



# LET'S FIX EXETER

## A Manifesto for Change



# Exeter Conservative Group Exeter City Council

## Foreword

Exeter's residents deserve better. At the heart of our manifesto is a vision for a City where we all want to live, work, raise a family and grow old. A vision based on sustainable and cost-effective finances that are fair to current and future generations.

It is a vision for a city that cares about its most vulnerable, promotes aspiration and empowers communities to shape and drive the changes 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. It recognises that when innovation and enterprise thrive everyone wins.

In preparing this manifesto we have been listening to you. Our regular teams of canvassers are knocking on doors year-round asking people about the issues that frustrate them, anger them and cause them concern.

We have a great team 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. A Council that enhances its green spaces, both large and small and takes pride in being a clean and tidy place for residents and tourists to visit.

There are huge challenges - Labour have racked up £166m in debt. We need to plan where our communities can grow and provide homes for families. We need to plan for the necessary infrastructure - schools; GPs; Dentists; community facilities and transport). Labour committed Exeter to becoming Net Zero by 2030, but had no plan as to how this should be achieved. The level of debt means that vital services are threatened with extinction.

We need to improve our recycling services. We must face up to the challenges posed by anti-social behaviour and ensure people's safety in our City. Those who are homeless need to be supported out of homelessness. We need to work with partners ensure that services remain available to prevent homelessness becoming a revolving door.

A local authority must ensure that residents are supported and that the services needed are delivered. It is time for a change - Labour are ruining Exeter. This manifesto sets out how we will deliver the services that you have told us you want to see. We will not compromise on the quality of our essential services, but we will bring forward plans to reduce the debt. This will take time - there is no easy fix, but we are confident we can succeed.

*Anne*

**Anne Jobson OBE**

**Leader Conservative Group Exeter City Council**



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Labour-run Exeter City Council is £166million in debt. They have no plan to cut debt - they just run-down services. Conservatives are the only political party who aim to cut debt and provide the services that Exeter's residents demand and need.

## 2. Transparency & Democracy - page 4

Labour-run Exeter City Council is neither transparent or democratic. They established two private companies, Exeter City Living and Exeter City Futures. Neither were accountable to local residents . The former crashed leaving Exeter with a £10m debt and the latter was wound up having spent around £800k, but achieving precisely nothing. Exeter's Labour-controlled HATOC Committee introduced the Heavitree & Whipton LTN with no meaningful consultation. This must not be repeated.

## 3. Refuse and Recycling - page 5

Whilst acknowledging that Labour have, at last, started the roll out of a food waste collection, this is incomplete. The Reclamation Facility that underpins our services has to be rebuilt as a matter of urgency. The Labour Council still preside over the lowest recycling rate in Devon . There is still no date for the roll out of a kerbside glass collection.

## 4. Planning and Housing - page 6

A new local plan is being designed. Affordable homes, shared ownership and homes to both rent and buy for local people are required. A limit on student flats and dormitory apartments for the wealthy is needed. There must be proper funding for infrastructure (doctors, dentists, schools, public transport, green space, play parks). If there is a need for co-living apartments they must be of sufficient individual size and not smaller than a hotel bedroom.

## 5. The City Centre - page 7

Closed shops, expensive car parks and unreliable bus-services are for many their experience of our City Centre. Local Residents are too frequently not coming in to Exeter. Our plans look at reducing car park charges; working to make our City safer, enhancing areas around bus stops and ensuring that the disabled have sufficient places to park so they feel welcome in Exeter.

## 6. Our Green Environment

Without our dedicated bands of voluntary litter-pickers Exeter would be in a sorry state. Labour recently cut the budget by about £250,000 leading to fewer bins and less street cleaning. We have a plan to work with the County Council and our local communities to keep the roads and paths clean, the grass cut and the hedges trimmed. We will hold South West Water to account to prevent or limit the incidences of flooding and sewage spills. We need more allotments, and we need to keep the charges reasonable.

