



Historic England



# Historic Places Panel Review Paper

Exeter, September 2024

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# 1 Executive Summary

Exeter is a city of growth, and over the next 20 years will benefit from an unprecedented expansion of 14,000 new homes. This is a huge opportunity for the city to create a revitalised, sustainable, and vibrant metropolis of south-west England that embraces its people, its history, and its future.

Exeter City Council has an ambitious vision and programme for this urban renewal ably set out in its Exeter Vision 2040 and the Liveable Exeter Placemaking Charter. However, meeting ambitious targets such as becoming a carbon-neutral city while delivering a large volume of high-quality housing will only be attainable if the necessary resources and strategies are adopted and used to the best advantage. This is a critical point in Exeter's vision.

The Historic Places Panel was invited to Exeter at this pivotal moment to provide its recommendations on what it believes is needed for Exeter City Council to deliver an exceptional transformation of the city. Our recommendations are focussed on providing that springboard for delivery, and include:

- **Ensuring the right skills, capacity, and baseline studies are available to enable the successful delivery of its vision.** An **organisational audit** would ensure the council has the necessary resourcing and expertise; more **detailed neighbourhood characterisation studies** would provide a fuller understanding of community types; a **Strategic Regeneration Framework** would provide a city-wide place-making strategy that takes in all the opportunities of its brownfield sites; a **strategic transportation study** would better understand the city's future transports needs and actively help to reduce car parking in the city centre; and an **updated green infrastructure study** would clarify and support the delivery of the city's carbon neutral targets.
- **Continuous and meaningful community engagement.** Exeter City Council needs to ensure that its people are at the heart of its aspirations. The creation of an Urban Room, a neutral space for discourse and debate about the city's future, would make a strong statement that the council is listening to and involving its citizens.
- **Engaging with the community to identify and celebrate Exeter's story.** By focusing on people and place the city would be able to create a shared narrative that promotes its historical importance and heritage assets more widely and instils pride in Exeter. This narrative could help promote the city's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature and inspire a creative approach to knit the separate sections of the city walls together.

- **Connecting the city to wider audiences.** Exeter is a magnet for employment across a wide area; it is a busy college and university city with a diverse student population; it has a rich hinterland which it could draw more from; and has a steady flow of visitors from home and abroad. Bold plans to enhance these connections sustainably would enhance Exeter's offer. One example could be to encourage the expansion and enhancement of the farmers' market in partnership with InExeter BID and local farming and fishing communities.
- **Creating new and better connections.** Making bold adjustments to the inner bypass to reconnect the historic link between the walled city with the River Exe must be a major priority and is crucial to the successful delivery of the council's vision for Exeter.

