

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 28 April 2026

Report of: Strategic Director Place

Title: Exeter City Centre Strategy 2026 – 2031 Public Consultation

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The draft City Centre Strategy 2026 - 2031, entitled 'Exeter: Our City Centre' is in its final stages of development, with the final stage seeking feedback from residents and the business community. This report is seeking authorisation from Executive to go out to public consultation on the draft Exeter City Centre Strategy.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Executive approves the publication of the draft City Centre Strategy 2026 – 2031 for public consultation from 18 May 2026 for six weeks.

2.2 That Executive gives delegated authority to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Relevant Portfolio Holder to change the consultation date if required.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 To gain feedback from residents and the business community on prioritising themes within the City Centre Strategy.

3.2 Approval to go out to public consultation will enable an evidence-led development of a long-term strategy through engagement and partnership working.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation. Officer resources have been identified to lead on and deliver the consultation.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no additional financial implications for Council to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations. The public consultation will be carried out in accordance with the council's Consultation Charter.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.

For enquiries please contact: democratic.services@exeter.gov.uk

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 In recommending this proposal, potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act. An Equality Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention. A further EQIA will be completed for the final version of the City Centre Strategy is completed.

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 As a result of this report and its recommendation, there are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

10. Background and development of the Strategy:

10.1 Exeter City Council commissioned LDA Design to assist with the development of the new City Centre Strategy.

10.2 To gain insight from the business community and elected members on issues and opportunities for Exeter's city centre, four engagement workshops were held with the business community July 2024 at Positive Lights and a joint workshop with City Council and relevant Devon County Council Ward Councillors in November 2024. The following questions were asked of both groups:

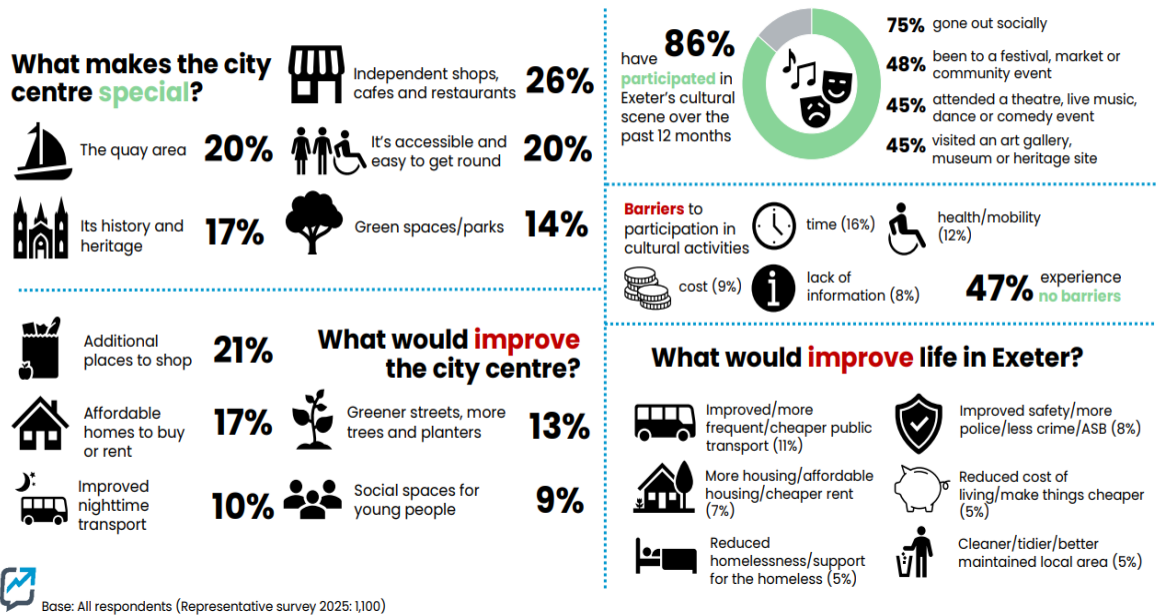
- 1) What are the key issues and challenges the city centre faces?
- 2) What makes the city centre a special place?
- 3) Which are the priority development sites within the city centre?
- 4) What uses or activities are missing from the City Centre?
- 5) How can city centre streets and spaces be improved?
- 6) Which city businesses and partners should be involved with the delivery of the Action Plan?
- 7) From what has been discussed do far, how can it be paid for?

10.3 As part of the 2025 Exeter residents survey, several questions, like the questions asked above, were included in the survey to gain viewpoints on resident's use of the City Centre, as well as culture. 1,100 telephone interviews were completed during July and August 2025. An online survey was also available for residents and business to complete at the same time; 782 responses were received. The infographic below, provides some of the highlights from the 2025 residents survey.

