

Exeter: Our City Centre

Exeter City Centre Strategy

2026 - 2031



Exeter
City Council



Exeter: Our City Centre

Foreword

A Shared Endeavour

Exeter has a remarkable city centre. Its vitality and sustainability is central to the quality of life experienced by our residents both local and visiting from further afield.

'Exeter: Our City Centre' is Exeter City Council's Strategy, that will ensure a sustainable future for our High Street and city centre and sets out key themes for its delivery.

Exeter City Council will play a key role in convening our business and voluntary community to deliver the Strategy.

Continuing and building upon the success of the City Centre, depends on Exeter's partners and businesses with an interest and stake in the city, working together with a common purpose and belief in a better future.

We aim to capture our pride in the city centre, while increasing its range of experiences and offer to all of us.

A vision for our City Centre



A city centre buzzing with talent, where dynamic startups create ideas and energy.

Tired buildings and sites are re-used and revitalised with high quality architecture and spaces accommodating a vibrant mix of new uses.

The culture, history and commerce of Exeter is brought to life for everyone.

Streets and spaces feel alive morning, noon and night, with independent and national shops serving the needs of our residents, students and visitors.

From the High Street to the Quay, there are homes for families, professionals and students.

A stone's throw from the Roman Walls and Cathedral, musicians, artists and comedians make people move, think and laugh.

The City Centre excites and inspires, with culture, events, public art, unique shops, food, urban nature and leisure experiences.

People can hop onto a bus or taxi, easily and safely. Waterways and parks are connected by walkable, safe, green streets.

Buildings and spaces are adaptable making Exeter City Centre resilient to changes in our climate.

→ Collage of images of Exeter and quotes from engagement workshops, in answer to the question 'What makes Exeter special?'



"A busy but extremely walkable city"

"Creative activities within the city"

"Great sense of community"

"A vibrant mix of uses, such as leisure, cultural and retail"

"Nice places to go for coffee and meet friends"

"A wealth of heritage assets and the beautiful cobbles"

"The number of lovely green spaces"

"Young, vibrant and lively due to student population"



Our City Centre Today

Exeter City Centre is performing well. It ranks in the top 1% of retail destinations nationally and is the commercial and cultural heart of Devon. The High Street, Princesshay and Guildhall shopping centres, Queen Street, Magdalen Road and the Quay are full of life, with a vibrant mix of uses. There is an emergence of new homegrown enterprise.



The city centre is home to a wealth of existing cultural and historic assets that give the area a distinct flavour, it has more green spaces and trees than any other city in the UK [University of Sheffield report 2022]. The city centre has the ingredients to offer a good quality of life for its residents, businesses, students and visitors.

Exeter will build on this success and make sure that it can deliver on its potential for the people that live, work, study and visit here. Strengthening the city centre's commercial competitiveness and continued investment is key to our goal for a thriving and sustainable local economy.

There has been a shift to a preference for places that have a good diversity of a live-work-play offer, so future activity will maximise the 'experiential' value of the city centre; ensuring that it provides an attractive and competitive offer for residents, shoppers and tourists.

This means prioritising changes that ensure the wellbeing and prosperity of communities alongside attracting new businesses, with a focus on public and green space improvements, safety, jobs, housing, leisure, culture, nature, sustainability and connectivity.

Improving climate resilience in the city centre is essential to protect people, nature, infrastructure, and the local economy from increasing climate risks such as heatwaves, flooding, and extreme weather. This requires a coordinated approach across government, infrastructure, and community engagement.

Exeter Christmas Market



The Bounds of Our City Centre

The map opposite shows the city centre area. This captures everything within a 10-minute walk of Exeter Cathedral and extends west to include the important arrival gateway of Exeter St David's Station. The city centre encompasses a remarkable diversity of qualities including:



Green Spaces and River

Wonderful, much valued green spaces such as Northernhay Gardens, Rougemont Gardens, Southernhay, Cathedral Green and Belmont Park, together with Devon's primary river at its heart, the River Exe.

