

# Labour's Manifesto for 2024 Exeter City Council Election

LABOUR'S  
PRIORITIES ARE:



Exeter's people



Exeter's environment



Exeter's homes



Exeter's economy

# Introduction



All local authorities across the nation are dealing with tough challenges. While funding decreases, costs rise and demands on councils continue to increase.

In making the tough choices required in Exeter, this Labour administration focuses on what benefits residents, while we also make sure we deliver the core services all councils are required to deliver.

Despite enduring funding cuts from central government for over 14 years, Exeter City Council is a well-run authority able to generate the income and minimise costs to continue to deliver services within a balanced budget.

Last year's unique pressures included higher than normal cost of living increases in staff salaries and spiralling energy costs. This has meant that for the 2024/25 financial year we have had to find a further £1.25m in savings or increased income to deliver services within a balanced budget. Despite these financial difficulties, we've continued to support individuals, communities, businesses and tourism to maintain Exeter as a great place to live in 2024.

We've achieved a lot this year!

Our Council's retrofit programme has been recognised with several awards including the National Unlock Net Zero category in 'Green Homes Upgrade of the Year' awards. We were also recognized for our renewable energy project at Water Lane and celebrated our two millionth visitor at St Sidwell's Point Leisure Centre, much more about these and other success throughout this document.

In the spring, the City Council will lead efforts for city-wide net zero emissions, collaborating with various groups across the city.

Our success relies on working closely with partners and residents. We're committed to finding solutions together and achieving our vision for an inclusive, healthy and sustainable city. This manifesto outlines what Labour achieved last year and our priorities and pledges for 2024.

**Cllr Phil Bialyk**, Labour Leader, Exeter City Council

## Our Priorities going forward

We will continue to deliver against four priorities in leading Exeter City Council.



### **Exeter's People** (page 3)

In leading Exeter City Council, we commit to supporting residents and community groups, sustaining cultural and leisure programs to improve health, well-being and enrichment and increase safety in our city alongside working in partnership to address anti-social behaviour.



### **Exeter's Environment** (page 7)

We will work with you and the city's key partners, businesses, communities and residents to decrease our carbon emissions, ensure our parks and open spaces are properly maintained, and focus on increasing tree canopy coverage and biodiversity.



### **Exeter's Homes** (page 12)

We are dedicated to fighting homelessness, expanding our own council housing, sharing our Exeter Plan for future housing developments in Exeter and fulfilling our Liveable Exeter aspirations.

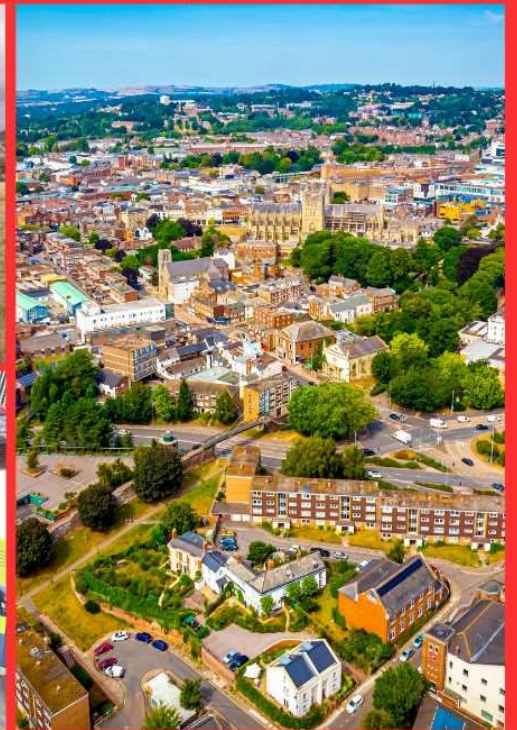


### **Exeter's Economy** (page 16)

Despite reduced government funding and the increasing cost of living, we are committed to maintaining a strong and resilient council. We will collaborate with InExeter and local businesses to revitalise the city centre. We will work to enhance our capacity to attract new businesses and continue to invest in our culture and tourism industries.



