

14th July 2021

Mr Matthew Diamond
Senior Officer – Major Schemes
Development Management Department
Exeter City Council
Civic Centre
Paris Street
EXETER
EX1 1NN

Dear Mr Diamond,

20/0538/OUT - Land off Spruce Close, Exeter,

I write in response the public consultation on the planning application referenced above.

Stagecoach South West has been in ongoing discussion with the applicant, its consultant team, the Council as Local Planning Authority and Devon County Council as Local Highway Authority, for a considerable period, with a view to securing safe and effective access by public transport to this proposal. In so doing, it increases substantially both the convenience of access to the bus network for the immediate vicinity, and also substantially improves operating conditions for the existing route F1 serving the area. In particular, a reversing manoeuvre that currently must be performed at the existing terminus at Savoy Hill will be obviated.

The existing routing of buses in this area dates back to the mid-1980s, when a radical, and ultimately very successful experiment with high frequency minibus was initiated. This saw the replacement of conventional buses with a much larger number of 16-seat Ford Transit minibuses. As well as greatly increasing service frequencies, these buses were able to penetrate much more deeply into residential areas. Service F1 is a legacy of this period.

The success of these routes quickly led to larger vehicle progressively being needed. Since 2001, changes in regulations regarding access for the physically impaired onto buses, has led to the need to use still larger buses, able to accommodate wheelchairs and also having a low floor. Currently we are generally using Optare Solo SR minibuses on this route, which are substantially bigger than previous generations of vehicles, although still sized to penetrate smaller residential roads quite comfortably. We intend to continue to use these kinds of vehicles. However these buses do not have a rear window, and have a substantial rear overhang and associated side sweep. This adds to the challenge of performing the manoeuvring required at the Savoy Hill terminal. These challenges can be exacerbated by on-carriageway parking. It is exceptionally rare for Stagecoach to perform reversing manoeuvres, in service, on the public highway, reflecting the obviously elevated levels of risk attendant on this.

The proposals submitted for bus circulation through the site and the adjoining areas have been collaboratively prepared, with very thorough and detailed consideration by all stakeholders.

They will permit the F1 service to operate around a terminal loop through the site, always in forward gear. This allows us to directly serve not only the site, but Pinwood Meadow Drive, and existing development to the west of the site further uphill than the current terminus. As such, convenient access to the service is assured for many more people. Chancellors Drive, no longer being served in two directions, also sees the number of bus movements each way halved.

We recognise that this is a big change for Pinwood Meadow Drive and Celia Crescent, that have not previously accommodated bus services. Great care has been taken to sensitively and appropriately make provision for the route to operate one-way northbound up Pinwood Meadows Drive and southbound down Celia Crescent, minimising the loss of on-carriageway parking, while ensuring that safe and efficient progress can be made by buses. We serve many streets of closely comparable character and geometry in Exeter.

The eastern site access from Pinwood Meadow Drive involves the comprehensive realignment of what is currently a part of Spruce Close to effect a seamless continuation of the existing road, without a change in priority, into the site. The location of the new bus stops has been very carefully considered to mitigate potential adverse impacts.

Within the new development, a simple link through the site purpose-engineered for buses has been provided, incorporating two appropriately spaced bus stops, one within the development and one on the western boundary. The site access road links directly into the existing highway stump at Celia Crescent, which will be widened to 5.5m wide. Here the bus service makes a left turn into Celia Crescent, with route F1 then returning towards the city centre as today via Chancellors Way.

The route will continue to run every 30 minutes Monday-Sunday. We consider that this level of service is commensurate with the character of the area and the level of demand currently existing and likely to arise in the short term. Given the aspirations of national government through the national bus strategy, to greatly increase the attractiveness and use of public transport expressed in the National Bus Strategy for England, it is nevertheless conceivable that this frequency might rise, to operate perhaps up to every 20 minutes. We would stress that there are no current plans to do so.

The tracking plans submitted with the application demonstrate robustly that the service can route effectively and safely through the site and on adjoining existing roads. In fact, Stagecoach and DCC as Highways Authority have been quite insistent on this being assessed prudently and robustly. Tracking has been performed for a 10.8m Enviro 200 bus, which is significantly larger than the 9.2m Solo SR buses we use on the route, and as such this amply demonstrates that the route can be operated safely without prejudice to other highway users, whether on the carriageway or footways.

It is very rare that a development on this scale can benefit from regular bus service being provided to it, seven days a week and into the evening. The service will provide existing and new residents with a “real choice” as to the how they travel that for many is likely to be much more competitive with driving to key destinations in the city centre and on or near the line of the route.

As such, this proposal is highly compliant with the transport requirements set out at Chapter 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019). It especially well complies with paragraph 110 a) which states: *“(development proposals should:) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and*

appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;) It is clear that the opportunities to facilitate public transport have been identified and fully taken up with a good deal of care and collaborative work. Such a situation is relatively unusual for residential developments at any scale.

Stagecoach South West is therefore pleased to lend its support to this application.

Yours sincerely

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Christian Reed,
Commercial Manager,
Stagecoach South West.