



TRANSFORMING EXETER

A Manifesto for Change



Exeter Conservative Group

Exeter City Council

Foreword

This manifesto sets out our positive vision for change that delivers the world class public services Exeter residents deserve, in a sustainable and cost-effective way that is fair to current and future tax-payers.

At its heart is a vision for one city that comes together to deliver the kind of place where we all want to live, work, raise a family and grow old.

It is a vision for a city that cares about its most vulnerable, that promotes aspiration across all generations and in which communities are empowered to shape and drive the change they want to see.

It recognises that the cleanliness and sustainability of our local environment is fundamental to the quality of life both now and in the future and that recognises that when innovation and enterprise thrive, everyone wins.

In preparing this manifesto we have consulted widely throughout Exeter. Our regular team of canvassers are knocking on doors year-round asking people what issues cause them concern.

We have a great group of candidates who are committed to making a difference in Exeter. They will represent you - the taxpayers; and run a City Council that is transparent, democratic and financially secure.

There are huge challenges presented by not only the Climate Emergency, and the commitment given to Exeter becoming Net Zero by 2030, but also the need to plan where our communities grow – well-planned homes with the right infrastructure.

We need to improve our recycling services. We need to face up to the challenges posed by anti-social behaviour and people's safety in our City. We need a plan to tackle poverty and promote equality.

The single most decisive factor for any local authority is how it's residents can be supported and how to deliver the services needed. Development in Exeter has delivered finance in the form of the New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy, but there can be no complacency and this manifesto shows how we will ensure that there are healthy balances, sensible and prudent investment and that your money will be spent on the services that you have told us you want.



Yours sincerely

Cllr Andrew Leadbetter
Conservative Group Leader

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Leadbetter".

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1. Economic Stability and Accountability

We will deliver the world class public services that Exeter deserves within budget and without reliance on debt.

2. Net Carbon Zero '30

Net Zero 30 will only become a reality with an open, transparent and democratic approach that brings people and businesses together.

3. Refuse and recycling

Conservatives will halt the dither and delay by Exeter's Labour Council that has resulted in the lowest recycling rate in Devon and roll out food waste and kerbside glass collection.

4. Planning and Housing

Conservatives will halt the building of dormitories and work with residents to provide the homes that people need. Conservatives will seek changes to the Law to make sure all properties are subject to Council Tax or Business Rates.

5. The City Centre

Conservatives plan a vibrant City Centre fit for the 21st Century whilst acknowledging the history that has made Exeter into the place to live and work

6. Our Green environment

Conservatives will work with local residents to enhance our green spaces for all to enjoy and prioritise keeping our highways and byways clean and tidy.

7. A Conservative led Council – our first 100 days

Our vision and ambition demands action from Day one

Economic stability and accountability

Government has pledged to make sure that funds are distributed around the country. They call it “Levelling Up”.

Exeter Conservatives are committed to making sure that Exeter gets its fair share of those funds, whether this is towards public health and wellbeing, public transport, infrastructure or other significant projects.

Exeter Conservatives are deeply concerned about how much the Labour controlled Exeter City Council has already borrowed. This will have to be repaid. Exeter Labour has committed Exeter City Council to borrowing in excess of £110 million That is £2.4m in debt repayment each year. £1 in every £5 of **your** money used just to pay for existing borrowing.

Exeter Conservatives cannot change the amount already borrowed but

- ♦ **We can and will stop that figure from rising.**
- ♦ **We will properly factor into future budgets how that debt is to be repaid.**
- ♦ **We will take into account there will be an end to New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy**
- ♦ **We will ensure prudent and balanced budgets that provide Exeter with the world class services that are needed.**



An Unfair Tax system

Student shared houses are not subject to Council Tax. This has to change. We will take our case to Government to seek changes to the legislation that prevents council tax being charged.



Most houses in this road pay no Council Tax and yet they expect their bins to be collected

All parties were asked to support our approach to the Government to get the legislation changed – Labour; Greens; Liberal Democrats did not do so. They are backing an unfair system.

New Purpose Built Student flats (not those built on campus) are not subject to Business Rates. We are seeking changes to the law so that they are.

Properties let out as holiday lets are subject to Business Rates, rather than Council Tax. This means that many owners pay no tax because of Small Business Rate Relief. We are seeking changes to the law to make such domestic properties subject to Council Tax.

The Need for transparency and democratic accountability

Exeter City Council must be transparent and accountable. Council taxpayers need to be satisfied that the Council is spending, investing and saving wisely.

Exeter's controlling Labour Group are not transparent . They do not encourage democracy.

Exeter City Futures a Community Interest Company (created by Exeter City Council) filed no accounts between 1st January 2020 and 14th December 2021. There were no published minutes of meetings from 20th November 2020 to the end of February 2022. Their website reports that over £1m has been bid for in government grants with a further £250,000 from the national lottery.

YOUR COUNCILLORS had no influence or say in how that money was spent.

