

Exeter City Council  
City Development,  
Exeter City Council,  
Civic Centre,  
Paris Street,  
EX1 1NN

11<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Our Ref: A2971

**RE: FULL PLANNING APPLICATION AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT REVISED PROPOSAL – The Al Qasimi Building, Land at Mardon Hill, Streatham Campus, University of Exeter**

Dear Planning,

On behalf of the applicant, the University of Exeter, I am pleased to submit to you a full set of relevant plans and supporting documents to support the revised scheme design at the above site.

In addition to this covering letter, the revised documentation comprises the following information:

- Relevant revised proposed plans, elevations and sections;
- Addendum DAS explaining the design revisions including landscaping;
- Updated Heritage Statement;
- Public Benefits Statement;
- Ecology addendum covering BNG confirming no change;
- Updated Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Protection Plans;
- Updated Surface and Foul Water Drainage Strategy;
- Sustainability Statement Addendum;
- Ecology Addendum;

For your assistance, please refer to the supporting document titled 'Use of existing supporting documents in assessing revised proposal' outlining the content of the revised submission and explaining where current application documents remain applicable/retained or where these have been superseded with an updated version or supplemented with an addendum.

For the avoidance of doubt, the revisions predominantly relate to the building and landscape design and include an alternative construction logistics strategy. As such, the description of development remains the same as originally submitted and is set out below for clarity:

*"Partial demolition of the existing garden walls and workshops and construction of a part two, part three storey educational building for teaching and research use and associated landscaping, including temporary enabling works."*

Those aspects of the development previously assessed in relation to transport impacts, operational noise and air quality impacts remain unchanged from the original submission, as does the information provided on ground conditions, existing structures and site plans and archaeology.

### **Summary of revisions**

This submission follows a three-month period of intensive engagement with ECC officers and the Exeter Design Quality Partnership Panel (EDQP), hosted by Design West. This process was considered necessary, following the receipt of consultation responses from ECC Urban Design, Landscape and Heritage in late May 2025 which raised a number of significant concerns. These focussed on the overall scale, massing and architectural response, in addition to the perceived resultant harm that may be caused to this sensitive part of the Streatham Campus without a full appreciation of the overall public benefits package that would be secured by the proposals to help balance the development's impact.

Enabled by a collective appreciation of the critical project programme required to deliver this much-needed facility in a timely manner and within a complex academic context, a number of meetings and workshops have since been held throughout June, July and August between the applicant team and ECC to review the proposal and to develop a revised design that addresses the concerns raised. The proposals have also been back to the EDQP at the request of ECC, with the feedback further informing the proposals.

As a result of this positive and collaborative process, the refined design and architectural approach for the proposed new flagship educational building demonstrates a carefully considered and heritage-led response to the site's constraints and opportunities, and will deliver the exceptional design quality required by the Streatham Campus Masterplan Framework SPD (2010) to justify the proposed built intervention in this sensitive part of the historic campus.

The result of this comprehensive process of design review and development has led to the following revisions that are direct responses to the consultation comments. These are explained in detail within the supporting Design and Access Statement Addendum but are summarised below.

### **Form and massing**

Following a comprehensive review of the building's accommodation and functional requirements, the overall GIA floorspace has been reduced by approximately 19% across all floors. This has enabled further reductions in the overall form and massing through the further stepping in of the L-shaped building at both ends, creating more generous landscaping at

Level 00. The previously proposed brise soleil and supporting frame structure has also been omitted further reducing the perceived sense of massing.

The reduction in massing has also enabled the building to be further stepped away from the historic vault structures, removing the need for any structural interventions to ensure their conservation in situ.

### **Building height**

Through further review and unifying floor to floor heights, the overall building height has been reduced by 2.25m. This has allowed the building to sit more comfortably in its context, now sitting 1.3m lower than the originally submitted scheme. This has also enabled Level 00 to be raised 0.95m, reducing excavation and improving the buildings relationship with Mardon Hill, ensuring level public realm around the building's perimeter.

### **Architecture and materiality**

ECC officers raised particular queries with regards to the originally proposed material palette and its resonance with the surrounding historic setting. As such, a comprehensive review of the surrounding historic context has been undertaken and the primary material palette carefully revised to better reflect the dominant architectural language of the neighbouring Reed Mews buildings and Reed Hall. This approach strengthens the visual connection to the surrounding context, introduces historic references, and celebrates the legacy of the site.