## 7. Net Carbon Zero

Net Zero '30 will only become a reality with an open, transparent and democratic approach that brings people and businesses together. Labour and the Green Party are increasingly simply anti-car, taking no account of the vulnerable and those who need a vehicle to do their job. The introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods without public consent and the failure to remove them when there was a clear recommendation was wrong.

# Economic stability and accountability

## Background

Since Labour took control in Exeter in 2011, they have increased debt. On 31st March 2023 the borrowing figure was £166,697,000. Each year a Council has to set a balanced budget. Whilst it is correct that since 2011 there have been cuts in the Rate Support Grant, Exeter has not relied on that for its income. Car Parks were aimed to bring in an anticipated revenue of £8m per annum; Community Infrastructure Levy an estimated £850,000; Business Rates an estimated £7.8m and the New Homes Bonus around £672,000. Council tax raises £6.78m. Overspending on City flagship buildings; a failed Development Company leaving a £10m black hole and a £1.2m per annum subsidy to leisure services has resulted in a budget that lacks aspiration or ambition and risks vital services.

## A Conservative run Council will :

- Introduce a plan to reduce the level of debt. Repayments are currently £2.44m pa. - more than £1 in every £5.00 of your money is used to pay existing borrowing..
- Future-proof the budget to ensure that when the New Homes Bonus scheme ends, the Council will not have to make cuts. This scheme has continued for longer than anticipated, but it is a scheme that will end .
- Look at each and every service budget, initially concentrating our efforts on restoring the Parks and Green spaces budget and how funding will continue to be secured for vital services such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- Ensure that the vital refurbishment of the Materials Reclamation Facility is completed without delay in order to protect and enhance our recycling and enable an income to be derived from the manufacture of recycled products (benches, kayaks etc).
- Demand reform by the Government of the Tax System. Owners of second properties know that if they rent them as holiday lets they are subject to Business Rates. This means that many such property owners pay no tax at all as the property comes within the Business Rate relief scheme. All such properties should be subject to Council Tax and a premium can then be secured on all second homes.
- Demand reform by the Government to make sure that the Management Companies of Purpose Built Student Housing pay Business Rates. There should be a change in the law making them do so, particularly as some compete with the hotel sector during holiday periods and none contribute towards the services they obtain. (This would not apply to on-campus accommodation)



There is no easy fix for the mess created by Labour-run Exeter City Council. No incoming administration will be able to fix the problems in year one, but by adopting a prudent approach and looking to maximise external revenue opportunities through the more commercial operations we will create a stable financial operation.



**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a long term plan to deal with the finances and to give Exeter a sustainable future.**

# The Need for Transparency and Democratic Accountability

## Background

Labour pay little more than lip-service to the need for democratic accountability. They set up Exeter City Living, which collapsed leaving debts. There was no accountability to you, the taxpayer. They established Exeter City Futures, now wound up, having achieved nothing but spending around £800,000 of government grants. They now propose that allotment holders pay more in rent - stating that the provision and servicing of allotments should be cost neutral, whilst happily subsidising leisure services by over £1m, presumably because they don't believe leisure services should be cost neutral. Local Government finances should be absolutely transparent and fair: Local taxpayers need to know how and on what their money is being spent.

## A Conservative run Council will:

- Ensure there are no more private companies set up that are not fully accountable to the Council Taxpayer.
  - Ensure that the new Exeter Plan will concentrate on delivering homes for the residents of Exeter and not concentrating on student flats or co-living rooms for a transient population.
  - concentrate on your priorities for homes, services, culture and tourism.
  - ensure that 15% of sums received by way of Community Infrastructure Levy is spent in the communities affected by the developments being charged the Levy. Currently all funds are pooled and used centrally.
  - work with local communities to deliver the facilities that are required; being honest about costs and not making overblown promises to undertake projects for which there is no money.
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- conduct a review as to how the Council conducts its business, ensuring that there is proper opportunity for members of the public to have their say at meetings and working on a plan to involve opposition parties in decision making.
  - make sure that all consultations are easily available to those without access to the internet, properly advertising such consultations, encouraging people to participate and publicising the results of such consultation in detail.