Heritage

A rich heritage seen in the many valuable historic buildings. Particularly celebrated are the 2000-year-old Roman Wall, which bounds the historic core, and the magnificent Cathedral, at the centre. The Historic Guildhall, Castle and St Martin's Lane and church, are architectural jewels.

Shopping

Princesshay and the Guildhall Shopping Centres, as well as the High Street and the independent retail offer of Fore Street, South Street, Magdalen Road, Sidwell Street, Gandy Street and the Quay offer a range of retail and hospitality experience.

Education

Exeter College and the University of Exeter bring life to the city centre with approximately 39,000 students using the city centre during term time.

Themed Quarters

Distinct themed quarters, such as the West, Castle, Cathedral and Grecian Quarters. Each has its own individual identity and offer unique experiences.

Arriving by public transport

Three train stations, Exeter St David's, Exeter Central and Exeter St Thomas, and the new Bus Station provide excellent connectivity.



The Strategy

This City Centre Strategy establishes common goals for the city centre and is intended to be used to help partners work together with a sense of shared purpose and commitment. By aligning the energy and activities of Exeter City Council, our communities, businesses and stakeholders towards a strong shared purpose, Exeter will continue to offer one of the best city centres in the UK and be recognised internationally for its heritage and cultural assets. This document consolidates planned activity and drives delivery.



The Exeter Vision 2040, the 'Liveable Exeter' Exeter Plan, the Corporate Plan and the new Exeter Culture Strategy frame this Strategy. It contains the guiding principles, priorities and outcomes for the Council, city partners and businesses to act together in partnership, bring about the change and guide investment decisions.

This Strategy for Exeter's city centre outlines key priorities under six themes. These reflect the views of those who took part in the stakeholder workshops and on-line consultation:

- 1. Appearance and cleanliness**
- 2. Safety, accessibility and wellbeing**
- 3. Vibrant daytime and night-time economy**
- 4. Destination offer**
- 5. City centre living**
- 6. Connectivity of the city centre**

To provide a basis for delivery, the City Centre Strategy sets out key actions to be achieved under each theme and measures of success.

An Action Tracker is being worked on and will eventually accompany the Strategy document, which sets out the detail of how each priority will be delivered, who is responsible and how progress will be monitored. The Action Tracker is a 'live' document and will be regularly reviewed and kept up to date. An accompanying Technical document provides an appraisal of the city centre to inform this document.

The overall ownership of the City Centre Strategy sits with Exeter City Council. However, delivery will lie with a range of different organisations who share common objectives.

The City Centre Strategy will be an important tool to foster collaboration between Exeter City Council, our partners and our business community to ensure activities are aligned. It will be reviewed and updated in response to changing circumstances.



Bedford Street



The city centre's green infrastructure, including parks, gardens and trees, will form an important part of the city's offer, serving a dual purpose of making the city centre more attractive and improving climate resilience.

Exeter Castle

Theme One - Appearance & Cleanliness

First impressions and lasting memories of the city will be improved through maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of the city. The quality of the city centre environment will be raised, fostering local pride and attracting investment from business.

The city centre's parks, gardens and trees, will form an important part of the city's offer, serving a triple purpose of making the city centre more attractive, benefiting nature and improving climate resilience.



Priority actions:

Ensure the city centre's public spaces create an attractive green city centre environment.

Find better ways to keep the city centre clean and tidy seven days a week.

Make space for nature within existing spaces and new developments.

Introduce vibrant city dressing to enliven streets, historic and cultural buildings.

Raise pride in the city centre, leveraging effort from residents and businesses.