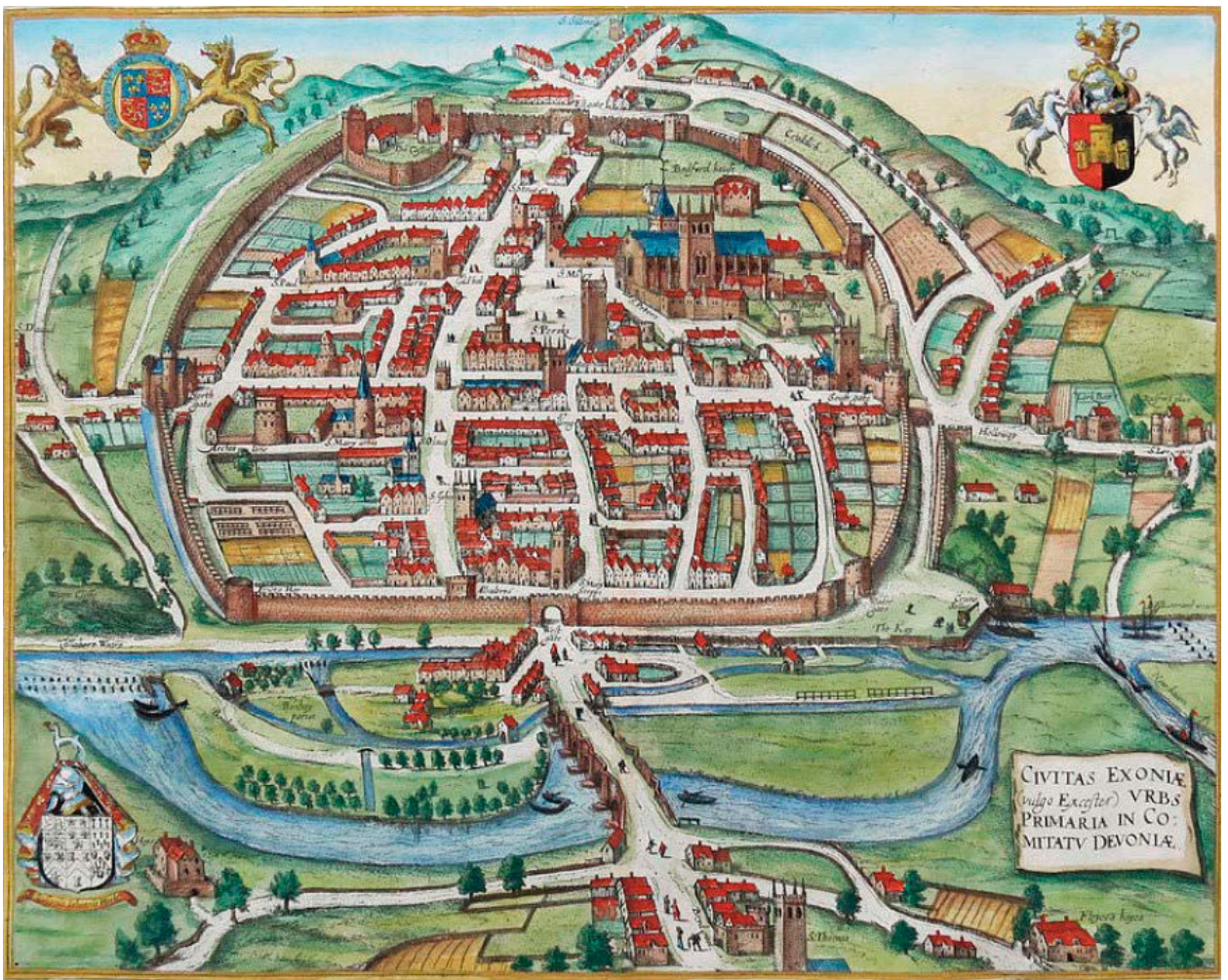
Exeter City Council has a history of success, as its work at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and with partners such as InExeter BID and Exeter University has shown. The Historic Places Panel believe that by putting in place these key recommendations, Exeter will continue to grow and thrive as a sustainable and vibrant city that will benefit all its citizens. The Panel has Great Exe-pectations!



**Image 1:** Historic Places Panel outside Exeter Custom House. [© Historic England]

## 2 Introduction to Exeter

- 2.1 Exeter is a Cathedral City with a rich history. Located on a ridge with a steep hill down to the navigable River Exe, Exeter was established as an important, defensible, trading settlement in the Roman period. The circuit of city walls that exist today follow the line of the fort wall, and the sites of the Roman basilica and forum are close to the cathedral. The city walls were rebuilt by Alfred the Great and strengthened by King Athelstan in 928. The cathedral was founded in 1050, although not completed until around 1400, and Rougemont Castle was built in response to a rebellion against William the Conqueror in 1068.
- 2.2 Medieval Exeter grew rich on the wool trade and became the most important city of the South West. The Exeter Ship Canal was begun in the 1560s and is one of the oldest artificial waterways in the United Kingdom; it has the first “pound locks” to be built in Britain.