**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a long term plan that will be open, accountable and transparent.**

# REFUSE AND RECYCLING

## Background

Labour have run Exeter since 2011. At that time Exeter's recycling rate stood at 36%. In October 2023 Exeter's recycling rate was the lowest in Devon - just 24.5%. The average for Devon is 54% - every other Council has a rate above 44%. Most other districts have weekly collections for green and grey bins. Labour has failed to roll-out 100% food waste collection because they have not invested in the Material's reclamation Facility (MRF) and they have failed on their promise to introduce kerbside glass collections. Incidences of fly-tipping are regularly reported and street cleaning has been reduced because of the overall level of debt resulting in service cuts.

## A Conservative run Council will

- Actively help residents to continue to reduce their waste. Residents have reduced household waste from 39,200 tonnes to 35,997 tonnes - the highest in Devon. We will investigate the viability of introducing a scheme called "Rethink Waste"<sup>1</sup>, currently being trialled in Surrey, to incentivise residents to reduce the amount of waste they produce.
- Provide a clear timetable for the introduction of kerbside glass collection and in the interim we will look for additional sites for more bottle banks to prevent scenes like this recurring.



- Ensure completion of the upgrade of the MRF (predicted to cost £8m) to enable the roll out of food waste collection to be completed. Continue to offer services to other councils and ensure that the MRF's commercial activities (such as making benches, kayaks and similar from granulated plastics) are enhanced and promoted.
- Pro-actively seek to enforce regulations against fly-tipping, supporting the prosecutions of offenders.
- Seek to introduce free bulky waste collections to enable residents to dispose of larger items without having to drive to the re-cycling centres.
- Seek to restore the provision of street cleaners throughout the City to stop Exeter looking grubby and acting as a magnet for seagulls and vermin. Work with local businesses to promote sponsorship of litter-bins

Conservative Councillors and candidates are already out and about in their local communities helping with litterpicks and undertaking pavement clearances. We will continue to support and promote community activity.

### Note 1

Rethink Waste is a free scheme available to anyone living in Surrey that offers a range of rewards for reducing waste. Residents can sign up online and will receive a personalised dashboard where they will be able to access relevant activities and resources and monitor their progress.



**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a long term plan to deal with the environmental issues of today and tomorrow.**

# PLANNING AND HOUSING

## Background

Exeter is an historic City. How should history and heritage play a part in designing the future? How many homes are needed and where should they be built? What types of accommodation need to be built? All those and many more questions should be answered in Exeter's Local Plan. This is currently being revised and to date there have been two consultations.

Exeter Labour are, however, failing to meet the needs for homes of those who have family ties and commitment to living in Exeter in favour of a more transient population. Nearly 1,000 units of hotel-style co-living units of accommodation have been given approval or are at the planning stage. Homes that are planned/approved are described as "low-car" neighbourhoods without consideration as to why people need their own transport. The Community Infrastructure Levy provides that developers of the co-living apartments are paying a lower rate than the developers providing student housing.

Exeter Labour created a Development Company, Exeter City Living, that delivered very few homes and collapsed leaving a £10m debt that has to be repaid. This puts the pledge not to build student-housing at Clifton Hill at risk and led to the proposal to sell the Mary Arches Car Park (partly for yet more co-living). Exeter relies on fees from car-parks to assist in providing services - putting delivery of services at risk.

## A Conservative run Council will :

- Work with developers to ensure that new buildings planned for the City Centre do reflect the need for sympathetic and quality design and not just high-rise flats.
- Make it clear that it is homes for single people, families and those who want to downsize that are needed in Exeter and for these to be built on the brownfield sites that are available.
- Encourage developers who wish to build homes and discourage those who simply want to build more purpose built student accommodation and Co-Living apartments (such as the proposals rejected on appeal for the Old Police Station site. This site should be for housing including affordable and social rented housing.



