

Steering Group Report 2016 - 2017

The Steering Group (SG), led by its 3 officers with the position of Chair unfilled, has met 6 times on routine business as well as for special meetings as necessary. The additional 5 members elected at the AGM last July were joined by representatives appointed by our Residents' Associations, and our City and County Councillors, each of whom has played a full and active role as SG member, setting aside party politics as together they have provided excellent, effective support to the Forum.

Particular mention and thanks should be given to Cllr. Jill Owen as she stood down in May, having consistently offered SG valued support and advice. We hope to continue to see Jill as a Forum member at our events. Maggie Cartridge, having been a very active SG member, stood down in April as she temporarily moved overseas for family reasons, and Anne Jobson tendered her resignation on accepting nomination as a candidate in the county council elections. SG was delighted to welcome her back as a co-opted member once the elections were over, and also to welcome our new County Councillor, Su Aves as a SG member.

Other key people who have been invited to report to, and attend, SG meetings are PC Ian Lugg, Neighbourhood Beat Officer for St James and University of Exeter, Rory Cunningham, University Community Liaison Officer and Gareth Oughton, Deputy Chief Executive of University Student Guild. Gareth will be leaving his post this month so SG wishes to thank him for his continuous support based on his appreciation of the negative impact on the permanent community resulting from community imbalance. His letter of congratulations to SG on the occasion of the successful Neighbourhood Plan referendum, is testament to the good relations between Student Guild and the Forum, and evidence if ever it were needed that the view sometimes heard that the Forum is anti-student is quite incorrect: *On behalf of the Students' Guild, I just wanted to email you all to say well done on the referendum news! You've all done an absolutely fantastic job and we're really pleased that St James got the result it needs. We wish him well in his future career.*

During the year, Forum member, Caroline Lee was appointed as ESJF representative on Exeter Community Forum, the organisation the Forum was instrumental in forming in 2014. Caroline attends ECF meetings and reports back to SG.

One of the first tasks undertaken by SG following the decision of the last AGM that ESJF would continue beyond its initial 5 year term, was to set up a working group to draft a constitution appropriate for this next phase. SG is very aware that the Forum should remain rooted in, and be responsive to, our RAs and so it was important to us that each had opportunity to be consulted over the new constitution, and feel comfortable with the final version before it was to be put to this year's AGM for ratification.

The key SG responsibilities are to forward the aims of Exeter St James Neighbourhood Plan (NP), defend its policies, and encourage the initiation of, and oversee, projects identified by the community as of importance in making St James a better place to live and work. Many such projects are listed in the appendix of the NP. In addition SG represents St James as a community group in various fora and has continued to respond to requests for advice received from other neighbourhoods around the country, and from national organisations such as Locality, the national network of community-led organisations, seeking to learn from our experience as a neighbourhood planning Frontrunner.

Defending St James Neighbourhood Plan

ESJF came into being when the individual residents' associations of St James were faced with the increasingly serious negative impact of community imbalance, resulting from seemingly exponential university expansion. They realised that their separate efforts to improve their own neighbourhoods would be enhanced by working together through a body with a remit covering the whole of St James and set up in accordance with the Localism Act as a statutory body, responsible for a statutorily-designated area to produce a statutory NP – one that in the Government's own oft-repeated words should ensure that 'where a planning application conflicts with a neighbourhood plan that has been brought into force, planning permission should not normally be granted'. St James NP was adopted as a statutory planning document in 2013, and it might have been expected that the Forum's role as far as the Plan was concerned would have ended at this point. However, it has become apparent that the monitoring and defending of the Plan is an essential ongoing role which SG carries out on behalf of the residents' associations and other Forum members.

This has been a challenging year in which we have had to pick ourselves up from the Slough of Despond after our application for judicial review against the City Council's approval of the application for 312 bed student accommodation development on the Football Club / Yeo and Davey site, was turned down, sealing the nullification of the Neighbourhood Plan's policy for mixed-use development on this highly significant site, that would have begun, albeit in a small way, to lessen the community imbalance that has arisen with the rapid growth of the University and ever more students finding accommodation in St James.

At our last AGM in July 2016 we reported that our application for judicial review and also for a protective costs order (PCO) that would have limited the costs on both sides to £5000, had been submitted and we were greatly encouraged by the spontaneous applause from the floor as our Members demonstrated enthusiastic support for this carefully considered action.

However, the judge not only turned down our application to seek judicial review, but refused to grant a PCO, unbelievably, in our view, not considering the question of the relevant weight to be given to a 'made' neighbourhood plan to be one of national significance. We know from the interest and support, including financial, that we have received from as far afield as Chester, Manchester, Bath and Canterbury, that many communities did not agree with that judgement. However, without the PCO it would have been foolhardy to have proceeded to the next stage of an oral hearing and so there was no option but to accept the decision and pay Exeter City Council's costs that were awarded against us. The fact that the judge decided the developer's costs should not also be awarded against us, had the effect of keeping the total costs below the £5000 limit that the PCO would have imposed, our own costs having been kept to a minimum as our barrister, Gavin Collett of Magdalen Chambers, had acted pro bono. We are most grateful to him for his generous and excellent support.