Measures of success:

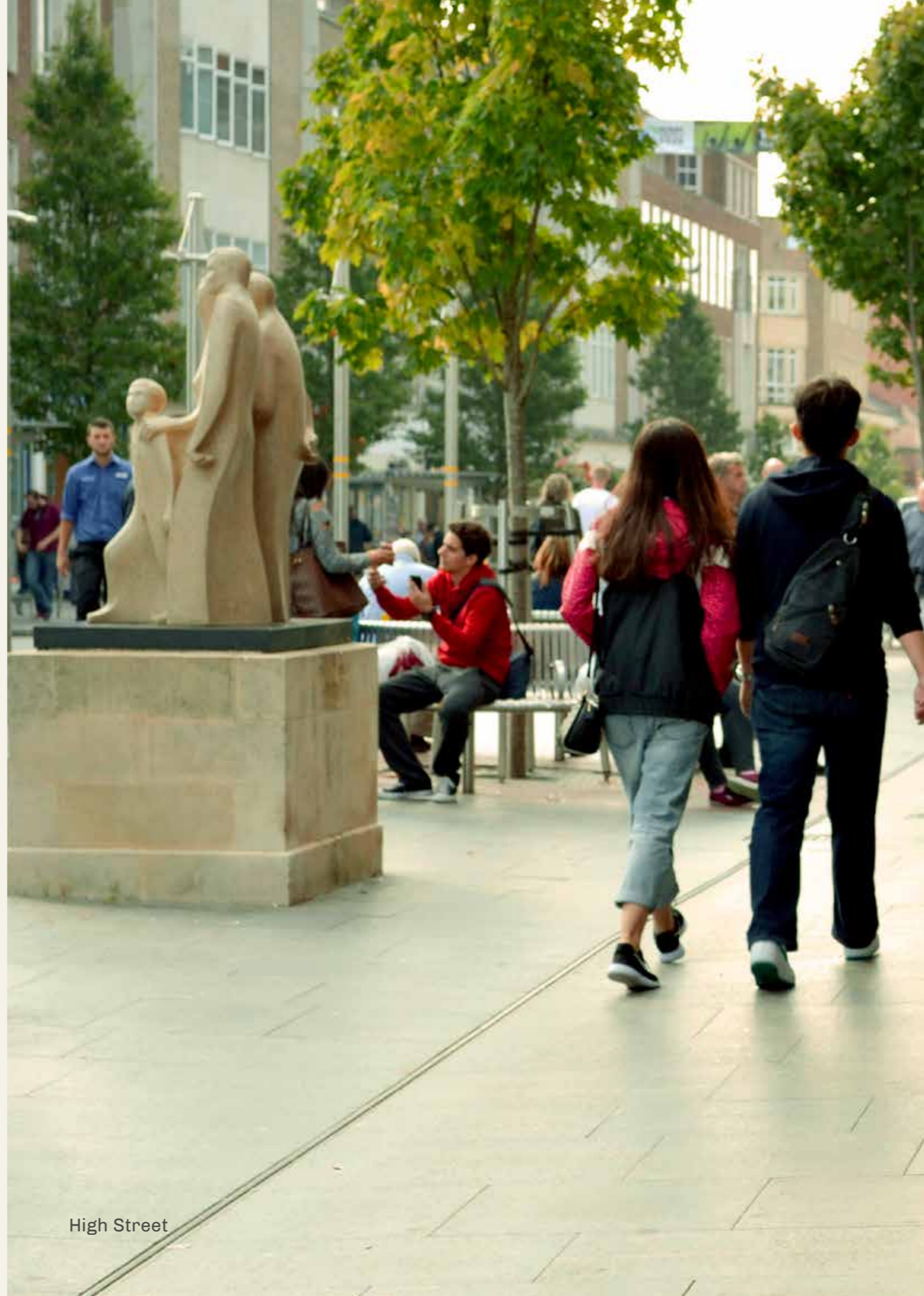
Achieve and maintain Nature Towns and Cities accreditation (Foundation).

Improvement in street cleansing to provide effective removal of litter.

Increase in the level of greenery within the city centre (planters and low level greenery).

Two city dressing campaigns per year.

Volunteer programme developed.



High Street



Inclusivity is enhanced through the diverse, multi-use offering of the city centre that caters to a wider range of needs of its existing and future population.