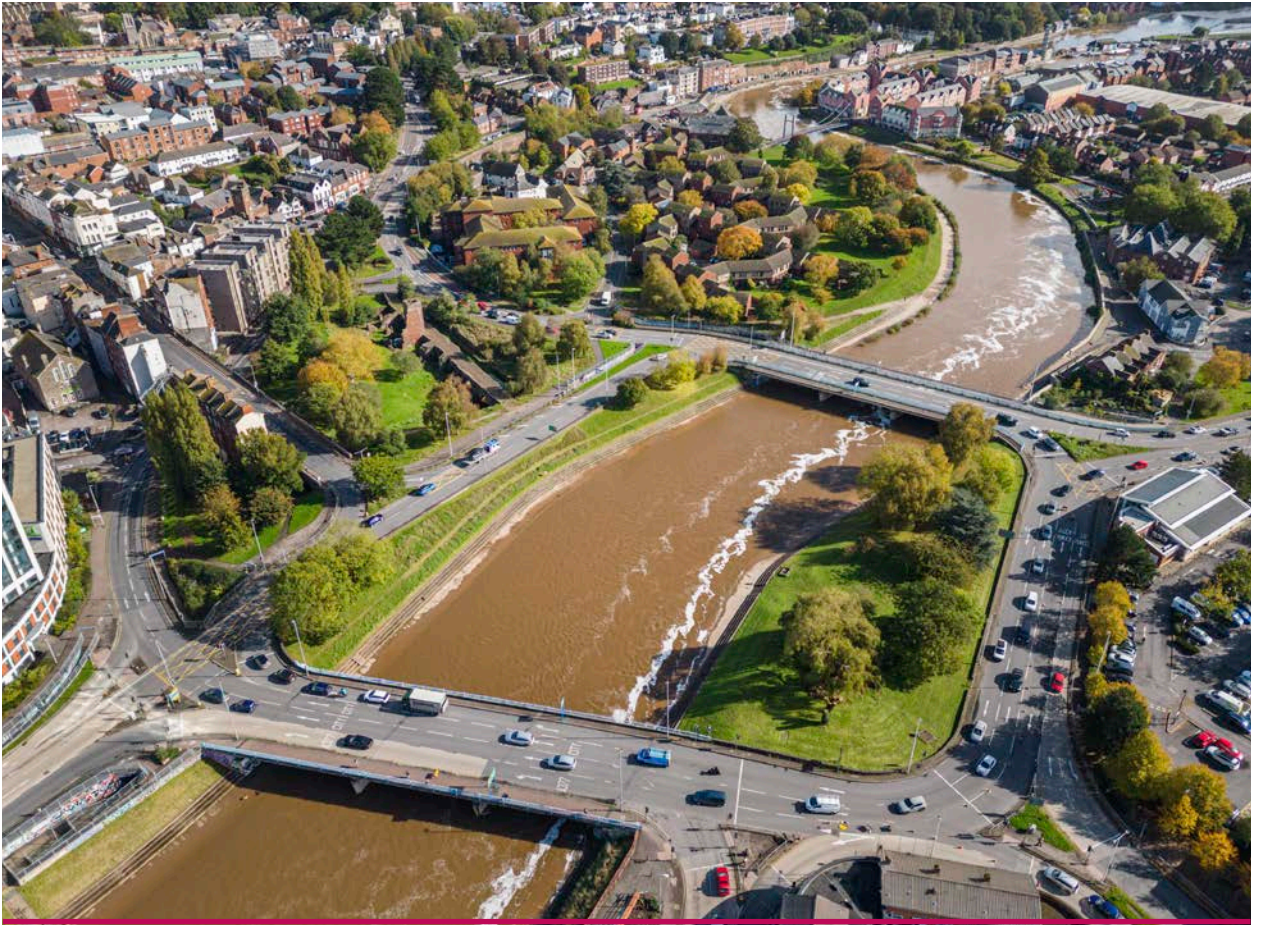


**Image 2:** Braun and Hogenburg Exeter Map of 1587. [courtesy of Ozgur Tufekci © Historic Cities Research Project]

- 2.3 Exeter was an early force in the Industrial Revolution, with industry springing up on Exe Island and the drained marshes to the west of the city, and there are a number of eighteenth century buildings and villas that continue to survive. However, with poor access to coal Exeter's growth slowed, preserving a rich network of medieval buildings in the city centre until the mid-twentieth century. In 1778 a new bridge was built at the end of Fore Street, bypassing the medieval Exe Bridge.
- 2.4 In 1834 a cast-iron bridge was constructed altering the approach to North Street. The Bristol and Exeter Railway opened St David's Station in 1844, followed by London and South Western's Queen Street (Exeter Central) in 1860. Horse trams arrived in 1882.