As part of this, a key move has been to introduce a light cream/buff brick to match the existing reed Hall Mews, strengthening the visual connection with nearby heritage buildings. Along Mardon Hill, recycled brick in Flemish bond complements the existing boundary walls. The upper levels use buff brick infills in stacked bond, framed by smooth concrete elements that reference the detailing of Reed Hall.

A number of alternative options to express the Level 00 entrance canopy have been explored with ECC throughout the workshops. The now adopted solution has been to more directly reference the existing retaining walls and surrounding built form, through the use of segmental arches and buff brick piers which now define this key entry point, enhancing its relationship with the landscape and improving the building's integration with its immediate setting.

To harmonize with the reduction in building height and refined material palette, the fenestration design has also been carefully adjusted to retain proportionality while maintaining the rhythm of window placements against the cladding panels. The elevation facing the Mews Courtyard has been refined in response to feedback from ECC officers and the EDQP. The revised design adopts a simpler, more cohesive approach to better suit the surrounding context and address key concerns raised during consultation.

Overall, the revised architectural language now draws from a mix of forms and materials that engage more meaningfully with the surrounding context. A reduced massing and the use of brick alongside smooth concrete reflect the character of Reed Hall, while recycled hand-laid brickwork at the base evokes the original found wall, reinforcing continuity within the historic setting.

On the basis of the revised design that has been evolved in collaboration with ECC officers and further refined through the design review process, the proposals are considered to now more successfully integrate into its landscape setting, is of an appropriate scale and massing

that relates positively to adjoining/nearby buildings and promotes local distinctiveness through the use of a refined palette of materials that are reflective of those found in the locality, promoting both the visual and historic richness of this part of Streatham Campus. As such the revised proposals are considered to fully achieve the aims of the key principles set out in Local Plan First Review Policy DG1 and meets the exceptional design quality required by the Framework to justify development at this site.

### **Landscaping**

The reduction in building footprint has also enabled a more generous approach to landscaping across the application site, complimenting the revised architectural approach and building upon the immediate and wider campus "garden" setting.

The revised design reduces the building footprint at Level 00, expanding the Courtyard Garden and allowing for a formal, quadrilateral garden style commonly seen in classic English country gardens, Italianate landscapes, and formal Middle Eastern designs that enhances social use and planting. Although the Level 02 Terrace is smaller, its redesign strengthens ties to the adjacent café and enhances views, light, and planting opportunities, providing new enhanced abilities to appreciate the historic setting of Reed Hall and its gardens. Elevated seating and a new viewing lookout will further improve the experience.

The stepping back from Reed Hall Gardens allows for better site integration, while planting along Mardon Hill is extended and better integrated with the steep gradient and façade. Improved access has been enabled by raising the building, allowing direct entry from Mardon Hill into Levels 00 and 01.

The Garden Mews running alongside the building has been reconfigured to open a clear sightline from Mardon Hill to Reed Hall, with improved social spaces to compliment the teaching spaces within the building. A new physical and visual connection links the Level 01 Terrace to Reed Hall Gardens.

Planting has been significantly increased across the site, with fewer raised planters and more drought-tolerant plants. The integration of water into the landscaping strategy has been simplified to a central fountain, and paving materials have been streamlined, emphasising reclaimed stone and natural gravel.

In response to comments from the initial EDQP feedback and ECC officers, the new accessible path from the Level 02 IAIS Terrace to the wider campus has been realigned and inspired by further analysis of the historic layout of Reed Hall's former productive garden. The proposed alignment is proposed to achieve an appropriate balance between the reflecting the history of the site, its wider setting and supporting the University of Exeter's important equality and inclusion goals.

### **Heritage**

Conservation has been a key driver for the revised design development process, following officer's feedback in May 2025. The revised proposals are a direct response to the concerns raised with regards to the location and scale of the proposed development, the construction logistics and provides the clear and convincing justification required by the NPPF. In this regard the supporting Heritage and Archaeological Statement (September 2025) has been updated to reflect the extensive engagement with ECC and the EDQP to resolve the heritage concerns, assessing the impacts through renewed views analysis and providing wider assessment of the acceptability of the revised design in conservation terms.

As set out within the supporting statement, the scheme will result in the removal of a proportion of the historic fabric to facilitate the construction of the new world-class research building. The external boundary walls will be retained as will the vault structure. Some of the materials removed will be reused in the ground floor of the new building and in the external landscape scheme. It is considered that the removal of historic fabric will have an impact on the significance of Reed Hall that is at the low end of Less than Substantial Harm (NPPF 2024).

