

A Better Tomorrow

Exeter City Council Manifesto 2022

Exeter Liberal Democrats

Our Values

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.



What you will get



Liberal Democrat candidates are empowered to speak up for the areas they represent and are bound together by a common philosophy rather than strict party discipline. Electing more Lib Dem councillors will ensure you are properly represented by someone who answers primarily to the people in your ward, and who will champion and empower your local community.

Liberal Democrat councillors pride themselves on working hard all year round for the communities they represent. Too often, other parties just turn up at election time asking for your vote. We strive to keep in touch with the people we represent all year round with Focus newsletters, and regular online content.

Our Vision for Exeter



We seek to create environmentally-sound and forward-looking City and County Councils. Councils that embrace collaboration, open and free ideas to deliver services in partnership with the local community. Councils that promote equality, human rights

and freedoms, and deliver high-quality, value for money services that are democratically controlled by the local community.

The Labour-dominated City Council are squandering millions on their city centre vanity schemes. Liberal Democrats want to reorder the city councils' priorities and divert resources back to the communities that are providing them. A Liberal Democrat-led council will mean councillors can deliver improvements for their local areas. We will continue to work with our Progressive Group colleagues who have continuously held the Labour-dominated council to account.

Exeter is facing numerous crises: from housing to the environment, safety to the cost of living. An inclusive, evidence-based and cost-effective set of solutions is required to prevent these crises from becoming catastrophes.

Affordable Housing for Exeter

Poor long-term planning by Labour has led to housing shortages, skyrocketing prices and problematic decisions being made. Priced out of the city or priced out of any home altogether, more affordable homes are required. We welcome the opportunity for a new Local Plan with open consultation to more sustainably shape Exeter for the years to come.

More Social Housing

Following the lead of Lib Dem-led Teignbridge District Council, Exeter Lib Dems would start building more affordable and environmentally-friendly council homes, prioritising Brownfield sites. We would also seek to protect and improve our current housing stock and ensure the council works closely with other social housing providers.



Tackling the Homelessness Crisis

Liberal Democrats seek to set up an Exeter Homelessness Task Force that works with local community partners and others. This brings together mental health services, housing associations and charities. The task force would oversee an action plan to deal with rising rough sleeping and seek to ensure that we find a home for all those who need one.

Ensuring Balanced Communities

A Lib Dem-led council would end the half-off Community Infrastructure Levy payments to student developers because this has just facilitated the rapid and unsustainable growth of the University, leading to stretched and underfunded services. We are also calling for a review into the City Council's policy for redistributing these developer payments to local communities.

We would widen the area covered by Article 4, where up to 20% of a street can be council tax exempt, and ensure that streets currently in the scheme are properly monitored by a full-time planning enforcement officer.

We seek a framework for what 'co-living blocks' mean, with regards to safety, rent and standards.



Proposed co-living blocks in Exeter appear to be unaffordable purpose-built-student-accommodation in another name and set a precedent for more student accommodation that comes at the expense of homes for locals.

A Housing Charter Mark

Exeter Lib Dems are calling for a self-financing voluntary licensing scheme for the private rented sector that sets assurance standards and provides advice and support systems for both tenants and landlords.

We want to raise standards within the rented sector.



Transparency and Accountability

We want to work with communities and city partners openly and transparently to help deliver the improvements in our housing stock and build more affordable homes.

Bodies need to be representative of our diverse city or how can they expect to reflect our interests?

Decision-making needs to be open to public scrutiny.

Improving Exeter's Environment

With the world facing a Climate and Ecological Emergency, the time to act is now. Emissions are cumulative so any action now will pay dividends down the line. Local-level action builds resilience, drives local economies and creates healthier living.

Recycling

A Lib Dem-led City Council would introduce kerbside food waste and glass recycling and public recycling bins for the whole of Exeter. Exeter's recycling was ahead of the curve when the City Council was Lib Dem-led 10 years ago. Since Labour have taken control, our recycling rate has slumped by 10% to the worst in the South West and beaten by a whopping 92% of all English councils.