Theme Two - Safety, Accessibility & Wellbeing

The city centre will be an inclusive, welcoming environment that is safe to be in, by day and night. Anti-social behaviour will be addressed positively and with compassion, ensuring people feel safe and businesses thrive. Inclusivity will be enhanced through the diverse, multi-use offering of the city centre that caters to a wider range of needs of its existing and future population.

Improved parks and public spaces providing infrastructure for disabled and older people. The city centre will feel safer for residents, businesses and visitors because the designers, services and community will be working together to make improvements.



Priority actions:

Reduce city-centre anti-social behaviour by continuing to work in partnership with police and support agencies on preventative strategies.

Safer Exeter, the Community Safety Partnership, addresses city centre safety and social cohesion for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Improve lighting and CCTV within the city centre.

Ensure city centre parks and open spaces are safe spaces and accessible for all.

The city centre is accessible to those with limited mobility.

Measures of success:

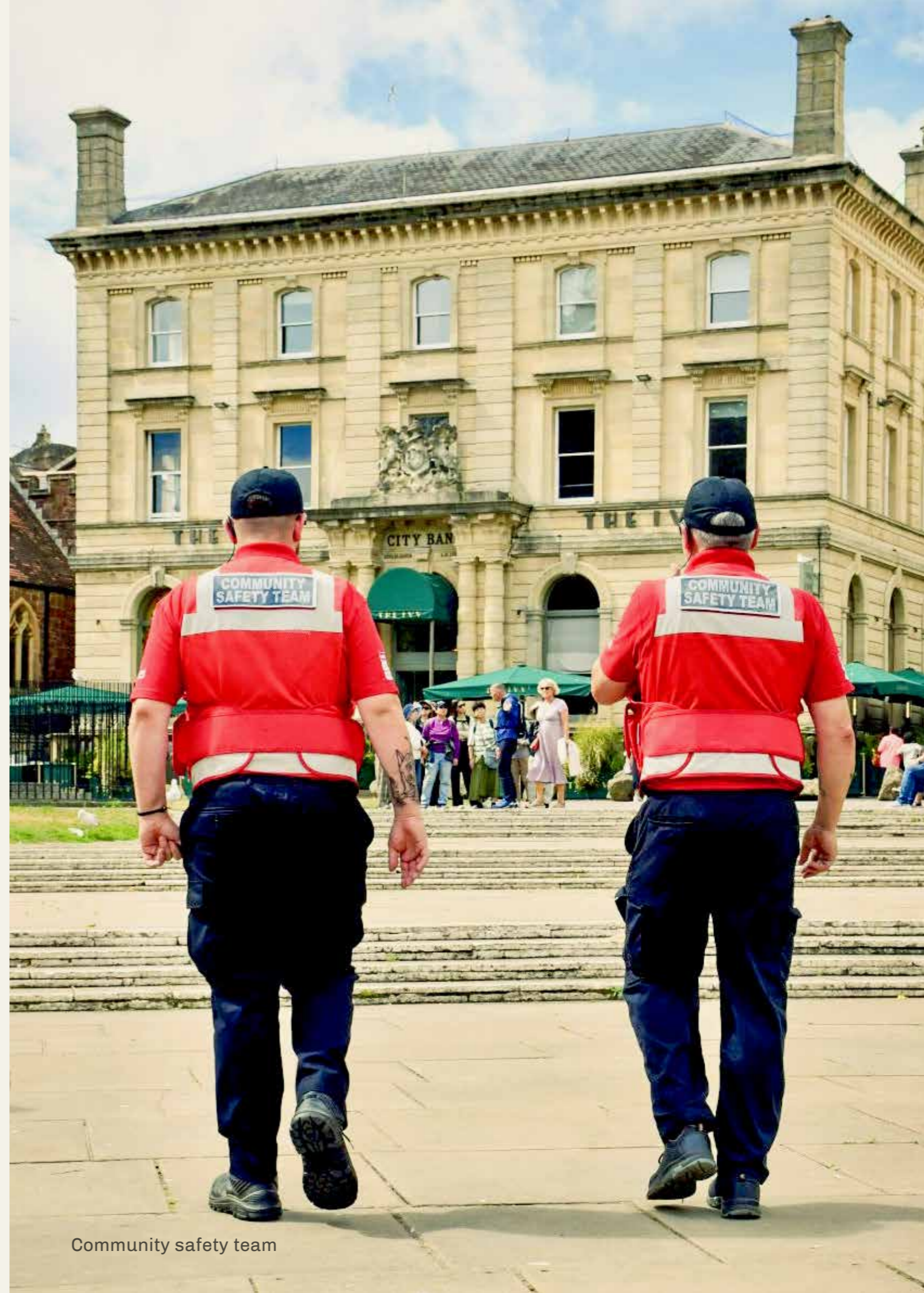
Reductions in Anti-Social Behaviour incidents in the city centre.

