on the rest of the waterway, the Basin and the Port of Exeter as a whole, and on the realisation of the Heritage Harbour project.

The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal believe that planning for an attractive element of working maritime and port-related activity in the new development will increase the area's liveability beyond seeing the water as primarily a leisure facility.

We do not argue this should form the primary focus of the Water Lane development. New homes are much needed. We argue that ongoing considerations of feasibility, and consultation with waterway management and stakeholders, should be mitigating conditions of outline planning approval.

The shipyard land at Gabriel's Wharf is not derelict land, as much of its surroundings are. It is entirely appropriate – even in a general housing shortage – that Exeter's functioning yard for vessels of size should continue in this strategic location on the waterway.

We acknowledge there has already been considerable consultation on the development and that the developers have listened and taken notice. Not all issues are resolved or possible alternatives addressed, however. The functionality and future of the Canal as a working waterway will be compromised if development on the adjacent land ignores these elements and does not breathe life into them that enhances the offer of the homes being built. That is why **we believe a condition should be attached to outline planning approval that ensures continuing water-related evaluation and focused consultation.** Experience has already proved it is fruitful.

In the absence of such a condition, we would maintain our objection to the application for outline planning permission as it stands. Our comments on the original details as presented also stand. But we want to play a part in moving the development forward.

We stress again that a Canal and Basin Plan, using the 'Exeter Ship Canal and Heritage Harbour Route Map' and other documents, will help bring synergy between the new Water Lane community and the working waterway.

John Monks
Chair, Friends of Exeter Ship Canal
26 June 2024

References: The Friends of Exeter Ship Canal response to the original application and the report by Greenwood Projects on Gabriel's Wharf and the Canal Basin, both submitted October 2023.