The effect of the new scheme on the setting of Reed Hall will have both positive and harmful aspects. The loss of legibility to the glass house enclosure is considered to have a harmful impact on the significance of Reed Hall at the lower end of Less than Substantial Harm (NPPF 2024). This will however be mitigated to a degree by interpretation within the design of the building and the surrounding landscaping.

Notwithstanding, the revised scheme is considered to create new and interesting architectural relationships between the existing buildings, new public views to Reed Hall; and connectivity between areas of the campus. In urban design terms it is a strong response to the context and will have some positive effects on the setting. However, it has also been identified through analysis of views that there will be some adverse impacts on Reed Hall resulting from the introduction of additional building mass into its setting. These setting impacts arise from the effect on a group of views which are considered to be of relatively low sensitivity, with the most significant views unaffected or affected to a negligible degree. As the building has been reduced in mass and articulated to better respond to its context and the views affected are views of lower sensitivity, it is considered that the impact on the significance of Reed Hall will be at the low end of Less Than Substantial Harm in terms of the NPPF 2024.

Overall however, the impact of the proposed new building is expected to be positive in urban design terms due to its high quality, and the improved placemaking it offers, as well as its contextual response. In balancing the identified Less Than Substantial Harm these benefits to the setting of Reed Hall should be considered to weigh in favour of the scheme.

In accordance with Paragraph 215 of the NPPF (2024), any remaining heritage harm should be weighed against the substantial public benefits of the scheme which are multifaceted and have been outlined in detail in the supporting Public Benefits Statement. These include wide reaching social, educational, research, environmental, cultural and economic benefits that will support University of Exeter, a key local and regional institution, and weigh heavily in favour of the proposals in the overall planning balance.

### **Construction logistics**

The originally submitted scheme proposed to temporarily use the Reed Hall Mews courtyard as a construction compound enabled by temporary works to historic fabric, supported by appropriate protective measures to mitigate against any long-term damage to historic fabric. Notwithstanding, officers were unable to support this approach in principle due to the risk of accidental harm occurring to the heritage assets.

These concerns have been acknowledged and following further detailed review by the University and its contractor, an alternative compound is proposed within the adjacent Reed Hall catering car park which is significantly less sensitive due to its adjacency to the unsympathetic extension to Reed Hall. This has been presented to officers who confirmed this alternative approach is strongly supported in conservation terms. An outline logistics plan

is included within the DAS Addendum and further details can be secured by an appropriately worded planning condition.

### **Public benefits**

A Public Benefits Statement has been prepared and submitted in support of the revised proposals, to capture the multifaceted and far reaching social, economic and environmental public benefits that would be secured in education, research, community engagement and sustainability, in addition to those that contribute towards the regional economy that will be delivered as part of the development. This report should be read in conjunction with the following summary.

The University's contribution towards Exeter's identity and economy is widely recognised, as is its status as a key stakeholder for the city. As such, ensuring the University is able to deliver sustainable growth on campus with its partners through the development of exceptional new facilities will assist in maintaining the ongoing benefits the institution provides to the local area. As set out within the supporting statement, the proposals are key to delivering the University's Strategy 2030 objectives of securing improved financial sustainability through international student recruitment and diversification of income streams, to grow research power through increased research quality and income, and to deliver excellent education and student experience, enhancing its global reputation and ranking.

The Al Qasimi Building will directly deliver a number of social and cultural benefits stemming from the proposed expansion of education facilities on campus. The building will provide a world leading, collaborative environment for 80 academic colleagues and 400 students. The Academic Vision focuses on building upon the University's existing strengths in contributing to the United Nations 'Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South', which includes interdisciplinary subject areas within Environmental Management, Climate Change Solutions, International Studies & Global Governance, and Global Development & Health, enabling advancement in these important fields of work and resultant positive societal impacts. In particular, the new building will provide a much-needed home for world leading interdisciplinary research and will also host Green Futures Solutions, providing the industry facing 'shop window' for business support and engagement in climate and environment.

Situated next to the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS), the Al Qasimi Building will amplify the existing success of International research, expanding global partnerships with organisations committed to academic freedom of enquiry. In a world and region that continues to encounter complex geo-political turbulence, diplomatic, social and political expertise and relationships are increasingly in demand, placing Exeter at the centre of a dynamic and exhilarating part of the world. The proposals will facilitate further advancement of this research area and development of these important global partnerships delivering multifaceted social and economic benefits.

Furthermore, the University of Exeter has provided demonstrable social and economic impact through Exeter Innovation, engaging in over 2,500 partner projects each year with over £100m value generated in 2023/24. The proposed building will provide additional opportunities to engage with established partners and build new communities of practice with developing enterprises. The Met Office, RDUH NHS Foundation Trust and Royal Albert Memorial Museum are just three local institutions working closely with the University, across a broad range of disciplines. The Al Qasimi Building will provide further capacity and opportunities to engage with enterprises of all sizes, linking academic knowledge and business innovation.