Labour have created the Exeter Development Fund to be operated by Exeter City Futures. It is proposed that some City Council Assets will be transferred to this fund – in return for an equity stake. The documents filed mention plans for high density buildings as a part of the housing solutions.

THIS IS WRONG. YOUR COUNCILLORS will have very little say in what is built. Exeter's planners have ignored the views of thousand's of local residents and both local and national conservation charities. Dormitory building (given the title "co-living") will harm Exeter's historic environment; providing further substandard design.



Fixing Exeter's Finances

Community Funds – 15% of Community Infrastructure Levy should be spent in the Communities most affected by the developments charged the levy. In Exeter this does not happen – all the funds are pooled and used centrally. In our first year in Office we will urgently look at ways to ensure that there is proper consideration of local needs within the affected local communities. A priority will be the City's much loved play parks.

Borrowing – In our first year in Office we will conduct an urgent review of all borrowing and seek to reduce Exeter City Council's debt where we can.

Car Parking and Public Transport - City centre parking charges are hurting shoppers and businesses We will freeze car parking charges for next two years. In our first year in Office we will urgently work to develop a new Park & Ride facility. We will seek further government grants to ensure that the new station at Marsh Barton is completed and enable a new station at Hill Barton to progress. We will seek action from Stagecoach to improve performance and move to electric vehicles. We will seek solutions from other bus operators.

NET CARBON ZERO 30



The Conservative Government is putting the environment centre stage with the passing of the Environment Act

Exeter Conservatives believe that if the plan for Net Carbon Zero by 2030 is to become a reality there needs to be an open, transparent and democratic approach bringing people and businesses together.

Conservatives will consider two options and consult as to whether:-

- Exeter City Futures should continue to be responsible for delivering Net Zero and, if so, how many City

Councillors should sit on the Board of Directors. Their remit would include a duty to report to the Audit and Governance and Scrutiny Committees of the Council **before** recommendations are made to Full Council or the Executive Committee before significant financial decisions are implemented..

This should include at least one representative from an opposition party;

2. Exeter City Futures should be wound up with the work to be brought back within Exeter City Council.

To succeed Net Zero 30 requires a positive plan and action from the major institutions in Exeter—the University; Exeter College; the RD&E; both large and small businesses; public transport operators as well as individuals. It is the role of the City Council to bring all these groups and individuals together to develop the way forward. Time has been wasted and the current economic climate will bring further challenges.

Some key Initiatives

- ♦ **New electric Charging points in convenient locations, new housing to be built with capacity for electric charging points wherever possible**
- ♦ **Working with Devon Wildlife Trust to further improve the tree canopy**
- ♦ **Ensuring that road changes to benefit walkers and cyclists remain sympathetic to the needs of motorists who include care-workers; family carers; drivers with disabilities and others for whom the car is a lifeline.**



REFUSE AND RECYCLING

Exeter's Recycling rates for the last 5 years are the lowest in Devon. In October 2021 East Devon's recycling rates were running at 60%. Exeter's were languishing at 27.8%.

The Labour party have run Exeter City Council since 2011 and in that time the city's recycling rate has dropped from 36% in 2011.

After years of dither Exeter's Labour Council have finally started to roll out kerbside food waste collection. Less than 2,000 households in Exeter benefit from this

Labour have been too slow to implement and too quick to find excuses

A Conservative run Council will actively help residents reduce their waste. We know that residents want to help the planet (and make savings for Councils while they are at it). The best thing they can do with their waste is not produce it in the first place. A scheme called "Rethink Waste" is being trialled in Surrey to incentivise residents to reduce the amount of waste they produce.

- **A Conservative run Council will seek to introduce such a scheme in Exeter.**
- **A Conservative-led Council will prioritise the roll out of kerbside food waste.**
- **A Conservative Council will provide a clear timetable for the introduction of kerbside glass collection**
- **A Conservative Council will seek to work with other local councils to ensure that at least some vehicles can be used by multiple councils to prevent build-ups of rubbish when a vehicle breaks down.**
- **A Conservative Council will seek to enforce regulations against fly-tipping and will support prosecutions of offenders.**



Conservative Councillors are already active in their local communities with litterpicks and hedge trimming and will continue to support community activity.

PLANNING AND HOUSING

Exeter is an historic City. There have been many changes of building style over the Centuries and it is right that should continue.

Many of the new buildings already built and planned for the City Centre do not reflect the need for sympathetic and quality designs in the new buildings.

There remain plans for yet more brutalist dormitories that do not reflect Exeter or the need for homes for people who want to live and work in our City.

Conservatives would introduce proper pre-planning with developers so that they know what the City will and will not accept. Consideration will be given to charging for pre-planning advice, routinely done in other authorities.

Community Infrastructure Levies will be weighted in favour of developers who wish to build family homes that take into account the need for new homes to be energy efficient. Those developers who only want to build dormitory type developments will find the CIL levels much higher.