- 2.5 Many of Exeter's historic buildings were destroyed in the Baedeker Blitz of 1942, which levelled 16 hectares of the city, especially impacting the High Street and Sidwell Street. After the war, Thomas Sharp was commissioned to draw up a plan for rebuilding, titled 'Exeter Phoenix'. Characteristically for the time, the plan focussed on equipping the city for the motor car age, with inner ring roads, and provision for car parking cutting the city centre off from its river, its quayside, and its central suburbs.
- 2.6 The post-war architecture is of varying quality, with some good examples, and many post-war buildings survive along the High Street and Sidwell Street.



**Image 3:** Modern Exe Bridge. [DP464555 © Historic England Archive]



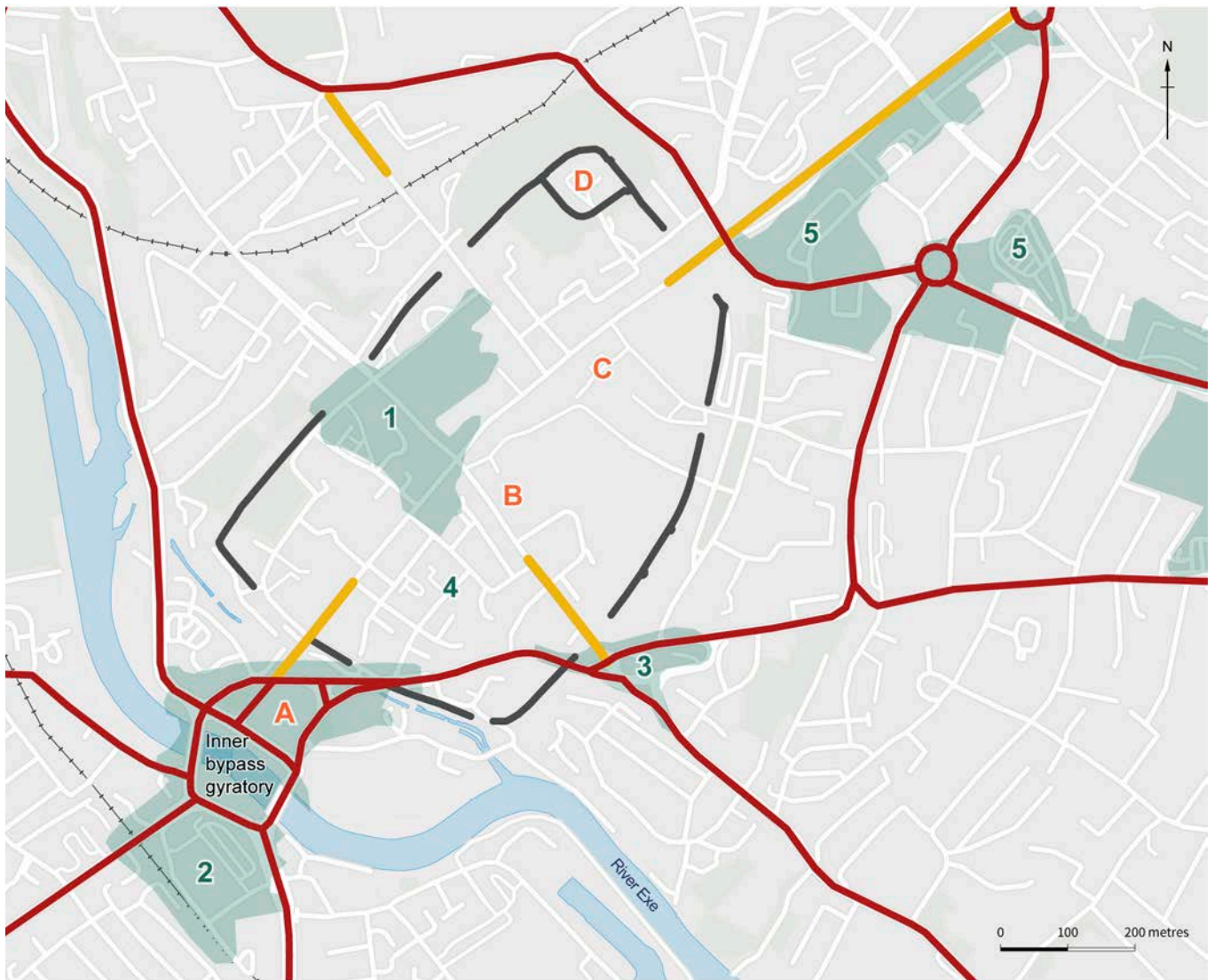
**Image 4:** Exeter city centre road network. [DP464561 © Historic England Archive]