Donations specifically towards the legal costs have been invited from our members and other supporters and we are slowly moving towards the target of £4634.29, with the total raised so far £1393.40 (the account may be viewed via a link on the front page of the Forum website). SG wishes to thank those from our membership who have contributed, both individuals and resident associations. For those who maybe have not yet got around to making a donation but would like to show support for SG's attempt to defend the Neighbourhood Plan in this way, a box for contributions will be

available at the AGM.

Devastated and bemused by the outcome of this highly significant application, SG sent a delegation to a meeting with Gavin Barwell, MP, Minister of Housing, Planning and Minister for London, at Department of Communities and Local Government. This meeting was arranged thanks to the welcome support of our MP Ben Bradshaw who also attended, to express our concerns at the ease with which such a key policy of the NP had been set aside, and to seek clarification of the reality behind government rhetoric. The delegates hand delivered a joint letter of support signed by each of our City Councillors, representing all three major political parties. The welcome but very unusual nature of such a show of support was not lost on the Minister who proceeded to explain that he was aware local authorities (LAs) were not always giving neighbourhood plans the intended and expected respect, and he enumerated a number of changes in the neighbourhood planning bill that was currently passing through Parliament to strengthen legislation to rectify this.

However, it was not easy to see how any of these amendments would have ensured a different outcome regarding the Football Club development, though steps introduced to facilitate the amendment of a 'made' plan to ensure it is kept 'up-to-date' (of vital importance when it comes to 'pecking order' of planning policies), were noted as of benefit to us. SG has therefore set up a working group looking in detail at the Plan, now 4 years old, and how it should be amended to ensure it is kept up to date and made as robust as possible regarding its ability to achieve its aims. We have been advised that the Forum is entitled to apply for a £15000 grant to achieve this, and proposals are currently being prepared.

When the Minister was asked whether a local authority had the power to require developers of purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) to select sites away from an area of existing over-concentration to ensure more even dispersal across a city, he stated that this was his understanding, but that he would seek clarification from his advisers before sending a written response. When the response came it was somewhat deflating. Although when determining a particular PBSA application, local authorities *'may take into consideration the detrimental impact upon residential amenities including the impact on the character of the area, availability of infrastructure, density, over-development ...'* the response continued, *'The weight attached to these considerations in reaching a decision is a matter of judgement for the decision-taker'*.

The Minister had expressed enthusiastic interest in visiting Exeter to see the situation on the ground in St James, so we were disappointed that his promised visit failed to materialise – the general election put paid to that – and to the Minister's job!

Since a meeting in February 2016 we have been reminding our MP Ben Bradshaw of the agreement those who attended understood he had made, to liaise with MPs of all university towns and cities, to discuss the negative impact of studentification that is blighting communities and threatening the built environment across the country, with a view to setting up an all party working group to investigate and decide what could and should be done at national government level. Although before the election Ben advised that he had spoken with fellow Labour MPs of affected constituencies, disappointingly there appeared to have been a misunderstanding as he maintained he had not agreed to extend any discussions to the cross-party MPs on the list of university constituencies that we had provided. Just as our local councillors put aside party politics to work together in support of the Forum, we believe an all party working group is needed if attempts to address the serious impact of studentification on

communities are to be most effective.

However, networking with affected communities continues, and maybe the pressure on MPs around the country will eventually bring results. Last July, as joint delegate for the Forum and Bury Meadow Residents' Association, Maggie Cartridge attended the National Conference on University and Community Issues at Durham University, subtitled: Accommodation, community relations and economic impacts of universities. The speakers were university Pro Vice-Chancellors of Durham and Northumbria, Chief Constable of Durham and his Neighbourhood Police Team, Exeter University's Community Relations Officer, Rory Cunningham, a Student Union rep from Newcastle and Sheffield City Council's Housing Department Student Accommodation Officer. This impressive line-up reveals a common flaw in conferences that aim to address the issues of studentification; the absence of any speaker to give the community perspective! Disappointingly Maggie reported that there was also a lack of any information gathering by the organisers from community delegates, and although time was given for questions from the floor, most of the time was given over to Powerpoint presentations. Networking between delegates was very valuable, however, with much interest in our legal challenge, the Chief Executive of Bath Preservation Trust asking Maggie to keep her updated.

It is clear that the studentification problems we experience are shared by many, many communities. Locally we have also been working more closely with the two other organisations of neighbourhoods where community balance has become a serious concern: St David's Neighbourhood Partnership and Newtown Community Association. A working group made up of a representative from each neighbourhood has sought advice and met on two or three occasions, to discuss the potential of each neighbourhood preparing its own NP, with relevant policies in common, and also submitted a joint response to the initial consultation for Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP). The full response may be found via a link on the front page of the Forum website and SG would encourage our members to read it. The response concluded that:

GESP offers an opportunity to plan positively for the future of the Exeter area. We believe that this requires some fresh and visionary thinking. We believe that the City is at a crucial point. Whilst there are many positives, the neighbourhoods around the City Centre are under huge pressure and much of the development on the edge of the city is of a poor quality. We believe the way to address this is to start to plan positively for the needs of the existing and emerging communities of Exeter so that they have access to the housing, jobs, services and green space that they need.