A new Safety Charter and SWaN Charter launched.

A well lit City Centre.

Reductions in Anti-Social Behaviour incidents within City Centre parks with improved accessibility.

Review Clear Street Charter to provide an accessible and improved pedestrian environment within the city centre.



Community safety team



Ensuring the continued vitality of our city centre will require a wider variety of uses, with cultural activities being increasingly important.

Theme Three - Daytime & Night-Time Economy

The city centre will be vibrant and resilient, characterised by the diversity of businesses, clustered along key streets. Vacant shops will be brought back into use, the evening economy offer will be more varied, making the city centre feel animated during both the day and night-time. The city will be a magnet for businesses attracting and retaining entrepreneurs, students and young people, fostering innovation and entrepreneurialism.



Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Reduce vacancy rates in the city centre by repurposing vacant shops for meanwhile uses and developing the creative industries.

The city centre vacancy rate continues to remain less than the national average.

Make the city centre an attractive and viable proposition for start-ups, independent and micro-businesses.

Number of businesses registered within the city centre (InExeter boundary).

Create the conditions for people to stay longer within the city centre so it is vibrant for all during the day and night

Achieve and maintain Purple Flag status.

Work collaboratively across the city centre to support and protect our retail and hospitality.

Number of retail and hospitality businesses registered within the city centre (InExeter boundary).

Develop a varied and diverse offer to attract residents from outside of the city.

Visits from Exeter's catchment grows.

Focus on ways to celebrate and encourage performing arts across the city centre.

Increased promotion of performing arts and events across Exeter.





The city is recognised nationally and globally as a place that successfully combines its natural and built environment and heritage assets with the international strengths of its key institutions.

Theme Four - Destination Offer

The city's quarters will define a range of cultural and heritage activities which are well publicised through city branding. A new network will connect renovated historic assets and improved public realm.



Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Develop a new Cultural Strategy.

Cultural offer and experience in Exeter improves.

Build on our UNESCO City of Literature status by promoting heritage, public art, performance, and festivals.

Our cultural offer is making a positive contribution to our economy and wellbeing.

Build on the Visit Exeter branding and celebrate our culture heritage and nature offer, and to fully utilise the opportunities for tourism arising from this.

The number of day and overnight visitors to Exeter increases.

Improve the quality and accessibility of public art.

New public art has an open, inclusive and transparent commissioning.

Encourage and support events and festivals throughout the year.

A successful year-round programme of events and festivals.