Establishing this service would go a long way to improve that rate, minimise emissions, and help the poorest households save the environment and money the most. This is because poorer households are less likely to have access to a compost bin, or have the time, money and energy to make onerous trips to recycle glass at banks as much as 20 minutes' walk away.



A Cycle-Friendly City

Lib Dems work with Devon County Council and the cycling community in developing a city-wide cycle network and planning framework that incorporate the transport hierarchy. This would reduce pollution, improve air quality and ensure the safety of both cyclists and pedestrians.



We further work with Devon County Council and transport providers to try to deliver cheaper bus fares, more reliable and greener services.

Growing your own



Liberal Democrats believe allotments play a key role in helping to keep our city green and sustainable. That's why we work with allotment tenants to improve security and facilities.

Parks and Green Spaces

The Lib Dems encourage and support greater involvement with Devon Wildlife Trust, residents and community groups to ensure they have a say in how their parks are maintained and improved. We work to protect our crucial parks and green spaces from development, ensure sites have clear community facilities and designated zones.



Our Four-Step Plan for Addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency

1: Utilise the abundance of climate expertise at the University of Exeter to establish a comprehensive baseline for Exeter's emissions that includes all sectors and scopes.

2: Properly include locals in decision-making, such as through a Citizens' Assembly. It is crucial that local people are empowered in bringing about a happier, healthier community to ensure improvements are fair, effective and worthwhile.

3: Collaborate with partners to deliver solutions that help save the environment. Many of these can also save money, such as recycling, active transport and retrofitting.

4: An evidence-based carbon budget would give plans clarity, rigour and robustness and would incorporate realistic and achievable, measurable outcomes. Combined with an annual audit, this means any progress can be scrutinised and emissions tackled much more effectively.

The lungs and lives of nature and our children are at stake.



Safer Streets for Exeter

Exeter has been shaken by recent events. No one should have to think twice about walking on our streets, yet this is the reality and unfortunately experienced by many on a daily basis. A joined up approach is required across all levels of government and collaboration with community actors, sharing ideas and raising awareness.

Supporting Community Engagement

We support engaging with local communities to agree upon solutions to improve safety in Exeter, including through Safer Central Exeter.

A Lib Dem-led council would support and work with survivors and family members where appropriate to help us act sooner rather than later to prevent more tragedies.



Collaborating with Partners

A Lib Dem-led council would work with local residents, night-time economy partners, charities, the University of Exeter and Devon County Council to:

- raise awareness of the issues around safety;
- improve street lighting;
- improve the placement, integration and monitoring of CCTV cameras;
- more widely establish checks on pub and club doors to prevent spiking and injecting;
- ensure more reliable and night-time bus services; and
- ensure comprehensive mental health support is available for all.



Community Patrol Service

No one in Exeter should have to live in fear of crime or have to tolerate the effects of crime and anti-social behaviour. Labour abolished the community patrol service and have reduced environmental health services enhanced by the last Liberal Democrat-led council in Exeter.

Liberal Democrats also support abolishing the Police and Crime Commissioner role and using the savings to improve front-line policing.

Services that Deliver for Exeter

Facing a cost of living crisis, the last thing the people of Exeter need are unnecessary council tax hikes caused by Labour misspending. Labour have squandered millions from a rising council tax base, New Home Bonus funding and Community Infrastructure Levy.

Exeter Liberal Democrats believe in spending local taxes on services where people live, investing in all of Exeter, not just sinking them into reckless vanity projects in the city centre. We need to rethink the way forward for the city centre by working openly with partners and no longer setting up semi-accountable private companies.

Funding Basic Services

Labour misspending has caused cuts to crucial basic services, including public toilets, graffiti and litter removal. Labour need to get the basics right before considering any kind of vanity project.

A Lib Dem-led council would ensure proper funding for front-line services, such as recycling, environmental health teams and local communities, to ensure our city is clean, thriving and safe.

Getting the basics right would free up resources to deliver more effective safety, environmental and affordable housing schemes.



Labour's city centre vanity schemes with spiralling costs of £50 million and counting

Exeter's Council Tax

Exeter ranks in the top third of the country for how expensive its council tax is. Thanks to Labour misspending, this is set to worsen: rising by the absolute maximum allowed without holding a referendum.