# Exeter's People



# Exeter's People



As leaders of Exeter City Council, we, the Labour administration, are dedicated to serving our community with integrity and compassion. Our vision for Exeter is one of progress, inclusivity, and sustainability, and we work tirelessly to ensure that every resident has the opportunity to thrive.

Our commitment to social justice extends to housing. We believe that everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. That's why we provide housing benefit schemes and support services for those on low incomes, working to prevent homelessness and ensure housing security for all.

Empowering our community is at the heart of what we do. Through grants and support for local community groups, we encourage grassroots initiatives that strengthen our bonds and foster a sense of belonging among residents.

We believe in transparency and accountability and seek to consult and listen to residents wherever possible and to adhere to the council's consultation charter.

The council's website and serves as a hub of information, providing residents with access to resources, updates and engaging with services. The news section provides up to date factual articles on the work of the Council and its partners. We welcome feedback and collaboration as we work together to build a brighter future for Exeter.

The council promotes health and wellbeing through initiatives such as Wellbeing Exeter, providing support to community activities and groups through its Live and Move project alongside its inclusive and affordable leisure service in addition outdoor sports and recreation facilities.

## Our specific commitments in the coming year we will be to:

- continue to provide ward grants for community groups and activities across the city.
- remain committed to continuing our Wellbeing Exeter program Despite facing the withdrawal of two-thirds of our funding from Devon County Council and the NHS.
- continue to provide high quality Leisure services across the city.
- begin the development of a discount card scheme to reduce the cost for Exeter Citizens to access our Leisure service.
- begin work on a new cultural strategy, bringing together our cultural venues, creative residents, city communities, businesses and night-time economy.
- develop the Heavitree pool project with the site expected to be fully refurbished in 2025.

## So how do we measure up against what we pledged to do last year?

**We said:** *We will continue to provide targeted support to individuals, local communities, and organisations.*

The Council has been helping low-income residents struggling with living costs. In the summer of 2023, we gave direct support to 1,759 households, totalling £312,700. We've also been using the remaining Economic Vulnerability Fund to offer immediate financial help to locals facing financial difficulties due to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Since April 2023, we've given nearly £30,000 to over 350 vulnerable households. However, the government announced they won't continue the Economic Vulnerability Fund after March 2024, posing a new challenge for many citizens and for us.

Over the past five years, the Exeter Community Grants program has given out 599 grants to community groups, totalling £882,979 in value.

**We said:** *We will launch the Exeter Community Lottery to support community groups and organisations.*

In July 2023, Exeter City Council introduced the Exeter Community Lottery to aid community projects and local charities. This lottery works by raising funds within the community for the community, empowering local causes to raise money in an enjoyable and efficient manner. Since its inception, it has gained popularity among local groups and their supporters. It's anticipated to raise over £50,000 for over 100

good causes, along with establishing a general grant fund for small grants. In a period of tightening budgets and growing community requirements, the Exeter Community Lottery provides a way for people to support the causes that matter most to them.

**We said:** *We will develop and launch an introductory 12-week wellbeing programme for residents to improve their health and wellbeing based on the success of our This Girl Can and NHS workforce programmes.*

The Live and Move wellbeing pilot programme was launched in February at Wonford and Riverside Leisure Centres with Wellbeing Exeter. The pilot programme is designed to support residents on low incomes and those furthest away from being active into a supported activities in the community or with our leisure service facilities.

**We said:** *We will continue to work with local residents of Wonford to develop plans for a new Community Wellbeing Hub.*

The plans for an extensive redesign and renovation of the Wonford Community Hub are moving forward smoothly. We've worked closely with members of the local community to shape these plans. Architectural designs have been created, and following consultations, we'll be submitting a planning permission application in the first half of 2024.

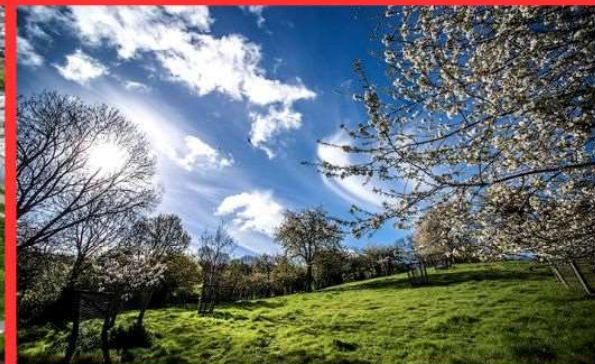
**We said:** *We will deliver a refurbishment of paddling pools in parks across the city.*

Throughout the year, the refurbishment of Exeter's water play areas in parks has been ongoing.