One change to neighbourhood planning legislation introduced last year, and immediately acted upon by ECC, has strengthened the Forum's position. Although following the Referendum and adoption by ECC in 2013, the NP became a planning document that the Local Authority was required by law to take into consideration when determining planning applications for proposals within St James, the Forum had no comparable statutory role. This all changed in October 2016 when the government ruled that neighbourhood fora should be statutory consultees. Now ECC advises us of all planning applications as they are submitted and is keen to discuss applications with us, work with us and the applicant/agent during the consultation stage where there is potential for amendment that will better meet the satisfaction of the NP, and pay careful attention to our representations as a statutory consultee. On some occasions we have been invited by developers or their agents to enter into consultation at the pre-application stage, when the expectation is that the discussions remain confidential.

It is seldom considered appropriate by SG for the Forum to comment on applications for small scale

proposals relating to private homes, such as loft conversions, rear extensions etc., though when we heard that an application to replace a recently installed UPVC window in a listed house, with a timber sash window sympathetic to the original architectural character, we were pleased to express our support to the planning officer for enforcing the listed property regulations. The degradation of the built environment, particularly involving listed buildings or within conservation areas, by unsympathetic conversions, repairs and renewals was a concern of the community expressed during the neighbourhood planning consultation which led to the NP Heritage Policy H1.

During the year we have submitted comments in respect of a total of 9 planning applications.

We have been pleased to be able to support two applications that have proposed change of use to form additional residential houses.

Having expressed our serious concern to the Case Officer over the change of use of the old Poundstretcher store in Sidwell Street to a restaurant and two hot food takeaways, we were encouraged to learn the agent had agreed to amend these plans prior to determination. We are concerned at the existing over-concentration of food outlets in Sidwell Street, particularly takeaways, with attendant litter issues, and argued that the City Council's existing designation of Sidwell Street as a Secondary Shopping Area of Exeter City Centre, would be devalued by three further food outlets instead of a mix of small scale independent traders as advocated in the NP. Although we had pushed for all three units to be designated for retail use, we were pleased that when the application was revised, only one food outlet remained. The revised proposal was to divide the space into two units only, and although change of use to takeaway was retained for the the smaller, the larger was now to remain as a retail unit.

The original application for the upper storeys of 35 – 37 Sidwell Street, above the old Poundstretcher store, and extending behind, for mixed use development of 28 student bed accommodation and eight private residential flats, not only raised concerns relating to increasing community imbalance, but also because of missed opportunities for better quality design to improve this part of Sidwell Street and Ackland Road behind. The Case Officer involved the agent in discussion with the Forum's Planning and Design Panel adviser, Frazer Osment, and the application was put on hold while improvements were suggested. The final version of revised plans is still awaited at time of writing, but the changes include reduction of student beds by one, and increase in residential element from eight flats to nine dwellings.

A much larger purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) development of 124 student beds is proposed at the top of Longbrook Street on the King Billy pub site and adjacent vacant site, the latter already having PBSA consent. Commercial uses on the ground floor of a shop, restaurant and pub are proposed. Having been advised by the Case Officer that revised plans have been requested to address a number of concerns, we have reserved the right to submit further comments when we have had sight of these, but we have submitted an interim objection on grounds of increased community imbalance, mass, scale and dominance of the building blocks, and inadequate arrangements for dropping off and picking up at the start and end of year, and also the access arrangements for the restaurant and pub.

An application which caused great concern was the change of use of Clock Tower Hotel in New North

Road, to 18 bed House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) for students. A robust objection was submitted by SG, and together with objections from a good number of local residents and Forum members, and the support of our city councillors, resulted in the withdrawal of the application prior to determination. All indications were that without these combined objections, the change to HMO would have been approved, thus once again revealing the value of the NP and a community actively backing its aims and policies. However, this means permission has not been refused, and we know that the agent is considering the options available. Conversion back to two large family homes remains a possibility. When we met the agent at his request in May, and suggested the asking price was too high, he invited offers of £500,000 - £600,000, a much more realistic figure than the advertised guide price of £950,000! However, since then the property has been taken off the market, so it may be that the HMO application will re-emerge, or alternatively an application be submitted for change of use to hostel, which was being considered. SG continues to be vigilant and will inform Members when a new application is submitted!

There have been a number of applications for change of use from 6 bed HMO to 7, both within the streets exempt from Article 4 Direction (A4D), and elsewhere in St James, where A4D removes the permitted right for an owner to convert a dwelling from family home to a HMO for up to 6 people without obtaining planning permission. We are disappointed that the Planning Department does not share SG's view that such applications should be resisted. It doesn't make sense that in St James where community balance was considered by the same Planning Department to have reached such a perilous state that this permitted right should be removed, and that where applications were made permission should be resisted, that it is now considered appropriate to approve the change of use to HMO accommodating more than 6 people, even just one more.

In addition to representations to the City Council in relation to relevant planning applications, SG also submitted an objection to the Secretary of State regarding the closure of part of Paris Street to vehicles as part of the planning consent given last year to the application for the redevelopment of the bus station site. We understand that many of our Members were among those who also submitted objections and we were delighted to learn on 19 June that the Sec. of State has decided there should be a Public Inquiry. Let's hope sense prevails so that our residential streets are protected from further inappropriate and intolerable increases in through traffic!