- Seek to ensure that 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. Whilst delighted that Labour have finally agreed to introduce charges for pre-planning advice, more needs to be done.
- Seek changes to legislation to make the shared houses liable to Council Tax and the non-campus Purpose Built Student Housing subject to business rates.
- Encourage local communities to consider taking advantage of Neighbourhood Plans, designed by the community, for the community and which form part of the essential planning framework.

**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a long term plan to deal with the provision of the homes that the residents of Exeter deserve.**

# THE CITY CENTRE

## Background

At the turn of the 21st century Princesshay opened. A lively shopping and restaurant complex, now a shadow of its former self. Guildhall Shopping Centre not as busy as it once was. Lots of restaurants and cafes, but people worry about their safety when in the City. Car Park Charges have rocketed under Labour. The Green Party would put them up still further. The bus service is unreliable. The coach gateway for tourists a shabby back street frequently full of litter. The bus station too small. Exeter is the Capital of Devon, it has the Cathedral, the Museum, The Quay, Northernhay Gardens and Topsham and many other first class visitor hotspots, but Labour hasn't looked after Exeter. It has put in some first class CCTV, but even that is not enough to tempt some people from coming in to their own City for a night out and they continue to go elsewhere for their shopping.

## A Conservative run Council will:

- Work on plans that enable Exeter to retain its distinctive character. There will be no more soulless dormitories like those given planning permission at the Harlequins Centre.
- Work with businesses and the hospitality sector to make sure that Exeter City Centre is a vibrant place where people live, work and play.
- Protect the Quay and the River Exe and Canal from intrusive development and work to enhance the area for more water sports and river use.
- Stop Exeter from losing its distinctive and unique character. As an example, much more could be made of Northernhay Gardens - the oldest public gardens in the UK.



- Continue to enhance the CCTV coverage to encourage people to come into the centre of the City to enjoy an evening in the vibrant restaurant sector or a trip to the cinema, the cathedral, the Corn Exchange or one of the many nightclubs.
- Work with developers to make sure that any homes in the City Centre are built with green spaces to enjoy and at a height sympathetic to the historic centre of Exeter.
- Will endeavour to find a better area for visitors arriving and departing by coach. With proper collect/drop off parking and some rest-room/café facilities.
- Will reduce car parking charges to a flat rate after 6pm (between £2 & £3 ) introduce a free 30 minute drop off, 1hr availability (not 2) and ensure that at least one Sunday in each month the car parks are free.
- Will work with the homeless charities to reduce the number of street homeless on Exeter's High Street and prevent the revolving door of street homelessness.
- Will take into account Net Zero; people's aspirations; public toilets; the need for good clean public transport and overall homes for individuals; families and the elderly as well as safety and security
- Work with you to create a vibrant and modern Exeter that acknowledges its history but builds for its future.

**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have the vision that will create a vibrant City Centre for residents and visitors alike.**



# OUR GREEN ENVIRONMENT

## Background

Without our dedicated bands of voluntary litter-pickers Exeter would be in a sorry state. Labour have cut the parks & green spaces budget by about £250,000 leading to fewer bins and less street cleaning. Devon Wildlife Trust do a fantastic job in maintaining our 6 City Parks. Access to green space where children can kick a ball, others can just sit or walk to take in the views and the fresh air is vital for our well-being and mental health. Too many developments have little green space, more could be done to ensure that quality green spaces are provided with proper disabled access, benches suitable for those with mobility issues. Labour do not maintain our City. Exeter deserves so much better.