Labour have shown where their priorities lie: inappropriate, unsustainable, and debt-inducing city centre vanity projects that suck resources away from the communities that provide the funds.

In contrast, Lib Dem-led Teignbridge District Council have led the way by scrapping council tax for the poorest households.

A Full-Time Planning Enforcement Officer

The council is currently paying £43,000 for a planning enforcement officer from an agency for six months. A permanent officer will offer better value for money and acknowledge the importance of keeping developers in check. Without such an officer, it is clear that Labour are unable, or worse unwilling, to enforce their own planning conditions.

Labour wouldn't support a similar proposal the Progressive Group made two years ago. Now the planning team are short of planning officers and face a backlog of 160 enforcement complaints. Our fully-costed proposal provides a long-term solution.

The cost of this additional post can be found by the council introducing a charging scheme for its Pre-Application Advice Service for larger-scale developers, similar to Plymouth's.

Properly-Resourced Scrutiny

With Labour's programme of massive cuts of £7.65m and big plans for the future of Exeter, there has never been a more important time to hold the Council to account. In the last 12 months, the workload for scrutiny has increased but some of the staff support to make it happen has been removed. This has led to cancelled meetings and a logjam in progressing pressing issues, such as the stalled food waste collection service, the final bill for St Sidwell's Point and action on reducing carbon emissions.

A good council is one that is willing to be open to scrutiny. A scrutiny officer will help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the council's scrutiny function, improving governance and making the council more accountable to Exeters' residents.

PROGRESSIVE GROUP BUDGET AMENDMENTS FOR EXETER



IMPROVED GOVERNANCE



BETTER VALUE FOR MONEY



KEEPING DEVELOPERS IN CHECK

"A good council is one that is willing to be open to scrutiny."

Empowering Exeter's Communities

"Liberal Democrats believe that the council should fully involve its citizens in decision-making about the future of their city."

We are a grassroots democratic party and, as Liberal Democrats, we strive to implement community politics. This is a way of solving political problems that seeks to actively engage and listen to the views of the local community. We seek to set up active community groups to bring people together to solve issues and, where possible, devolve power from central government and local government to local community groups.

A recent report from the Electoral Reform Society highlighted how one-party dominated councils are a cause for concern with regards to corruption, value for money and in responding to residents' needs. We aim to provide real opposition to the Labour-dominated City Council, which is made up of over 70% Labour councillors on just 44% of the vote, to improve governance, ensure better value for money and a strong voice for residents.

Funding Thriving Communities

A Lib Dem-led council would increase the community ward project budget - giving councillors direct control over money that can help their local area via local community groups.

Lib Dems want to ensure the benefits of a growing city are shared with every community. We would set aside money from the Community Infrastructure Levy to rejuvenate Exeter's neighbourhoods, particularly the most deprived areas.



Cllrs Kevin Mitchell and Michael Mitchell have been vocal supporters of the St James Community Trust, helping to secure funding for and restore Queen's Crescent garden.

Facilitating the Growth of Neighbourhood Planning

We support, encourage and enable local communities to develop local plans. For instance, Liberal Democrats were instrumental in the creation of the St James Neighbourhood Plan.

We promote a grassroots, bottom-up involvement in setting our city's agenda, rather than top-down. This is because Lib Dems passionately believe local communities should have a real say in determining what their area is like.

Transparency and Accountability

Liberal Democrats oppose Labour's secrecy, backroom decisions and setting up private companies to carry out the work of the council, which lack proper scrutiny and accountability. We will invite the public to take part in scrutiny panels - similar to that used for social housing - for parks, waste, and other identified services. They will have the power to make recommendations on service levels and propose improvements for how we deliver improvements to services in Exeter.

A Functioning Democracy for the People of Exeter

A Labour majority has meant that they have seized control of the scrutiny leadership roles to silence any opposition. Liberal Democrats welcome a vigorous and plural decision-making process with all views taken into account from all perspectives. Liberal Democrats have demonstrated this by helping form the Progressive Group, showing that people with a range of views working positively together can make fairer decisions. We have started to hold Labour to account but we need reinforcements to give communities a real option when they are ignored.