Initiation, Monitoring and Support of Community Projects

Queen's Crescent Garden

The many steps of the long drawn out process leading to the Compulsory Purchase Order that Exeter City Council (ECC) has been undertaking since 2013 have been successfully completed! The final hurdle was the advertisement of the Order marking a further opportunity for submission of objections, this time concerning technical or procedural aspects. After an agonisingly long wait, Department for Communities and Local Government informed ECC that there had been no objections and that the CPO could now be confirmed. Exeter St James Community Trust (ESJCT) is preparing to accept transfer of the mantle of responsibility for the QCG Project, from the Forum as it signs a 125 year lease with ECC. Negotiations have been taking place between ECC's legal team and ESJCT's solicitor over the wording of an Agreement of Lease and the Lease Agreement, The Agreement of Lease will bind the Trust to signing the Lease Agreement as soon as ECC completes the CPO and

becomes the owner of the land.

A summer event has been on hold as we have been anticipating this year's event should also be a celebration of the Garden officially becoming the Community's responsibility – our own special green space to look after, use and transform into a beautiful garden that will not only add pride to St James, but enhance the perceptions of the City, formed by all who travel past. A special event will be called for to mark this momentous occasion, and we hope all Members will want to join the celebrations.

We would like to thank the regular mowing teams who have been at work again and other volunteers, including University's 'Exeter Student Volunteers', who have individually helped to keep the Garden tidy. As the Community officially takes responsibility we shall be looking to increase substantially the number of practical volunteers to keep the Garden well-cared for on a regular basis, as well as for those keen to help in other ways: fund raising, publicity, organising and supporting events and activities, and in the case of local artists of all descriptions, considering elements of the Masterplan that might be met in a unique creative way as a reflection of the depth of artistic talent we have in St James. Please be ready to become involved in a way that suits you, remembering that it was the top priority of the community to make this precious but neglected place our community hub. We would encourage you all to play a part in bringing the vision to fruition. Although there will be jobs for people of all ages, QCG could really benefit from some younger volunteers – the current volunteers certainly do not reflect the demographic of our community, which is heavily skewed to 18 – 25 year olds, so if Forum Members know of younger adults or teenagers in our midst who might like to become involved, please rope them in!

Over the year the project has benefited from generous donations from individual residents, residents' associations, businesses and a grant of £5000 to ESJCT from DCC's Locality Budget, earmarked for legal fees and matchfunding for the next phase of regeneration work. The enthusiastic support of so many who, without prompting, have decided individually or in groups, to plan events specifically to raise money for QCG has been as good to see as the swelling funds themselves. Cllr Jill Owen decided to award all remaining £5286 in her 'Invest in Devon' funding pot to this project before she stood down as County Councillor in May, and we would like to thank Jill for her interest and support for the project over the years, shown in many different ways.

We have also been offered quantities of reusable old bricks by a number of individual residents or businesses to use when we recommence the restoration of the walls. We are immensely grateful for all these valuable offers, and where they are of suitable colour, size and quality, we have been only too pleased to arrange working parties to collect them. Special thanks are also due to those who have responded at late notice and cheerfully given an hour or so to brick-moving and stacking, including 87 year old Clive Temperton, proving that you're never too old to lend a hand! We are very grateful for the offer of a secure site for the bricks as we wait for the next phase.

St James Vegetable Gardens Project

The SJVG project group was set up to take forward, on behalf of the SG, the community's St James Park Station allotment project, one of the prioritised projects enumerated in the NP. The project's aim is to secure the long term future of this sole allotment site within St James, for the benefit of our community, through a lease with the owner, Network Rail. SG is disappointed that there has been

little if any progress this year with regard this aim.

Difficulties in communication led to a meeting of SG reps and SJVG committee members in January, chaired by Cllr. Jill Owen. SG was relieved by the assurance from SJVG that a perceived distancing from the Forum had no basis in reality, that the group was well aware of its roots in the Forum as the project group with responsibility for bringing the NP's allotment project to fruition. SJVG confirmed their acceptance that an annual Community Open Day would be held from the second year of the lease onwards. SG stressed the importance of prioritising the lease, as the allocating of plots and exciting planned site improvements were dependent on this being signed. SJVG was keen to make use of the Forum's public liability insurance cover for working parties to keep the vegetation under control on paths and vacant plots, and SG was pleased to agree to this provided essential conditions were met.

ESJCT, the incorporated body set up by the Forum specifically to take legal responsibility, where required, for its projects, has informed SG that it remains ready to seek legal scrutiny of the draft lease and related documents as soon as final versions are provided. In November 2016 it was reported that Network Rail, also keen to pursue the lease as a priority, suggested that this might be achieved by Christmas 2016, and grant money was allocated for the legal costs, though DCC required that the money be used by the end of its financial year this spring. Sadly, SJVG Chair advised that it would not be possible to provide the final version of the draft lease in time, but SG has continued to urge SJVG to focus on the lease and ask that every effort be made to facilitate the finalisation of the documents, and submission to the Trust, so that subject to legal appraisal, the lease may be signed paving the way for the operation of the plots on a secure legal footing and the improvements that SG supports.