In addition to educational and social benefits that will be realised through the operational phase of the development, the construction phase will provide additional fixed term social and economic benefits to the local economy with several local based businesses involved through sub-contractor arrangements and provision of support services. This is estimated to be in the region of £7.5 - £8.0m over the anticipated two-year construction period.

With regards to construction, the environmental and sustainability impacts have been critical considerations throughout the design development process with the building utilising low embodied carbon materials and off-site construction methods where feasible and adopting Passivhaus standards. The delivery of net gains in biodiversity through a significant increase in planting across the site, the use of renewable energy technologies and high-quality building management systems will ensure the University's commitment to sustainable growth is met.

The high quality and considered building design is detailed within the wider planning application documentation which demonstrates the rigorous appreciation of the historic significance of the application site and its wider setting. While it is acknowledged that the loss of some historic fabric is necessary to deliver the new building, this has been minimised as much as possible. Notwithstanding, the proposed building will enable new views and user experiences in this part of the campus from new garden areas and elevated terraces, allowing greater appreciation of the historic setting of Reed Hall and its former productive gardens. These are considered equal benefits of the proposals that will go some way to outweighing the identified harm to developing in the setting of Reed Hall.

Further benefits will be delivered through the provision of the fully inclusive and accessible path, sensitively incorporated through the Reed Hall gardens securing the University's commitment to providing an inclusive environment for students and visitors. This is particularly important to facilitate inclusive and accessible access to previously restricted areas of the campus and to enable student movement to and from proposed West Park residences and is significant benefit of the proposals. Further work is also underway to make appropriate reference to the historic formal gardens as part of this new route supporting wider conservation objectives.

The proposed development will also provide a catalyst for wider public realm works and maintenance adjacent to the application site, but outside the scope of this application, to ensure a high-quality and integrated environment for the new flagship building.

In summary, the proposed development demonstrably supports the aims of local and national planning policy by delivering public benefits across education, research, sustainability, and community access and these hold significant weight in the overall planning balance that must be considered on this complex site. The proposals reinforce the University of Exeter's role as a civic institution serving the city, the region, and wider society, and justifies planning consent on the grounds of significant long-term public value that will be secured.

### **Concluding summary**

In reference to the planning assessment set out in the original Planning Statement (January 2025), the development of education uses, student housing and research and development initiatives on Streatham Campus is supported in principle by saved policy E4, provided that the character and setting of the campus is protected. The importance of the growth of the University to Exeter's prosperity is also acknowledged with the Core Strategy.

It is also acknowledged that the University Masterplan Framework (2010) identifies the site as being predominantly within an area for potential development, albeit the scale of the proposal is more ambitious than what was perhaps envisaged approximately 15 years ago. Notwithstanding, the proposed quantum of development reflects the functional requirements of the building which have been refined to achieve the optimal layout while delivering the multi-faculty brief, and a building appropriate of its intended flagship status while balancing the sensitive campus context.

The recent process of collaborative design development, in partnership with ECC, has ensured that the proposed building and its wider landscaping strategy in its revised form will achieve the exceptional design quality required of any development in the vicinity of Reed Hall and as such, is considered to be well-aligned with the principles established in the Masterplan Framework and the adopted Development Plan as a whole.

To reiterate the previous conclusions which remain entirely relevant and appropriate to the revised proposals, the Al Qasimi Building will deliver a world-class, new teaching and academic building required to support the ongoing growth and role of the University of Exeter that will celebrate this historic and evolving part of Streatham Campus. The new building will be an exemplar of high quality and sustainable architecture, demonstrating the University's commitment to low carbon development and sustainable development goals.

Overall, the proposals are well-grounded in the environmental, social and economic principles of sustainable development and we welcome the Council's clear acknowledgement of the importance of this project and the wider delivery of this public service infrastructure. The proactive engagement with the applicant team to resolve key issues throughout the planning process has been critically important and reflects the guidance set out in Paragraph 101 of the NPPF.

We look forward to continuing our work with the Council on this application to reach a positive outcome in a timely manner. The applicant team is readily available to answer any queries that the Council and its statutory consultees may have to enable this and the smooth delivery of this exemplary new facility for the University.

If you require anything further or have any questions regarding the submission, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Jonathan Finch BSc(hons) MSc MRTPI  
**Planning Director**