In May 2023, the Splash pad at St Thomas underwent refurbishment after a leak was found, leading to a temporary closure. The Council invested £38,500 in a new surface, revitalising the facility and ensuring its operation for the future.



# Exeter's Environment





# Exeter's Environment

As the administration leading Exeter City Council, Labour is steadfast in our commitment to combatting climate change and creating a greener, more sustainable city. Exeter boasts a rich population of approximately 179,000 trees, averaging 1.4 trees per person. The Council has 246 hectares of green space. In addition, the city's valley parks, managed by the Devon Wildlife Trust, account for a further 144 hectares offering vital wildlife havens. The City Council is dedicated to preserving and enhancing these and other green spaces. It recognises their significance for the environment, supporting the aspiration to become net zero carbon by 2030 and the well-being of residents of the city.

We have implemented a comprehensive strategy to reduce carbon emissions within the council, which included creating a solar farm to power the recycling centre and our fleet of electric vehicles including waste collection trucks. In addition to the solar farm the council has

a large PV capacity across more than a dozen other sites in the city. The Council is keen to work with partners and residents to explore the reduction of carbon emissions and other initiatives to help the city become net zero carbon by 2030.

Furthermore, our council has a programme to retrofit our council homes. By upgrading existing buildings, our aim is to decrease energy consumption, lower carbon emissions, and improve the quality of life for our residents.

Through these initiatives, Labour is leading Exeter towards a more sustainable future, where environmental stewardship and social responsibility contribute to a net zero carbon by 2030. We remain committed to ensuring that our city remains vibrant, resilient, and environmentally conscious for generations to come.



## Our specific commitments in the coming year we will be to:

- replace our ageing Materials Reclamation Facility with a modern facility to achieve higher recycling rates with corresponding reduced carbon emissions due to less waste being incinerated.
- retrofit a further 250 council homes this year
- progress Exeter's Harbour Revision Order submission to the Marine Management Organisation
- develop an Electric Vehicle Strategy, set to launch in 2025, which will outline plans for electric vehicle (EV) charging provision across Exeter

- work with the new city wide net zero manager to establish an Exeter net zero strategic group and an Exeter net zero community group

## So how do we measure up against what we pledged to do last year?

**We Said:** *We will deliver our Council's Net Zero Carbon Reduction Plan and establish the City Council's Net Zero Ambassadors to deliver the Carbon Reduction Action Plan.*

In 2023, the City Council received national recognition from an independent review by Climate Emergency UK. They ranked as the third best district council in the country for implementing measures to achieve net zero carbon emissions, surpassing benchmarks by a significant margin. Additionally, the City Council's emissions for the 2021/22 period totalled 36,631 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, marking a reduction of 2,293 tCO<sub>2</sub>e (6%) compared to the previous year.

Our council's Net Zero team and Ambassadors have been collaborating with City Council services that have the highest carbon emissions. Their goal is to help these services decrease their carbon output and achieve the targets set in the Carbon Reduction Plan. The team has provided Carbon Literacy training to 190 officers and councillors. Out of these, 85 individuals have been certified as carbon literate so far.

Three decarbonization plans have already been completed for the leisure estate, and the remaining sites are scheduled to be finished within this year. Additionally, a decarbonization plan has been commissioned for the Canal & Waterways service.

These plans will provide a roadmap outlining how each service, along with the buildings they operate in, can transition to being decarbonized.

**Waste & Recycling** - Exeter's collaboration between citizens and the council to decrease waste per household has been highly successful. We've managed to reduce the total amount of waste per person from 302 kg to 278 kg, which translates to a reduction of 24 kg per year. This accomplishment places Exeter at the forefront among the 8 Devon districts and in the top 10 councils nationwide.