St James Park Station Project

Two NP projects related to the Station and railway corridor are pursued through liaison with Avocet Line Rail Users' Group whose Chairman is Forum member Mike Reddaway. The aims of the NP projects are to:

Work with Network Rail and the Council to upgrade St James Station; and to:

Work with Network Rail to protect and enhance flora and fauna along the railway corridor

This year the refurbishment of the shelters was begun, though unfortunately had to be put on hold after part of the work had been undertaken, as some components supplied were the wrong size. When completed both shelters will have new acrylic sides, new roofs and seating. A working party of volunteers has weeded the beds on Platform 1 and trimmed back the vegetation on Platform 2, as well as renewing the compost and planting in the tubs. Volunteers are not allowed to work on the banks, but GWR environment team planted ground hugging plants on the bank around the Cathedral Well brick housing. These are designed to form a cascade of blue flowers down the bank.

Heritage Project

Although early initiation of the NP project in 2014 to develop a Heritage Trail around St James was put on the back burner owing to lack of people currently with the time and commitment to take the project forward, there remains much support for the idea, originally proposed by the History Task Group while carrying out research for the evidence base which informed the drafting of the NP.

Since 2012 we have liaised with Andy Pye, the City Council's Heritage Officer, and since 2013 most particularly regarding St Sidwell's Well. We were excited when the archaeological investigation, required as a condition of the planning consent for development at 3 Well Street, the identified site of the Well, was undertaken between June and September 2014. However, despite our periodic nudging, the publication of the archaeological report, also a condition of planning consent, has taken a very long time! We are delighted that it has now finally been released and Andy Pye has sent us a copy, regarding it to be in the public domain. It makes a very interesting read – do take a look. It may be found via a link on the front page of the Forum website.

Assets of Community Value (ACV)

As the Exeter City Council website states "Across the city there are buildings and amenities that are important to the communities that use them. These could include, for example, a shop, a pub, or a library. The closure or sale of these places can sometimes damage communities. Under the Localism Act, voluntary and community organisations can nominate an asset to be included on a list of "assets of community value" held by the Council. If the owner of a listed asset wants to sell it, they must tell the Council. The community will then be given a period of time to prepare and make a bid for the asset." That period of time is 6 months. In 2016 SG successfully nominated St Anne's Well pub as an ACV. Towards the end of 2016 the owners of 3 Well Street put the property up for sale. The Housing Group, in conjunction with ESJCT, considered whether it would be a viable proposition to purchase the retail unit in order to run it as a community café. Failing to secure its sale, the owners subsequently advertised the unit for lease. Chris Bellairs, Manager of Seasons, the vegan speciality food shop at 8 Well Street, took on the lease and opened Rabbit – Exeter's first vegan café. Subsequent to Rabbit's opening, SG has nominated this new café (although not necessarily in its vegan-only guise) as an ACV, as it is located in the heart of what the NP designates the 'community hub'. We are currently waiting to hear if this nomination has been successful.

Let By and To Let signs: Project to 'declutter' ward by working with the Council

Part of a project suggested during the neighbourhood planning consultation was the '*Development of protocol between ECC, University and individual streets to prevent any portion of St James being degraded by presence of temporary populations, eg reduction of housing agent "TO LET" signage, ...*' Although the City Council agreed a protocol with agents that came into force in 2014, policing of this protocol has been left to the local community. Since its introduction SG officer and coordinator of the Housing Group, Annette Plaut, has taken responsibility on herself, with full support of the Council, to alert the agents of any breaches of this protocol, (which includes no 'Let By' signs at any time, and a holiday from 'To Let' signs during July and August), copying this both to City Councillors and to Council Officers. A number of agents are repeat offenders, and it is clear that Annette's persistent intervention has been essential to ensure offending signs are not allowed to remain. It is disappointing and a cause for concern that this is still necessary nearly 3 years after the protocol came into force and the need for a more effective way of enforcing compliance was raised in a meeting with ECC Chief Executive Karime Hassan (KH) recently. KH agreed to investigate enforcement of the protocol. This action is contributing to another NP project – '*to 'declutter' the ward by working with the Council*'.

Street Tree Planting Project

SG was delighted to learn that Forum Member Beth Osment is keen to initiate the community's project that was voted 3rd equal in 2011/12, to identify streets where tree planting would be possible and would enhance the area, work with the Councils to obtain permission, and initiate a street tree planting campaign. Beth has the ideal professional background to ensure all essential factors are considered, and intends to pursue this over the coming year. In due course she would be keen to receive contact details of any Member who would be interested in forming a Project Group with her. Members who would like to suggest potential streets to be assessed for this treatment are encouraged to make contact by email: info@exeterstjamesforum.org.

Working with Other Bodies Representing the Community of St James

Exeter Community Forum

The Forum continues to be represented on ECF, set up in 2014 as a formal co-operation between community groups engaged in the planning process and local councillors. It has produced a Community Strategy for Exeter which includes provision for how the neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is to be apportioned. Its work this year has focused on responding to the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and awarding the first tranche of grass roots grants utilising CIL money.

Exeter St James Community Trust Ltd

The Trust Board has met on six occasions during the past year and held its second AGM last October. In January the Board was delighted to appoint Forum member Rebecca Bower as an additional director. Rebecca brings a wealth of experience in finance and accounting and has been instrumental in organising the Trust's finances to a professional standard. The Trust now has over 230 shareholding members.

