

COMMENTS FROM THE HAVEN BANKS RESIDENTS' GROUP

5 October 2023 – Collated by Kirby James

The Haven Banks Residents Group have considered both the positive and negative aspects of the proposal 23/1007 for Outline Planning Permission for the Water Lane Site in Exeter.

GENERAL POINT

We are concerned that consideration of this application is taking place shortly before consultation begins on the Council's 'Water Lane: Development Framework and Design Code'. A draft of this document has been made public and it is likely to go out for formal consultation on 23 October 2023 for 6 weeks.

This Framework document contains substantially more detail than the Developers' Outline Planning Application and some of it is at variance with what is proposed. The Framework Document should have been consulted and agreed before developers are allowed to bring forward specific proposals.

It is not clear what the situation will be if the current Developers' proposals turn out to be at variance with a Framework that is agreed later.

We believe it would be negligent to consider and approve the outline planning permission at this time, considering that important infrastructure issues have not been solved and the proposed design code has been not been examined in detail.

POSITIVE – REDEVELOPMENT OF A BROWNFIELD SITE

We welcome the development of a brown field site for residential use.

NEGATIVE – HEIGHT & SCALE

We are particularly concerned about the height and scale of the development. At present users of the Riverside Park can see the prominent three-story buildings of the Gabriels Wharf/River Meadows complex. These extend for 200m horizontally and are adjacent to the two-story buildings in Cotfield Street and Exe View Cottages.

In the proposals six and seven-story buildings will stretch for 350m along the canal frontage. These will be more than twice as high as the prominent Gabriels Wharf/River Meadows complex and almost twice as wide. Several of these very high buildings are only 10-15m from the canal edge. In addition, the twelve-story hotel will dwarf the whole area.

Development on such a scale and position

- will fundamentally change the natural tranquil feel of the canal,
- is not in-keeping with the historic canal setting,
- is not in keeping with existing residential buildings,
- will impact nearby residents, overlooking bedrooms and gardens,
- will spoil the views from the canal side, the River Valley Park, the Exe walkways and from Colleton Crescent,
- will tower above users of the canal, and the canal-side path/cycleways,
- will shade the canal for more than half of daylight hours,
- is out of keeping with existing architecture in the area.

The Exeter Canal Basin, and the Canal and Riverside, are key historic, environmental, leisure and tourist attractions. It is vital that any development preserves and enhances these areas without diminishing the historical and cultural significance of this 500- year-old waterway.

NEGATIVE – DESIGN & HERITAGE

The canal is part of a green corridor connecting the heart of the city to the countryside. We believe that any development must be carried out with sensitivity to the character, natural beauty, heritage, amenity, natural environment, etc of the site.

The canal also has deep historical and cultural value, serving as a vital transportation link for over 500 years.

Unfortunately, this proposal does nothing to reflect on or enhance this heritage. For example, it does nothing to build upon the existing historic canal and Quayside buildings.

There is also little variety in the building – they are solely blocks or apartments rather than houses. The architecture needs to be of the highest standard in this beautiful part of the City.

NEGATIVE – CANAL USEAGE & IMPACT

The canal supports a thriving community of water-based users including rowers, kayakers, canoers, sailors, and stand-up paddleboard users. In addition, larger yachts, cruisers, barges and workboats regularly use the canal as well as more exotic craft such as the sailing barge Snark and the fishing smack Britannia.

All these users require access to the canal (e.g., slipways and steps) and facilities and space for launching vessels (plus cranes in the case of larger vessels). The facilities at Gabriel's Wharf are critical to the functioning of this working heritage Ship Canal. In the current plans, except for a pontoon alongside the cycle path, such facilities are absent.

NEGATIVE – ACCESS & TRANSPORT

Access to the whole area is already very difficult and this development will just exacerbate the situation.

We are concerned that the proposal lacks clear plans for road access, entry, exit, and service vehicle routes, which would likely lead to increased traffic congestion and strain on local infrastructure, including roads, utilities, and public services.

It is vital that such issues are addressed for the area as a whole (such as via the 'Water Lane: Development Framework and Design Code'.) rather than piecemeal (e.g., by imposing developments one-by-one).

Examples of some issues that need to be addressed include: -

- Minimising congestion at the Alphington Street/Haven Road junction
- Ensuing that appropriate routes are used for various type of traffic (e.g., allowing commercial access to Michael Browning Way trading estate via Water Lane rather than the sensitive Haven Road)

We support migration to sustainable transport options, but this must be matched by investment in appropriate facilities. Two weak points in the surrounding infrastructure are: -

- the narrow footpath/cycleway between Shilhay and the Kennaway block is a real bottleneck which can only be mitigated by the rebuilding of the Mallison Bridge, and
- the narrow footpath alongside the canal in front Gabriels Wharf/River Meadows complex. This should be widened to allow both pedestrians cyclists a continuous route alongside the canal,
- a bridge over the rail line would open up the possibility of a walkway/cycle path out to the Sainsbury's site (and also act as a flood escape route).

The proposal was built on the use of a Co-Bikes/Co-Cars type facility to provide ready access to both cycle and vehicle hire. The demise of this company, and the current lack of investors prepared to back a similar scheme, poses question marks about the sustainability of this approach.

NEGATIVE - PARKING

Parking is a problem in the whole Haven Banks/Water Lane area. At present residents and visitors can make use of three car parks in the Haven Banks area plus roadside parking and waste ground at the southern end of Water Lane. At many times of day this proves to be insufficient.

The large Haven Banks/Range car park is due to be built on and, with this development, all the on-street car parking in Water Lane and associated waste ground will be removed – thus reducing the spaces available. This development will add a further 1180 new homes – thus increasing the requirement - which will further compound the problem.

This might be mitigated by the use of a multi-storey car park.

NEGATIVE – GREEN ISSUES

We are disappointed by the lack of publicly accessible green space/ parkland / trees in the development.

We would like to see clarity in the proposal about how residents are able to handle washing. Will tumble driers be required, or external washing lines?

NEGATIVE – HOTEL

We question the inclusion of a twelve-story hotel at such a distance from the city centre. It will inevitably add to parking problems (where will the clients park?). There is also the suspicion that it might be a back-door route to introducing a co-living facility.