

# For a Community-Powered Council

## Exeter City Council Manifesto 2024

### 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.

Exeter Liberal Democrats want to reorder the City Council's priorities to ensure good quality basic services, investment in all our communities and decision-making that properly involves local people. A Lib Dem-led council will mean all councillors can deliver improvements for and with their local areas.

We will continue to work collaboratively on the council to hold the Labour-dominated council to account. Our positive and growing Progressive Group is now the official opposition, up from one councillor pre-2019.

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

# Empowering Exeter's Communities

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

A community-powered council is one that seeks out, involves and values individual's and community representative's voices in decision-making. After all, these are the people who best know their area and should have control over it. As a grassroots democratic party, Lib Dems seek to implement this community politics. We seek to establish active community groups and forums to bring people together to solve issues and, where possible, devolve power from central government to local government and 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. Working collaboratively, we are better holding the Labour-dominated City Council to account, which doesn't even receive a majority of votes. We improve governance, ensure better value for money and are 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 communities. We would set aside money from the Community Infrastructure Levy to rejuvenate Exeter's neighbourhoods, particularly the most deprived areas.



Exeter Lib Dems are passionate advocates for community politics.

## 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. This has caused wasteful spending against the interests of Exeter's people. 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.

# 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 Lib Dems believe in spending local taxes on services where people live: investing in all of Exeter, not just sinking them into reckless vanity projects sucking away from the communities that provide the funds. We need to rethink the way forward for the city centre by working openly with partners and no longer set-up semi-accountable private companies.

## Funding Basic Services

Labour's reckless spending of tens of millions of taxpayers' money on St Sidwell's Point and Exeter City Living has fuelled cuts to crucial basic services, including environmental health, community grants and Citizen's Advice Bureau support. The council needs to get the basics right first and foremost.

A Lib Dem-led council would ensure proper funding for front-line services 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.

In contrast, Lib Dem-led Teignbridge and East Devon lead the way by scrapping council tax for the poorest households.

The council must work more effectively with others to spend money more wisely. For example, our proposals to move City Council backroom functions to County Hall would improve efficiencies and cooperation.

## Properly-Resourced Scrutiny

Labour's programme of massive cuts 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.

## Funding for street cleansing

Labour's reckless spending means they cut street cleansing again this year, totalling >20% cut (£337k). This means one-in-four regular and dog poo bins removed, a reduction in litter pickers and just skeleton services.

Lib Dems are actively campaigning to get the budget reinstated as a top priority and reverse the decline.

To add insult to injury, Labour unwisely refuse to publicly consult. This contravenes their own Consultation Charter (2021). Are Labour running scared of public accountability?

Labour have also taken zero enforcement actions against fly tipping in the past decade. This is despite residents reporting 729 incidents just last year when Plymouth managed to make 475 fines. Where's our disincentive?

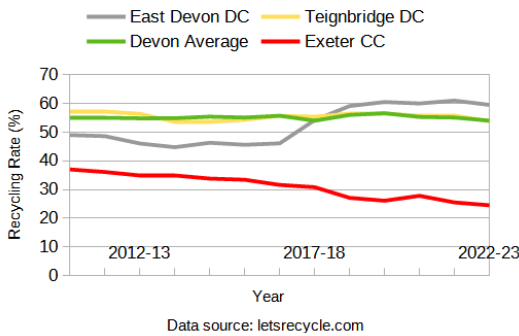


Local campaigners Will Aczel and Ayla by a removed bin site.

# 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.

Recycling Rates in Devon since 2010



## Action on Recycling

Our fully costed budget proposals to unlock food waste and glass recycling for the whole of Exeter were voted down by Labour en bloc without debate. Within two weeks, Labour caved to our pressure by making the investments in food waste collections.

The backdrop for this news is Exeter Labour's decade of decline where their recycling rate has slumped to an abysmal 24.5%, less than half the Devon average. Labour shamelessly prioritise wasteful vanity projects at the expense of delivering basic services.

Nine of top ten councils for recycling are Lib Dem-led. A vote for the Lib Dems is a vote for action on recycling and our environment.

## Better Transport Options

Lib Dems work with local residents, Devon County Council, the cycling community and other groups in developing a safe city-wide cycle network and planning framework that incorporates the transport hierarchy.

We further work with Devon County Council and transport providers for more reliable, frequent, accessible, informative and green services.



## Growing your own

Lib Dems believe allotments play a key role for a happy, healthy and sustainable city.



Our pressure has led Labour to soften their price hike for allotments and extend the consultation. The council should go further by cancelling the hike, properly consulting, and actually investing and engaging with tenants.

## Parks and Green Spaces

The Lib Dems encourage and support greater involvement with Devon Wildlife Trust, residents and community groups to ensure we all have a say in how our parks are maintained and improved. We are working to invest in and rejuvenate our green spaces, ensuring 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.



# 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 co-living block in Exeter to date. It still has many empty rooms.

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

We support larger-scale action to fit homes with insulation and renewable energy. This not only saves bills but the environment too.

## Transparency and Accountability

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

Decision-making must be representative and open to public scrutiny to reflect our interests and offer value for money. The wasted millions on Exeter City Living demonstrate what happens when decisions are made exclusively and vision trumps delivery.



Cllr Adrian Fullam in front of stalled Newman Road housing sites

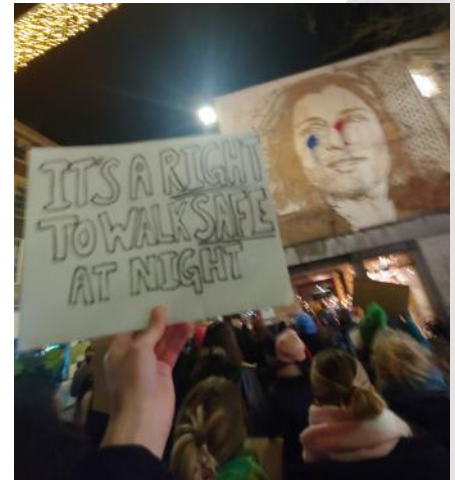
# Safer Streets for Exeter

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.