The major development this year has been the successful negotiation by Exeter City Council of the all the steps leading to the compulsory purchase of Queen's Crescent Garden and is now in a position to complete the Order when an Agreement for Lease is signed, as explained under the QCG Project section. Although it has been a frustratingly drawn out matter, we are now hopeful that we will soon, at last, be able to sign the lease and so begin in earnest work on the garden's regeneration. Elsewhere negotiations continue with Network Rail to take on the lease of the station allotments on behalf of the Forum's Vegetable Garden Project Group.

The Trust has continued to work in conjunction with the Forum to produce the joint newsletter, "*About St James*", and is currently in the process of upgrading the joint website which we hope will be launched very soon.

Working with the University, City and County Councils and Police

The NP Project rated 2nd in the community's priority ranking is to: *Work with the Council and University to manage any adverse impacts that arise from the high level of student accommodation within the ward.*

This year attempts to address this have continued in a number of ways. SG enjoys excellent committed support from each of our city and county councillors, through whom contact is made as appropriate with relevant council officers. We are also pleased that Rory Cunningham, University Community Liaison Officer, and Gareth Oughton, Deputy Chief Executive Students' Guild report to and attend SG meetings informing SG of significant matters within their respective briefs and listening to the community perspective. The attendance of Student Wardens who have a key role to play, has been missed this year, and we hope that their attendance will resume next year. However, it should be noted that the help of student wardens delivering About St James in some areas of St James has been outstanding this year. PC Ian Lugg whose neighbourhood policing responsibility includes St James and the University, is invited to each SG meeting, but due to ill-health has been unable to attend on several occasions. SG wish him well and are pleased that he has resumed his duties.

SG has been invited to send a rep to join residents' association reps, and individual residents from areas without an association, as well as councillors, at the University's Residents' Liaison Meetings to discuss the issues affecting these residents, with parking being a major concern at the meeting in March.

We were pleased to support the publicity in *About St James* of the University's 2017 Community Survey that will help inform its Community Engagement Plan for the coming three years. The closing date for the survey is 3 July and it is hoped that all our Members will have submitted their comments at www.exeter.ac.uk/surveys/community.

SG organised a further 'Have Your Say' meeting in October, and as well as the usual panel of our local City and County Councillors, PC Ian Lugg, Rory Cunningham, University Community Liaison Officer and Gareth Oughton, Deputy Chief Executive Students' Guild, this time it was decided to invite key people with responsibility for areas perceived to be of greatest concern to residents. We were delighted that Christopher Rook, DCC Traffic Management Team Manager, Joel Smith, Exeter University Travel Plan Coordinator and Richard Short, ECC Assistant Director City Development accepted the invitation to listen and respond to residents' concerns. A potentially significant issue raised was abuse of residents' parking permits by commuters and / or students, as suspected by some residents, with Cllr. Jill Owen confirming that she had received reports from some residents of being approached by students asking to buy any unused permits to which their address was entitled. The permit survey that was initiated as a result of this meeting, is reported later.

One of the proposals included in the NP to help address this project, was for engagement at a higher strategic level: *The creation of a joint ECC/Community/ University steering group.* This took shape in 2014 when a Joint Strategic Group was formed with meetings planned at regular intervals, to be attended by Phil Attwell, University's Director of Campus Services, Richard Short, ECC's Assistant Director City Development and the Chairs of ESJF and St David's Neighbourhood Partnership,

representing the communities worst affected by studentification. In the absence of a Forum Chair over the last two years, Dave Treharne was appointed to attend on behalf of SG. Convened by the University, this year there have been delays and the promised date for a meeting is still awaited.

In the meantime, Robyn Connett (RC) was invited by St David's Neighbourhood Partnership (SDNP) to attend a meeting with University Vice Chancellor (VC), Sir Steve Smith, convened following SDNP's request, by a councillor for St David's who happens to be a University student. Originally it was intended by SDNP as an opportunity for all local St James and St David's councillors, MP Ben Bradshaw and a community rep from each of the two neighbourhoods, to meet with the VC at St David's Community Centre to discuss local studentification issues - the growth of the University and what might be done to reduce the impact on communities adjacent to the University. In the event the VC could only offer a meeting at the University and due to size constraints of the meeting room, a much reduced attendance list had to be arranged. A wide range of issues was discussed and the most notable agreed outcome was that the University and City Council would explore ways in which they might offer strong encouragement to developers to focus on sites beyond the wards adjacent to the campus, to achieve dispersal of purpose built student accommodation blocks over a much wider area, so ensuring no further increase in the concentration in any one area. It was agreed that there would be a follow-up meeting, but this has not yet been announced.

A very serious episode of anti-social behaviour by a very large number of students, in Powderham Crescent in February, was described as the worst our councillors had been made aware of and Cllr. Keith Owen hoped it would serve as a wake-up call to the University authorities. Although SG and our residents' associations including Powderham Crescent Residents' Association (PCRA), enjoy good relations with many individual students and appreciate and value the work of Rory Cunningham in his efforts to nurture good relations between our temporary student resident population and permanent residents, and also that of Estate Patrol staff who respond to calls from residents to deal with student-related disturbance, the growing view is that the sheer number of students now living in our neighbourhood, exceeds a sustainable and manageable limit. With an increasing number of permanent residents seriously considering moving away, particularly those who experience regular nightly disturbance by the large numbers of students journeying through their streets and treating these areas as their playground, this incident acted as a catalyst for SG to convene a top level meeting with University, Exeter City Council and Police attendees to respond to the unsustainable increase in students living in, and moving through St James with concomitant increasingly serious negative impact on the permanent resident community.