**Residential food waste collection** has been extended to 21,300 domestic properties, resulting in the collection of 758 tonnes of food waste in the last six months. Additional collections will be rolled out when a new food bay is constructed. This initiative is significant as it helps avoid approximately 5,500 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. Instead of being incinerated, the food waste is sent for bio-digestion, contributing to environmental sustainability.

**The City Council's solar energy capacity** has grown to 3.4 megawatts (MW), thanks to the success of the new £3.5 million Water Lane Smart Grid and Storage project. This project has enhanced energy security while significantly reducing energy

consumption and costs. Situated on an inactive landfill site, the Water Lane project features 3,700 solar panels generating 1.2 MW of clean, renewable energy for Council operations. Additionally, 28 electric vehicle (EV) chargers support the Council's EV fleet, including three electric refuse vehicles. The project also includes a large battery facility capable of storing 2 MW, providing flexibility between peak energy generation and usage.

Income of over £419,000 has been generated from Feed-In Tariff, exporting surplus energy to the national grid, and selling energy to tenants. The Net Zero team is currently assessing the feasibility of expanding solar installations to more City Council buildings. Furthermore, battery storage has been added to other existing Council solar PV sites at The Matford Centre and John Lewis Car Park, along with a 120 kW solar PV array and battery store at the Riverside Leisure Centre.

Overall, the cost savings across all sites involved in the project are estimated to be £256,000 per year. In addition to reducing carbon emissions, the project has enhanced energy security and provided protection against price increases. These savings contribute to supporting Council services.

**We said:** *We will continue the reduction of glyphosate herbicide use across the city.*

The amount of glyphosate used by ECC has decreased by nearly 80% since 2017. By no longer spraying public highways,

the city's overall glyphosate usage has dropped by around 900 litres per year since the highway count began in 2020. While it's becoming increasingly challenging to make further reductions, teams are persistently seeking ways to minimise its usage in the future, if feasible, though fluctuations may still occur due to necessity.

**We said:** *We will launch the Green Accord to improve environmental performance, reducing carbon emissions and business costs for companies.*

Exeter University has conducted a review of the Green Accord in light of changes and developments in national policy and legislation since its establishment. The revised scheme will enable the City Council to enhance its supply chain and more effectively monitor Scope 3 carbon emissions. The new Green Accord is scheduled to be launched in Spring 2024.

**We said:** *We will introduce a Green Travel Plan for Exeter City Council staff.*

The Green Travel Plan was launched in February, although it had already begun in several areas. This includes a new partnership with Stagecoach, featuring a staff incentive scheme encouraging bus travel.

**We said:** *We will continue to protect and improve our valley parks and Exeter's Green Circle in partnership with Devon Wildlife Trust and other partners.*

Work to manage and enhance Exeter's tree coverage have been ongoing. Following an investment in a baseline canopy report, it has been revealed that Exeter's current tree canopy cover exceeds 20%, which is higher than the national average. In 2023, we planted 107 trees across the city's open spaces to further expand this coverage.

Furthermore, work has commenced at the Northbrook Arboretum, a project eagerly anticipated by many. Our partners at Devon Wildlife Trust have already established a community orchard featuring over 50 trees, including various local heritage varieties of apple, cherry, plum, and pear. Additionally, 3,800 native bulbs and 400 native hedgerow whips have been planted across the site, with plans to plant another 500 later this year.

Thanks to the cooperation and support of the community in planting the site, Northbrook is beginning to establish itself as one of the city's biodiversity-rich landscapes.

A piece of farmland in Exeter has been transformed into one of the county's first 'habitat banks', providing biodiversity benefits to local wildlife. With this initiative now established, other landowners are encouraged to create their own habitat banks.

Exeter City Council and Devon County Council collaborated to legally secure Exeter's inaugural habitat bank on private land, situated within the Duryard Valley Park. This groundbreaking initiative was developed in close partnership with the Devon-based company Biogains Ltd.



# Exeter's Homes



# Exeter's Homes

Labour-led Exeter City Council in the UK is actively engaged in providing homes through various routes. These include the planning process it delivers, negotiating new affordable houses and social housing as part of new developments and collaborating with housing associations to increase availability.

Alongside provision of its own council homes, it implements policies to ensure social housing availability for low-income individuals and families. With key partners in the voluntary sector and other agencies it carries out extensive work support and investment in homelessness prevention.

