

# A Better Tomorrow Exeter City Council Manifesto 2023

## 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, now the official opposition, as we 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.

# 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.

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



Labour's city centre vanity schemes have cost £50m+ and decimated council finances

## 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, 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.

## Properly-Resourced Scrutiny

Labour's programme of massive cuts >£6m by 2025 and big plans for Exeter's future means it's more important than ever to hold the council to account. Scrutiny workload has risen but staff support has reduced. This has led to cancelled meetings and a logjam in progressing pressing issues, such as the food waste rollout and questioning multi-million pound arrangements.

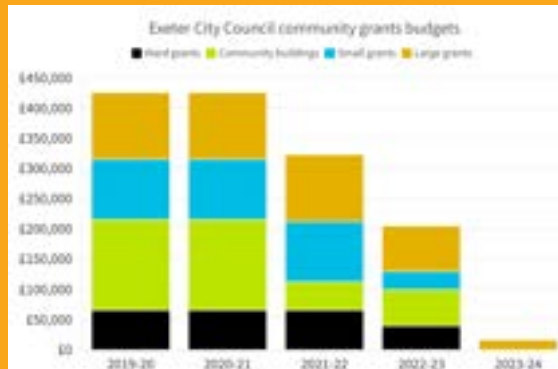
A good council is willing to be open to scrutiny. A scrutiny officer will help improve efficiency, effectiveness and governance – making the council more accountable to Exeter's residents.

## Community Grants Funding

Labour have slashed the Community Grants Budget from £425k to just 15k. 145 community organisations received grants last year. With many of these relying on the money to survive, how will these invaluable community groups survive now?

This is whilst Labour make politically expedient bribes that break their own new strict spending rules. They also refused independent budget advice despite agreeing to it last November. There are countless more examples of Labour's poor transparency, accountability and value for money in decision-making, symptomatic of one-party-dominated councils.

Liberal Democrats fight for community services, initiatives and groups in the face of short-sighted, exclusive and self-motivating Labour misspending.



Labour have slashed the Community Grants Budget from £425k to just £15k  
Source: Exeter Observer

# 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, not slash it. This funding enables our local communities to thrive.

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 councillors 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.



# Affordable Housing for Exeter

Poor long-term planning by Labour has led to housing shortages, skyrocketing prices and problematic decision-making. Priced out of the city or priced out of any home altogether, more affordable homes are required. We hold the council to account over the transparency, scope, greenness and value for money of plans or lack thereof.

## More Social Housing

Following the lead of Lib Dem-led Teignbridge District Council, Exeter Lib Dems would build 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

So far, pressure from our campaign has secured a partial review into levies paid by developers. We want a full review so this money can be fairly redistributed to communities.

Purpose built student accommodation no longer receives a discount but 'co-living' blocks do. These bedsits are yet more cramped and unaffordable student blocks in another name. We need a mix of homes to reflect our diverse communities.



The Gorge - the only (partly built) co-living block in Exeter to date

These developer levies should instead incentivise building decent, affordable and environmentally-sound homes. This will help people save on running costs too.

## 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.



## Insulation and Renewables

It is clear that much more is required to fit homes with insulation and renewable energy to not only save costs but the environment.

## 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.



Adrian Fullam in front of stalled Newman Rd housing sites

# Improving Our 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 enables healthier living.

## Action on Recycling

A Lib Dem-led City Council would introduce household glass and food waste 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. Since Labour have taken control, our recycling rate has slumped by over 10% to the worst in the South West and beaten by a whopping 95% of all English councils.

Establishing this service would go a long way to improve that rate, minimise emissions and help households save the environment and money.

We also want to reform bin collection times to better incentivise recycling. Mid Devon District Council have found recycling rates shoot-up as a result.



## Better Transport Options

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.