This meeting took place on 18 May, with notable attendees Mike Shore-Nye (MS-N), University Registrar and Secretary; Phil Attwell, University Director of Campus Services; Karime Hassan (KH), CEO Exeter City Council; and Insp. Simon Arliss (SA), Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. SG was represented by Dave Treharne who chaired the meeting, Robyn Connett, Paul Layton and all four of our city and county councillors. Adrian Ramsey, Chair of PCRA was invited to attend on behalf of the community left distraught after the 'last straw' of that Friday evening/night in February, events of which had sparked the meeting.

The meeting began by focusing on the fundamental issue of the rapid, steep and relentless growth of the University and an exploration of current strategy, and its effectiveness, of the City Council to manage the increase in student numbers so that the permanent communities between the University

and City Centre are not so severely and negatively impacted that their continued existence is seriously threatened. As well as anti-social behaviour, litter and waste issues, and parking space pressures, other impacts were raised: the negative effects of degradation of housing stock not least within conservation areas, often by landlords unsympathetic to the architectural heritage that should be an impressive feature of St James, the loss of potential sites for much needed residential housing for a wide variety of people seeking to live in the area when all available sites are earmarked by developers for purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) and the effect of these PBSA on the built environment. Consideration of the existing use of University, Council and Police resources to deal with the negative impacts on the community was followed by discussion of how the issues raised might be addressed more effectively.

KH promised to investigate the reported lack of enforcement of Article 4 Direction, with the Council's own Council Tax exemption data revealing year on year increases in student Houses of Multiple Occupation despite the Direction put in place to prevent this. KH also confirmed the Council's commitment to dealing with graffiti and enforcing the protocol agreed with letting agents, and that he would report back once he had discussed these issues with Council Officers. SA explained that there has had to be a far greater focus of available police resources on high threat and vulnerability cases with missing young people, organised crime gangs coming to Exeter and the number of homeless people having risen to 40. This has meant that enforcement against anti-social behaviour has become more difficult. KH expressed his great concern at what was happening on the City's streets, including Sidwell Street, and announced that he had appointed a new Assistant Director responsible for addressing anti-social behaviour across the City. Cllr. Kevin Mitchell raised the suggestion that it would be appropriate for the Council to allocate a fair proportion of money paid by the developers of PBSA in the form of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to mitigate against the negative impacts resulting from the huge growth in student numbers and the resultant worsening community imbalance. MS-N reported that the University's Residence Life Team ensures students understand their responsibilities of living in a city. He also stated that Estate Patrol currently has four shift teams each with four staff members, doubled during Freshers' Week, and that while incidents on campus must be prioritised. it responds to calls from residents in St James troubled by student-related incidents.

The meeting was felt to have been a welcome start to an ongoing exchange and all attendees agreed to look to meet every three months throughout the year. KH and SA, were particularly keen to commit to further meetings.

Residents' Parking Permit Survey

At the 'Have Your Say' meeting in October the increasing problem of insufficient on-street parking spaces to meet the need was raised, and residents questioned whether all parking permits had been obtained legitimately. As an example, Cllr Jill Owen (JO) stated that some residents had been approached and offered money to use their address for permits. However, based solely on the limited number of incidents reported by the public on which the Council is dependent for monitoring, Christopher Rook (CR) of Devon County Council did not accept there was any significant abuse of the permit scheme.

Following the meeting Thornton West RA and Forum member Phil Davies (PD) approached JO and SG,

proposing a small-scale survey designed to provide objective evidence to indicate whether there is an issue that demands further investigation and enforcement, or whether, as CR maintained, the suspicions of some residents that this practice was prevalent, were ill-founded. SG was pleased to accept PD's willingness and commitment to pursue this matter in cooperation with Robyn Connett (RC) for SG.

A meeting took place at County Hall, arranged by JO, and attended by CR and Keith Hardacre, also a member of the Traffic Management Team, PD and RC for the Forum, and JO. After a useful discussion, it was agreed that if local residents were to submit a maximum of 60 registration numbers of cars displaying a permit and parked in local residents' parking bays, DCC would investigate the eligibility of the permit holders. Our RAs were consulted and invited to take part in collecting the car registration numbers.

Although the registration numbers were submitted by mid February as agreed, it was not until June that the final results of the investigation were made available. From 55 numbers submitted, 45 permits were investigated and of these 26 were shown to be legitimately held, but 19 resulted in cancellation when the permit holders failed to provide the required eligibility evidence, such as a tenancy agreement, as proof of address.

Because CR believed that ESJF had only collected registrations of suspected ineligible vehicles, he subsequently undertook to investigate a "random sample" of 22 permits linked to addresses in high density student streets in St James -Victoria Street, Springfield Road and Hillsborough Avenue. Bearing in mind that each house is entitled to two permits, it might have been expected that all permits on DCC's database in these streets would be legitimately held, but even here, 5 of the 22 permit holders were found to be ineligible.