Through grants and loans arranged with key partners the council aims to make homes fit individual needs and to make improving sustainability in privately owned homes more affordable.

Additionally, our council is focusing on retrofitting its own existing housing stock and constructing new energy efficient council homes to enhance affordability and sustainability, further addressing housing shortages and ensuring suitable accommodation for Exeter residents.



## Our specific commitments in the coming year we will be to:

- continue to work with our own council tenant engagement programme, to maintain and enhance our 4,800 homes
- continue with our plans to build more social and affordable rent properties, with Whipton Gardens phase 1 completion next year, bringing us half-way towards our 500 new council home target.
- continue to find ways to prevent homelessness and to mitigate against the national rise in homelessness which affects our city.
- continue to develop the new Exeter Plan, highlighting city shaping, Net Zero ambition, biodiversity, connectivity and active travel to control development in our city.
- explore new ways of meeting the funding gap imposed on us, to tackle homelessness prevention and emergency housing need.

## So how do we measure up against what we pledged to do last year?

**We said:** *We will commence construction of 35 council homes (Phase 1) of The Gardens development in Whipton.*

Construction has begun on the 35 energy-efficient Passivhaus council homes at Whipton Gardens. These homes are expected to be completed by summer 2025. Constructed to high specifications of insulation and heat recovery ventilation, these Council homes will result in low utility bills for our tenants during this time of rising living costs and cuts carbon emissions in the city.

**We said:** *We will continue our programme to retrofit Exeter's Council homes.*

Exeter City council has retrofitted about 700 of its homes with another 250 expected within the next year. The council has secured around £4.1m to carry out more retrofitting energy efficiency measures in the homes. This initiative is again saving money for tenants, making homes more comfortable and cutting carbon emissions across Exeter.

**We said:** *We will continue to build more council housing for social and affordable rent.*

In 2022 we set a target to build 500 council homes, to date we have completed 75, with 56 more in full construction and with ground works completed for another 56.

It is also worth noting that to date this Labour led council has built 142 Passivhaus homes.

**We said:** *continue to develop the new Exeter Plan, highlighting city shaping, Net Zero ambition, biodiversity, connectivity and active travel to control development in our city.*

The Exeter Plan will be the blueprint that shapes the future development of our city and has absorbed input from extensive consultations across the city. It brings together the City Council's key objectives for a healthy active city, for more housing built on brownfield sites to protect greenspace and create liveable neighbourhoods, a net zero carbon city, thriving culture and heritage and a prosperous local economy.

The draft Exeter Plan Exeter City Council plan had further public consultation on the between October and January.

**We said:** *Despite the proposed extensive cuts in DCC funding of homeless services, we will ensure ECC sustains its own support and works with others to secure funding to reduce this impact.*

The city council committed to sustain its funding and after campaigns from local charities and our Labour Councillors Devon County Council have agreed to put their homelessness funding back in place for a limited period.

**We said:** *We will undertake a further public consultation on the final draft Exeter Plan.*

A comprehensive public consultation on the full draft of the Exeter Plan occurred between October 2023 and January 2024. This consultation period lasted for 12 weeks, twice as long as the statutory requirement. To encourage engagement, a total of 15 events, including a community workshop and meetings with stakeholders, were organised. The level of participation from residents in the consultation process was remarkable.

**We said:** *We will consult the community on the proposed changes to Article 4, areas which require properties to have planning permission to become a House of Multiple Occupancy, to maintain balanced communities.*

The proposals included in the consultation were shaped by thorough research and discussions with various stakeholders

including local councillors, HMO landlords and letting agents, the University of Exeter, student and resident representatives. A public consultation on the proposed changes to the Article 4 Direction was conducted between May and July 2023.

Following this consultation, the revised Article 4 Direction has been established by the Council and is scheduled to take effect in December 2024. Additionally, the accompanying supplementary planning document has been adopted.

Under the Article 4 Direction, streets require planning permission for converting regular houses into Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This is crucial to maintain balanced and thriving communities. Exeter has had an Article 4 area for HMOs for some time, and by extending the area, a larger part of the city will have its community balance safeguarded.





