

What the Council intends for the expanded City Centre

The Exeter Plan explains that the Council is preparing a new **City Centre Strategy** to guide the area as a place to live, work, visit, shop, study and socialise. The Plan states that development in the city centre should:

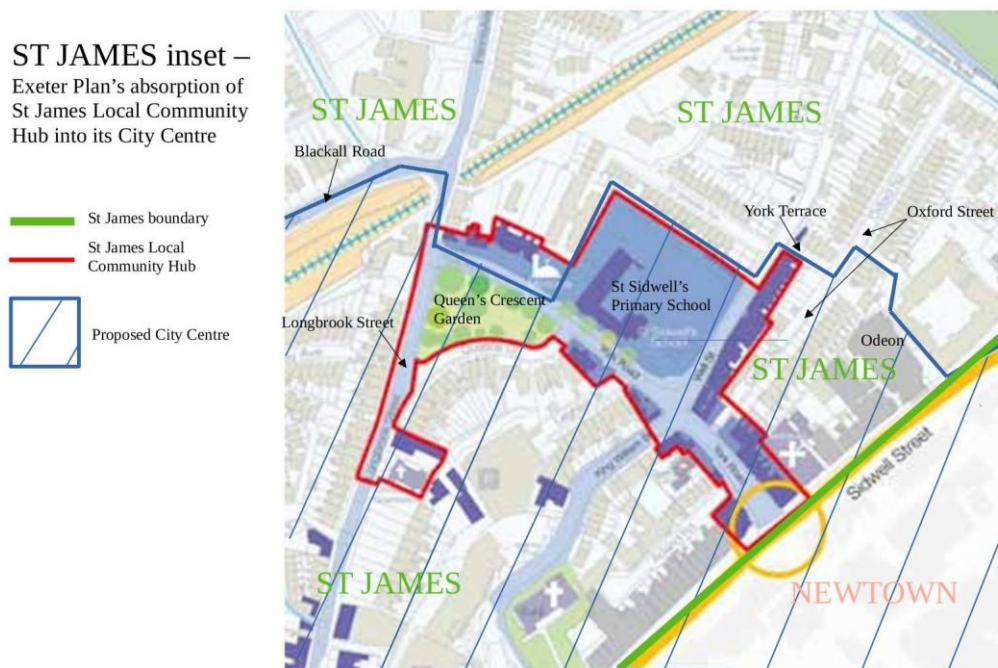
- diversify uses,
- extend hours of activity,
- enhance the night-time and visitor economy,
- strengthen cultural and leisure uses,
- and support major development opportunities.

It also identifies the city centre as a **preferred location for further PBSA**, effectively endorsing officers' previous controversial '*in principle*' support for student blocks in St James along New North Road, in Longbrook Street and, we now see in the light of the City Centre Strategy (of which more later) – Howell Road.

What this would mean for St James

The new boundary would bring these city-centre functions into the heart of St James, undermining the NP's aims for community balance, sustainable development and neighbourhood identity. Three examples illustrate the conflict.

1. St James Local Community Hub cannot be both a Local Centre and City Centre



The NP created a new statutory designation — the **St James Local Community Hub** — recognising the cluster of community facilities - the school, shops, organisations and

businesses around Well Street, York Road and the bottom of Longbrook Street, including our community-owned Local Green Space, **Queen's Crescent Garden**.

NP Policy C4 supports development that enhances the Hub's character, distinctiveness and community function, and protects nearby residential amenity.

The Exeter Plan also designates a hierarchy of centres — City Centre, District and Local — and stresses the importance of local centres in fostering identity and community spirit. The description of local centres aligns closely with the NP's Community Hub.

Yet Exeter Plan's list of 15 local centres **omits St James entirely**, despite it being the **only** local centre in Exeter with statutory designation. This omission is inexplicable, especially given the Plan's claim to have undertaken a '*high level review*' of centres.

Had the Hub been recognised, the conflict would have been obvious: **an area cannot simultaneously be a Local Centre and part of the City Centre**.

2. Conflicting priorities for Howell Road car park

The NP identifies Howell Road car park as a potential **windfall site** for good-quality affordable homes for local people, should part of the site ever become surplus.

Under the Exeter Plan, the same site as part of the city centre becomes a **preferred location for PBSA, co-living blocks or night-time economy uses** — the exact opposite of the NP's sustainable development policy.

3. Community balance and the Article 4 Direction

The NP's overarching aim is a **sustainably balanced community**. The Council's own evidence has shown that additional PBSA has **not** returned HMOs to family use in St James; it simply increases the total number of students and worsens imbalance.

By steering more PBSA into the part of St James it defines as City Centre, the Exeter Plan would intensify the very pressures the NP seeks to address. Residents in Article 4 streets across St James, not only in those subsumed within the proposed boundary, would be justified in questioning the value of that protection if the Council simultaneously promotes more PBSA nearby.

What the Trust has done

The Trust raised the [boundary conflict](#) at the Exeter Plan Examination hearings in March. After Council officers subsequently [responded](#) claiming the boundary was not new but had existed for over 20 years, the Trust submitted [further evidence](#).

The Programme Officer confirmed that the Inspectors consider the material **clearly germane to the soundness of the Plan**, and have exceptionally agreed to accept it.

The latest development: City Centre Strategy consultation

While the Inspectors' Examination continues, the Council has completed and opened [consultation](#) on its new **City Centre Strategy** (closing 29 June).

The [Strategy](#) includes a map (p.6) showing an **even deeper incursion** of the city centre into residential St James than the Exeter Plan proposes.

Emphasis on the much smaller **historic City Walls** visually distracts from the **true extent** of the Strategy's city centre area. A closer look shows that it extends considerably further into St James, now engulfing:

- further north and west, the **entire length of Howell Road and Bury Meadow Park, Elm Grove Road** and the rest of the St James' length of **New North Road**;
- the **rest of Well Street** and all its offshoots;
- the **rest of Oxford Road**;
- **Old Tiverton Road** as far as Stadium Way;
- **Pennsylvania Road** up to West Avenue;
- **Hillsborough Avenue**.

There is **no acknowledgement or explanation** anywhere in the Strategy of this further expansion beyond that of the Exeter Plan which is already unacceptable and being challenged.

Some '*priority actions*' — such as cleaner streets — will be widely welcomed. Others, especially those promoting the stated vision where '*Streets and spaces feel alive morning noon and **night***' raise serious concerns for residents living in St James.

The consultation materials do **not** recognise the extent of the city centre's engulfment of St James, and the Survey does **not** facilitate comment on this issue.

Nevertheless, we strongly encourage residents to respond and **find a way to express their views**. Silence could be taken by the Council as evidence that, despite the Trust's warnings, St James residents are **ambivalent rather than concerned**.

See link to "Exeter City Centre Consultation" on website home page