10.4 The results of the City Centre, as well as the Culture questions, have been analysed and incorporated into the draft Strategy. The results of the resident survey have been uploaded onto the City Council website, which can be viewed:

<https://exeter.gov.uk/media/cn0qfoiy/exeter-resident-survey-2025-report.pdf>

Exeter city centre and cultural scene



10.5 As part of the research stage, LDA undertook extensive desktop research on regional and national strategies that play a role in management and development of City Centre's, as well as analysing locally available data sets. This work helped to develop the City Centre Strategy.

10.6 The title of the document is, 'Exeter: Our City Centre'. The City Centre is defined as an area within a 10-minute walk from Exeter Cathedral. It includes the arrival gateways of Exeter Central, Exeter St David's and St Thomas Train Stations, as well as the valuable green spaces of Belmont Park and Bury Meadow Park, and the historic Quay and Piazza Terracina.

10.7 To provide a basis for delivery of the final Strategy document, an Action Tracker is being developed. The Action Tracker will list each Theme and Priority Action, which organisation supports delivery, potential funding streams, measures of success and how progress will be monitored. The Action Tracker will be a 'live' document and will be regularly reviewed and updated, as and when projects evolve and are completed. Themes will be prioritised from the results of the public consultation.

10.8 The ownership of the City Centre Strategy sits with Exeter City Council. However, delivery will lie with a range of different partners and stakeholders who share common objectives. The City Centre Strategy will be an important tool to foster collaboration to ensure activities can be aligned. The Strategy is about prioritising interventions that ensure the wellbeing and prosperity of communities. As well as attracting new businesses to the City Centre, the strategy supports public space improvements, the feeling of safety, jobs, housing, leisure, culture, tourism and infrastructure.

10.9 The City Centre Strategy includes the following vision statement:

Exeter: Our City Centre

For enquiries please contact: democratic.services@exeter.gov.uk

“A city centre buzzing with talent, where dynamic startups create ideas and energy, sometimes re-using empty buildings.

Tired buildings and sites are 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”.

10.10 Exeter: Our City Centre is structured under six themes, which have been drawn from the business and member engagement, the results of the residents' survey and the evidence base:

- **Appearance and 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.
- **Safety, Accessibility and 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.
- **Vibrant Daytime and 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.
- **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.
- **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;

For enquiries please contact: democratic.services@exeter.gov.uk

there will be a greater choice of housing options and improved affordability. Major development sites will deliver housing and a diversity of uses.

- **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.

10.11 Next steps include the Head of Service City Centre & Net Zero working with the Arts & Events Lead and the Consultation and Engagement Manager in developing the online consultation for both the City Centre Strategy, and the Cultural Strategy, which is due to go live week commencing 18 May 2026 for 6 weeks.

10.12 The final City Centre Strategy will be reported back to Executive and Council late Summer for adoption, with implementation starting early Autumn.

10.13 Whilst the City Council owns the City Centre Strategy, delivery will be across organisations and institutions, including but not limited to: the City Council, Devon County Council, InExeter, Devon and Cornwall Police, the University of Exeter, Exeter College, public transport providers; as well as our voluntary, community and social enterprise community.

10.14 The Exeter Partnership will play its role in supporting and delivering the City Centre Vision and Strategy. Through the Exeter Partnership, a Business, Economy and Growth Group has been established. Whilst the focus of the group is on the local economy, one area of activity is to support the delivery of the City Centre Strategy.

10.15 A new officer led City Centre Task and Finish Group has been established. This group will play an important role in the delivery of the Action Tracker, ensuring key actions and initiatives align with Service Plans.

11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

11.1 The City Centre Strategy works towards delivering the Local Economy priority. This priority has a focus on a thriving economy, attracting new businesses, our business community, culture, tourism, regeneration and more specifically; the development of a new City Centre Strategy.

11.2 The intended outcomes of this priority will be as a direct result of the City Centre Vision and Strategy:

- A thriving, diverse and resilient city which can adapt to changing conditions.
- An increase in independent shops and a low level of empty shops.
- A vibrant cultural and tourism offer.
- A safe and thriving night-time economy.

11.3 A new City Centre Strategy for Exeter supports the three other Corporate Plan priorities for the **People, Homes and Sustainable Environment**. To achieve this the Council's strategic efforts will focus on partnership work to deliver a City Centre Strategy to support regeneration and investment across the city.

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

12.1 There is the risk that residents do not engage with and respond to the consultation. The Head of City Centre & Net Zero is engaging with the communications team, to ensure that messages are included in City Council media channels, so that residents and the business community comment on the document.

12.2 A second risk is failure to act on engagement outcomes. This can be mitigated by carefully considering responses, ensuring robust monitoring, and maintaining transparent communication with communities.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 There is the option of not consulting on the draft City Centre Strategy; this would be counter to the Council's Consultation Charter.

Strategic Director Place, Ian Collinson

Author: Head of City Centre & Net Zero

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

List of Appendices:

- EQIA