Thus the combined results show that one in every three parking permit holders failed to demonstrate eligibility for a permit. However, the situation could be even worse because, of the 55 registrations submitted by ESJF, DCC were only able to find 45 on their parking permit system.

CR acknowledged there was a problem and proposed carrying out further investigations in the new academic year, but recognising the depth of frustration of many local residents over parking issues made worse by this evidence of abuse, SG supported the suggestion of Cllr. Percy Prowse (PP) that he request the issue be included as an agenda item at DCC's Exeter Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) on 4 July. We anticipate that an update to explain the outcome of this meeting will be possible at the AGM.

We are of the view that action is required immediately and are pressing for the introduction of measures to minimise potential for abuse, including a return to physical checking of original documents for eligibility, rigorous enforcement with fines or sanctions for permit abuse and regular audits. PD and RC prepared a briefing paper with proposals for HATOC to consider and have liaised with Cllr Su Aves (SA) as well as PP, both of whom sit on HATOC and are committed to supporting ESJF in this matter, for the benefit of all legitimate permit holders, including students.

Royal Horticultural Society 'It's Your Neighbourhood' Scheme

SG continues to liaise with the RHS IYN regional organiser and encourages and coordinates entries of sites in St James where community groups are developing and nurturing our precious green spaces. Last July Susie Bower (SB) prepared the portfolio for the additional St James' 'village' entry, which encompassed all eight individual sites as well as the roads, gardens and spaces in between them, and escorted the judge around the planned route. St James was awarded a Silver Gilt award! As with the IYN individual sites, assessment is based on community involvement, environmental awareness and gardening achievement, with greatest emphasis placed on community involvement. SG liaised with Community Payback Scheme organisers and a team made a valuable contribution by removing weeds from edges of some pavements en route. Maybe this is something we could all emulate outside our homes and along our street.

At a presentation in the Guildhall in October, the highest level of award, 'Outstanding' was presented to two of our entries, St Sidwell's Community Centre Garden and Devonshire Place Orchard. The next level down 'Thriving' was awarded to four sites, Powderham Crescent Garden, Queen's Crescent Garden, St James' Vegetable Gardens and King Stephen's Close. Bury Meadow Park was deemed 'Advancing' and St James' Park Station 'Improving'. SG commends all these, as well as those who keep their own gardens attractive - their efforts provide pleasure for the whole community.

Preparations are underway for this year's assessment on 19 July with 7 individual entries. Although SG decided not to enter the Village category this year, the judge will walk around the neighbourhood as he is taken from site to site, so SG would like to encourage all residents to make a special effort to spruce up their gardens as their contribution to show our neighbourhood in its best light.

Reaching out to the Local Community and Beyond

New website in Progress

After 6 years SG decided that the website that has seen much use from around the country in that time, is in need of renewal to provide a fresher, slicker, more contemporary feel and allow greater ease of management. The existing website was designed before ESJCT came into existence, and although it became a shared site, the Trust inevitably appeared a minor player. This will all be changed when the new site, that has been constructed at a very reasonable cost, is ready to go live. Ever supportive member and professional graphic designer, Aylwyn Bowen, has now taken the basic skeleton and is in the process of attending to the design elements for ease of use and attractiveness of the content. Aylwyn has provided countless hours of his professional services free of charge since the Forum came into existence, the website being just one aspect of his involvement, and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

The website address will change to reflect the shared nature of the site, www.exeterstjames.org but for the first couple of years the current address will automatically be redirected to the new one while people get used to the change.

'About St James'

Issues 4 and 5 of the newsletter, *About St James*, the joint bi-annual publication of ESJF and ESJCT, were delivered to each property in St James during the year. SG was delighted when Thornton West RA rep, Gaynor Carr agreed to take on the role of editor for the latest Issue. Thanks to all who contributed articles for this newsletter which ensures we reach everyone in the community, encouraging those who are not yet members of one or both organisations, to join us in our continual drive to make St James balanced and vibrant, and a great place to live and work. Thanks, too, to the local businesses that have advertised in the newsletter, helping to cover its production costs, and to our city councillors whose ward grant has met the remainder of the cost. Special mention is deserved for the ever faithful delivery team, including student wardens. Additional help with delivery is required, so if this is something you would be willing to assist with just twice a year, we would love to hear from you!

And finally...

SG always welcomes comments and ideas from our Members and Associate Members, so many thanks to all who have contacted us during the year. Never think your ideas are not worth suggesting – the conversations and discussions between local residents that took place during the neighbourhood planning consultation period of 2011/12 produced many creative and important ideas, many of which made their way into the long list of projects appended to the NP. We have made a good start with a number of these, but there are many still waiting for volunteers to come forward to initiate them. But good ideas didn't stop there! Do come forward with further suggestions of ways in which together we can make St James ever more attractive as a neighbourhood and important part of the City.

Of course, what St James needs most is people to come forward to help make the good ideas happen! To an extent it is true to say we are only limited in what we can achieve by the numbers of active volunteers willing to devote some time and effort, to the community. SG would urge all our members to consider whether there is some role that they could fill, and not to be shy in coming forward if you would like to help!