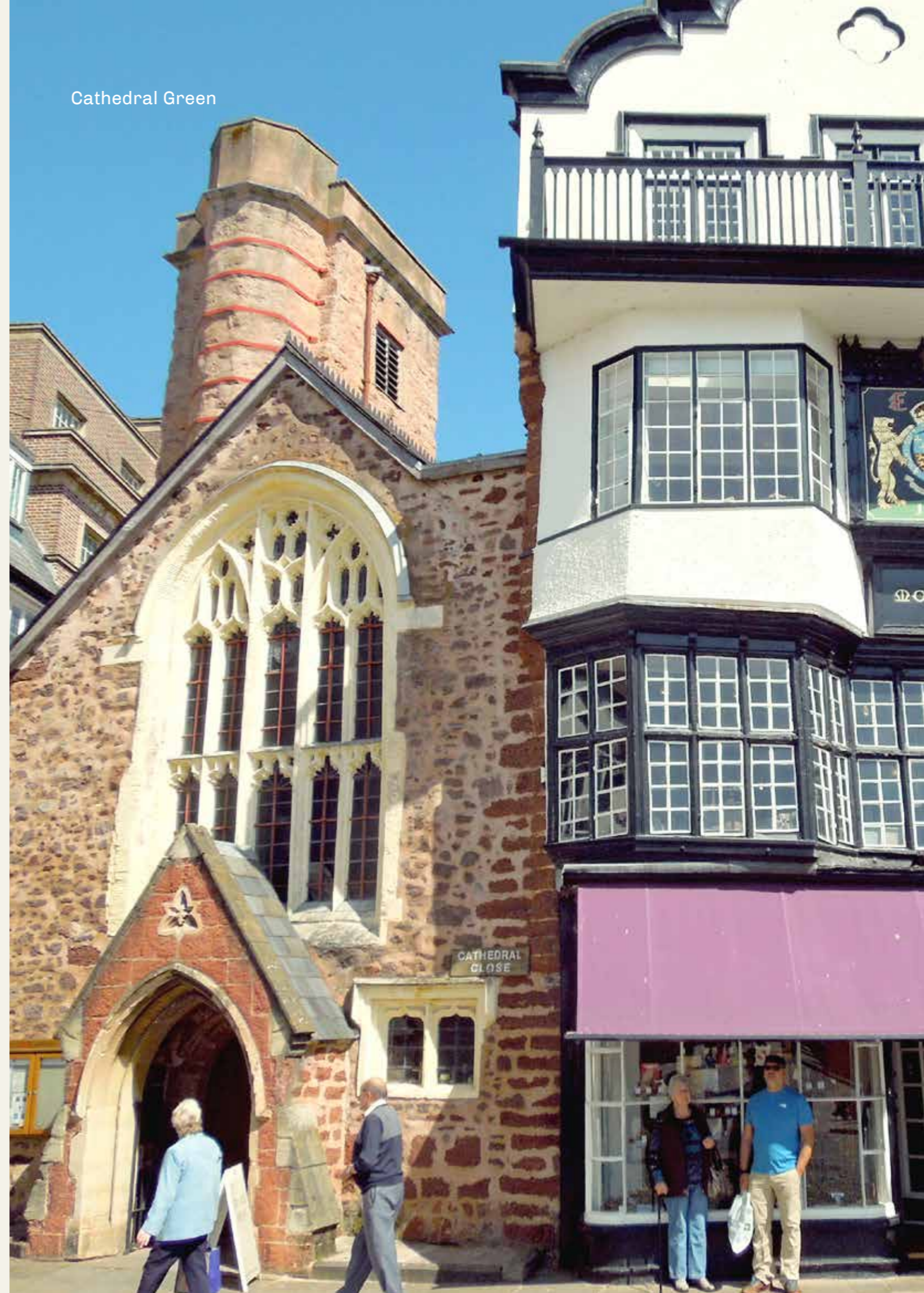
Work with city partners to attract more business events and conferences to Exeter.

An increase in the number of business events held in Exeter.

Improve signage and wayfinding with clear easily understandable signs, maps and digital tools.

Signage and wayfinding covers the city centre and is accessible and links back to digital tools.

Cathedral Green





Innovative solutions are incorporated within buildings, transport provision, energy and other infrastructure to achieve the ambitions for a net-zero city.

Theme Five - City Centre Living

The city will be recognised nationally and globally as a liveable city that puts well-being centre stage. Exeter will meet the needs of all our residents; there will be a greater choice of housing options and improved affordability. Major development sites will deliver housing and a diversity of uses.