# Exeter's Economy



## Exeter's Economy

Our Labour-led Exeter City Council contributes to the city's economy through various initiatives such as infrastructure development, urban planning, and support for local businesses, skills and innovation and encouraging business and investment into the city.

The Council we lead is also one of Exeter's largest employers providing jobs and opportunities in many different professions. It actively engages collaborative working with other key city organisations, to benefit and enhance the city. It promotes and invests in business development such as the innovation hub, the Exeter Business Centre and in skilling up city's workforce including green technologies.

It works closely with partners including InExeter and Exeter Culture and Creative Arc partnership. It also drives other initiatives such as Visit Exeter to promote business and tourism, attract investment, and create employment including freelance opportunities.

### Specific commitments in the coming year we will be to:

- continue to run a well-led and stable council despite the ongoing reductions in funding and strains upon our workforce.
- work with InExeter, local businesses and new start-ups to rejuvenate the city centre, Fore Street, Sidwell Street and South Street investigating in new ways to enhance the areas and feed into the local economy.

The council owns and runs the RAMM, the Corn Exchange, the underground passages alongside nationally significant Leisure facilities such as the award-winning St Sidwells Point.



It also supports key cultural organisations in the city. These endeavours improve opportunities within the city and further promote tourism to improve the attraction of the city to business relocated investment.

The Council has played a significant role in attracting significant investment and new businesses such as John Lewis and the Met Office and continues to encourage new businesses and new business opportunities.

Additionally, the council works to enhance the quality of life for residents, making Exeter an attractive place to live, work, and visit, which further stimulates economic growth,

- address anti-social behaviour through partnership working benefitting local businesses, residents and visitors.
- We will develop a city-wide cultural strategy involving our cultural venues and creative industries practitioners and Exeter residents.
- increase the capacity to support and attract new businesses to our city.
- work with local businesses and ward Councillors outside the city centre to understand and enhance the wider city economy.

## So how do we measure up against what we pledged to do last year?

**We said:** *Over the next three years we have committed more than £6.78m to support the five National Portfolio Organisations delivering Exeter's cultural offer.*

In the past year, we've continued supporting our five 'National Portfolio Organisations'—Exeter UNESCO City of Literature, Exeter Northcott and Barnfield Theatres, the Phoenix Arts Centre, Exeter Library, and our own Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM)—alongside Arts Council England. This support helps Exeter maintain its cultural vibrancy and adds to what makes Exeter such an attractive city to live or work in.

Having such a strong cultural scene means there's a wide range of cultural experiences available for both residents and visitors to enjoy. Each of these organisations employs locals and involves local artists, performers, curators, and creative industry professionals, making Exeter a hub for creative activity with both cultural and economic benefits.

Through our Exeter Culture program, we've also supported local artists and community groups in brightening up shop fronts in Princesshay and the city, adding to the vibrant cultural landscape.

**We said:** *We will continue to look for funding opportunities and new partners to deliver reduced emissions in the Council and wherever possible across the city.*

Exeter has been granted £1.4 million through the Shared Prosperity Fund to support city-wide net zero efforts over three years, from April 2022 to March 2025. We've allocated funds to various initiatives, including Greening Your Business £117,182, Exeter Innovation Hub, £242,432, Retrofit Skills Centre: £181,992, Community Energy Advisors: £30,223

The Innovation Hub, located in Dix's Field, opened in January. It offers support for local start-up businesses, focusing on achieving carbon neutrality and implementing green initiatives.

**We said:** *Through our Liveable Exeter programme, we will continue to look strategically at local investment in business, housing and connectivity and we will continue to support a thriving city centre and the 'InExeter' local business body.*

The Liveable Exeter vision puts human beings at the centre of all development, understanding and valuing that for Exeter to change positively, it must meet the needs of people now, as well as in the future. Establishing linked communities,

sustainable travel and good quality homes and green spaces is all part of this vision, but ensuring the survival of a thriving business, retail and hospitality hub is also hugely important.

The Council continues to provide support to InExeter which is the business improvement district (BID) for Exeter city centre. It is a leading partner in supporting and developing Exeter's essential city centre, which is made up of over 750 businesses. Together they work to support businesses, providing business engagement and projects to keep the centre vibrant and attractive.