- **Conservatives make it clear that there should be no further permission given for Purpose Built Student Flats or for more shared housing. There should be consideration given to extend the area within Exeter to prevent homes becoming houses of multiple occupation.**
- **Conservatives will seek changes to legislation to make the shared houses liable to Council Tax and non-campus Purpose Built Student Housing subject to business rates.**
- **The new Planning Framework document which is urgently needed is not being processed nearly quickly enough. A Conservative led Council would prioritise the formation of the new plan and make sure that the views of residents in all parts of the City were properly considered.**
- **Conservatives will encourage local communities to consider taking advantages of Neighbourhood Plans, designed by the community, for the community and which form part of the essential planning framework.**

THE CITY CENTRE

The rapid increase of on-line shopping, particularly during the pandemic, means that City Centres are changing. Exeter has lost two major department stores and many retail units remain empty.

Exeter has a vibrant restaurant sector and a number of cinemas but very few entertainment venues in the heart of the City. There are many night-clubs, but increasingly people are saying that they do not feel safe in Exeter at night. The CCTV cameras are not currently manned 24/7.

The City needs to be repurposed but not by building soulless dormitories as have been given planning permission on the Harlequins site. Conservatives don't want Exeter to lose its



distinctive and unique character. **Conservatives do want Exeter City Centre to be a vibrant place where people live, work and play.**

Much more could be made of Northernhay Gardens - the oldest public gardens in the UK.



Homes need to be built with green space and at a height sympathetic to the historic centre of Exeter. Coaches need more secure areas for parking to pick up and drop off visitors where there are proper facilities. Retail can do more to take into account small entrepreneurs who are looking for their first opportunity to create exciting new shops.

None of that vision will encourage people into Exeter if they do not feel safe and there are inadequate public transport alternatives.

- **Conservatives would like street wardens to be re-introduced.**
- **Conservatives will prioritise the enhancement of the City CCTV system. We will work with Devon and Cornwall Police to make sure that cameras are positioned in the right place and that they are manned and monitored 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Plymouth Conservatives have just established a Commission concerning violence towards Women and Girls and a similar Commission will be considered.**
- **Conservatives will work with the citizens of Exeter to develop a robust development plan for the City Centre and then find the developers who wish to work with us to deliver that plan.**
- **The Conservative plan will take into account Net Zero; people's aspirations; the need for good clean public transport and overall homes for individuals; families and the elderly as well as safety and security**
- **Our vision is for a vibrant and modern Exeter that acknowledges its history but builds for its future.**

OUR GREEN ENVIRONMENT

Exeter is rightly proud of its 6 City Parks, that are managed by Devon Wildlife Trust. Access to green space, where children can kick a ball and where others can just sit or walk to take in the views and the fresh air are an asset. Quiet spaces where people can enjoy the fresh air with disabled access and benches suitable for those with mobility difficulties.

However, there are many other green spaces in Exeter, grass verges, green areas between houses, small copses and woodland which we believe could be made more available for families to enjoy..

Planting wildflowers; spring bulbs; trees and shrubs all help to improve the environment and our quality of life and give us a smile as we pass by. Such resources are vital to our well-being.



Exeter Conservatives have been working with many community groups in encouraging planting by using our Councillor Grants to make awards.

Exeter Conservatives have been involved in litter-picking; tree clearance; pathway maintenance because insufficient resources have been made available in the Council budget.



- **A Conservative Council would continue to work with the volunteer groups who do so much for the City with regular litterpicks and hedge trimming.**
- **A Conservative Council would increase Council resources to ensure that Exeter's highways and byways are kept clean and tidy.**
- **A Conservative Council won't just pay lip service to our green environment we will work with residents throughout the year. The enhancement and preservation of our green important is a vital part of encouraging health and well-being to those who live and work in the City.**
- **A Conservative Council will crack down on the fly-tippers who blight the landscape.**

OUR FIRST 100 DAYS



Our team of Conservative Councillors and Candidates have a plan for their 1st 100 days in charge of Exeter City Council

We will:

- Have a new budget settlement that will finance our priorities – kerbside food waste and glass collections; renewing our play parks; and re-establishing Street Wardens
- Set up a timetable to prioritise the new local plan that will give us the housing that we need and not the housing that the developer wants to supply with proper accountability to local residents. Encourage new neighbourhood plans to give communities more control.
- Meet with all the external bodies, such as Exeter City Futures, Exeter Connect, and the Exeter Development Fund to determine if they are fit for purpose and if they are build in democratic accountability to the City Council.
- Set up a Commission to establish how institutions and businesses in Exeter will achieve Net Carbon Zero by 2030.
- Find the scope within the budget to enhance and improve the CCTV coverage within Exeter to make residents and visitors feel safe 24/7. Target the use of CCTV cameras to hotspots with a high level of anti social behaviour which will help deter criminals and make communities safer. Work with the police and local communities to deter drugs use.
- Use the Council's planning powers to ensure adequate charging points for electric vehicles are included in new developments as standard.
- Give a firm timetable for the roll out of Food waste and kerbside glass collection and look at the feasibility scrapping the extra charges for brown bins.

Our Commitment to You

From Day 1 we will be available to answer your questions on local issues, listen to your local concerns, act to help solve your local problems.