The Liveable Exeter Principles will guide delivery of large-scale brownfield developments and infrastructure projects to ensure that changes in the built and natural environment deliver the outcomes of the Exeter Vision 2040. The seven principles are: Memorable Places, Outstanding Quality, Welcoming Neighbourhoods, Liveable Buildings, Connected Culture, Spaces for People and Wildlife and Active Streets.

City centre residents will be more engaged with culture, health, nature and shopping as this will be made more accessible and available using digital technology, signage and mapping.



Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Through Liveable Exeter, work with developers in bringing forward city centre regeneration sites.

Number of new homes built within the city centre each year.

Unlock and deliver other major city centre development opportunities.

Number of new buildings delivered within the City Centre.

Collaborate with statutory, voluntary and community partners to deliver a joined-up approach to reducing homelessness in the city centre.

Lead collaborative efforts with partners to achieve measurable reductions in homelessness in the city centre.

Incorporate energy efficiency measures into existing and new buildings.

Increase in Energy Performance Certificate rating of City Centre buildings.

Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Encourage property owners and developers to create living spaces above city centre retail and mixed-use ground floors.

Number of new homes above retail.

Incorporate innovative solutions within buildings, transport provision, energy and other infrastructure to achieve the ambitions for a net-zero city.

New build within the city centre is built to be district heat network ready.



Exeter is easy and pleasurable to move around. The city is capitalising on its compactness with attractive pedestrian and cycle connections between key areas of activity and beautiful public spaces and parks.

Theme Six - Connectivity of the City Centre

Exeter will be easy and pleasurable to move around. The city will capitalise on its compactness with attractive pedestrian and cycle connections between our green and blue spaces, key city centre locations, public transport hubs and where residents live and work.

Improvements to the network for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport will make these choices more attractive, reducing the level of car trips into the city, improving air quality, health and wellbeing, as well as contributing to net zero ambitions.



Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Make the movement for people within the city centre safer.

A reduction in the number of road traffic accidents within the city centre.

Improve connectivity into the city from the rural hinterland for shoppers, students, commuters and visitors enjoying the cultural offer with late night buses.

Late night bus service into our rural communities is made permanent.

Understand the needs for those with limited mobility such as people who are disabled and older.

An increase in public transport usage for those with limited mobility.

Establish partnerships to improve the bus and train network within and into Exeter, so that its accessible and affordable for our residents, business community and students

Increase in the number of people who travel into Exeter by bus and train.

Provide city centre car and cycle parking, serving the needs of residents, visitors, commuters and our business community.

City Centre car parking serves the need of the city centre economy.



Exeter Bus Station

Priority actions:

Measures of success:

Improve connectivity between the city centre to the Quay and Exeter St David's train station.

Delivery of a comprehensive and joined up network of dedicated, traffic-free cycle and wheeling routes into and within the city centre that are connected to the wider network.

Improve the gateways to the city centre, including Exeter Central, Exeter St David's Station and Exeter St Thomas train stations.

Increase in the number of passengers through city centre train stations.

What Happens Next?

Exeter City Council will work with InExeter, Devon County Council, the Exeter Partnership, Safer Exeter, as well as other key city stakeholders and partners to deliver the Exeter City Centre Strategy.



Guildhall Shopping Centre

Measuring Success

The Business Growth and Economy Group of the Exeter Partnership will become the leadership and advocacy body for the City Centre, to share best practice, expertise and to forge partnerships to deliver the Exeter City Centre Strategy. One of its tasks will be to develop key themes, principles, and high-level actions into a detailed action tracker, which will be jointly owned by key city centre stakeholders and partners.

Measurements of success will be critical for ensuring the Themes and Priority Actions are delivered and stay on track. Methodologies for monitoring and evaluating progress and success against each priority action will be tailored for each Priority Action, depending on the availability of data sources.



Princesshay Shopping Centre



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