## A Conservative run Council will:

- Support the planting of wildflowers, spring bulbs, trees and shrubs which are not only good for the environment and enhance Exeter, but also benefit our health and well-being.
- Reinstate the £250,000 stripped out of the budget to keep our footpaths free of weeds and when finance permit further increase Council resources to ensure that Exeter's highways and byways are kept clean and tidy.
- Continue to work with the volunteer groups who do so much for the City with regular litterpicks and hedge trimming.
- Not just pay lip service to our green environment, but work with residents throughout the year.
- Work with Devon Wildlife Trust and local community groups to encourage more tree planting schemes.
- Hold South West water to account ensuring that they undertake the necessary works to prevent much of the flooding that occurs in the City and make sure that the sewage and rain water run off are fit for purpose.
- Ensure that large scale housing developments properly consider the provision of more allotments for City residents to enjoy.
- Work closely with Devon County Council to ensure the drains and gullies are kept clear of debris and that trees and hedges are properly maintained. (To prevent the recurrence of paths becoming overgrown and only being cut back when local community groups intervene with the help of the local Conservative Councillors).



Before and after a volunteer path-cleaning session

**Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a plan to tidy up Exeter so that it is not only a haven for wildlife but has clean and tidy streets and byways for residents and visitors alike.**

# NET CARBON ZERO 30

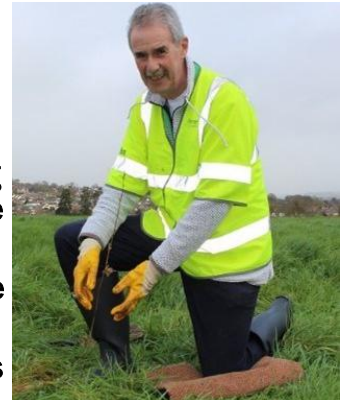
## Background

Labour declared a Climate Emergency and said that Exeter would be Net Zero by 2030. They had no plan as to how this would be achieved and their approach is to simply become increasingly anti-car. It was the Labour controlled Highways (HATOC) Committee that introduced the divisive and unworkable Heavitree & Whipton Low Traffic Neighbourhood. This was supported by the Greens who would increase car-park charges even more than Labour's extortionate fees.

There are plans for homes to be built with limited parking for delivery, service and emergency vehicles. They are built as "low/no" car developments. A theory that everyone will be able to walk or cycle to work/take their children to school and enjoy weekends and holidays without the need to own or park a car.

## A Conservative run Council will:

- Put the environment centre stage as the Government did when it passed the Environment Act.
- Ensure that there is an open, transparent and democratic approach bringing people and businesses together to create the environment where Net Zero is achievable.
- Encourage the major institutions in Exeter—the University; Exeter College; the RD&E; to bring forward their plans for their institutions to achieve net zero.
- Make sure there are sufficient and affordable electric charging points in convenient locations and encourage new housing to be built with capacity for electric charging points wherever possible.
- Work closely with Devon Wildlife Trust to further improve the tree canopy.
- Ensure that road changes intended to benefit walkers and cyclists remain empathetic to the needs of motorists who include care-workers, family carers, drivers with disabilities, delivery drivers and service vehicles and others for whom the car is a lifeline.
- Continue to oppose plans for further Low Traffic Neighbourhoods that do not have majority local consent and ill thought through cycle lanes and campaign for more funds to come into Exeter to repair our potholes.
- Continue to campaign for the Heavitree & Whipton LTN to go and for a proper review of all existing schemes to be undertaken to ensure that they are working in the interests of all road users.
- Want to see bus and coach operators switch to less polluting vehicles and run services at a frequency that will encourage more use. Including night-time services in and around Exeter.
- Will encourage and ensure that advice is available for all residents who wish to move towards a more energy efficient home.



Exeter Conservatives are not just talk, but have a plan for Net Zero that is not simply anti-car, but acknowledges that businesses and institutions need to make the necessary changes to enable their buildings to be part of the Net Zero solution.



**Rory More O'Ferrall**  
Duryard & St James



**Jack Hunt**  
Pennsylvania



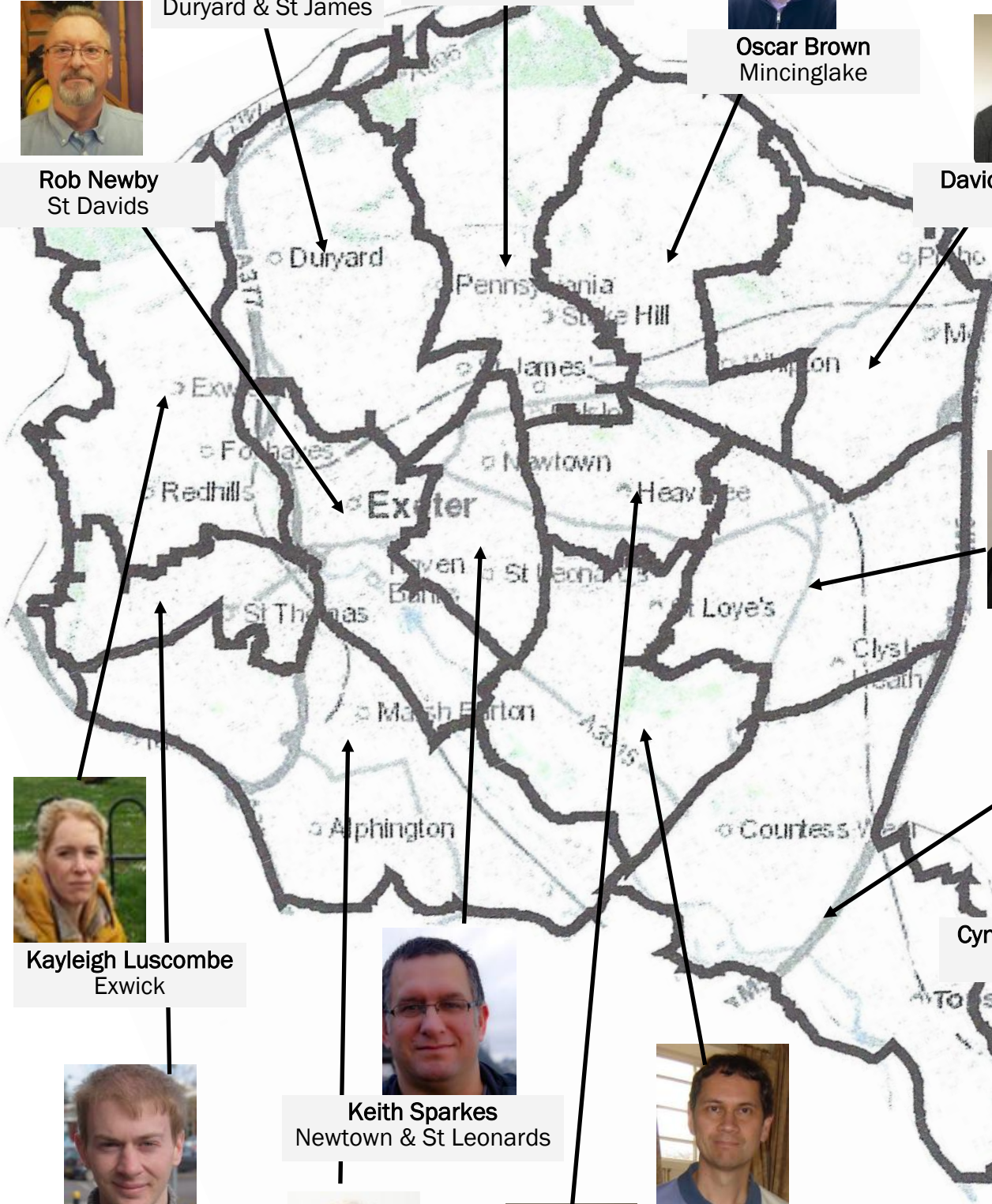
**Oscar Brown**  
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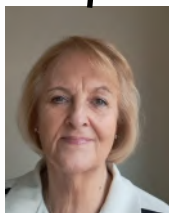
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