- 2.7 Following severe floods in the 1960s three new flood relief channels and two new concrete bridges were constructed (1969 and 1972) leaving the medieval Exe Bridge isolated on a traffic island. By the 1980s large shopping centres and multi-storey car parks had been built, arguably frustrating a more human-scaled experience for the city centre.
- 2.8 The relatively recent Princesshay shopping area made a step-change improvement to the city centre, transforming the area between the High Street and Southernhay. High-end retailers were attracted, displacing many existing traders to Fore Street and Sidwell Street, and these two traditional retail streets have become centres of independent retail. The quayside has also been regenerated but challenges of connecting this area to the city centre remain.
- 2.9 Exeter has a splendid hinterland glimpsed from key points in the city, and its centre boasts the jewels of Exeter Cathedral and its Close. Nevertheless, some areas of the city centre offer considerable opportunities for improvement.
- 2.10 Exeter is, in the twenty-first century, a city of growth. Exeter now has the opportunity to embed a strategic place-making strategy that celebrates its abundance of heritage assets, its topography, river, and vibrant culture of learning and creativity.

## 3 The Visit

- 3.1 The Historic Places Panel thanks Exeter City Council (ECC) for inviting its contributions at this pivotal moment in the history of the city. ECC's vision for its housing-led regeneration, with the opportunity for the re-use of buildings and improvements to the public realm, provides great opportunities for increasing Exeter's growing reputation.
- 3.2 The Panel congratulates ECC for its aspirational and ambitious vision for the city demonstrated in a number of reports and strategies, many of which were shared with the Panel. The Panel were particularly impressed by Exeter's place-based 'Cultural Strategy 2019-2024', produced in partnership between ECC, the University of Exeter, Exeter College, and InExeter (Exeter's Business Improvement District (BID)).
- 3.3 The Panel was welcomed to Exeter by Ian Collinson, Director of Place at ECC, and during the two days also heard from Roger Clotworthy, Head of City Development and Owen Cambridge, Principal Officer (Heritage), City Development, who together provided an overview of what the council hopes to achieve, the work it has done so far, and the challenges it needs to overcome. The Panel was pleased to hear that a dedicated conservation officer has recently been appointed.
- 3.4 Helen Hartstein, Head of Audience Development at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) spoke of the fantastic community engagement work at the museum. The Earl of Devon gave an account of the rich resources of Exeter's past and present culture and the important role of innovation and radicalism in the city's heritage, and Jamie Hulland from Devon County Council (DCC) gave a presentation on the highways and the transport infrastructure that serves Exeter and plans for its future enhancement.
- 3.5 Two presentations illustrated the highly effective grass-roots work within the city. The first, from Nicola Wheeler (BID Manager from InExeter) gave a review of activity undertaken by the BID community of 670 businesses, 44% of which are independent. The second, from Fiona Carden (Chief Executive Officer for CoLAB, a multi-agency wellbeing hub located in the city centre) gave an insight into what can be achieved when organisations work with disadvantaged local people to bring about positive change. The Panel was inspired by the grass-roots ecosystem in Exeter and its potential for stimulating further cultural activity and enriched place-making in the city.
- 3.6 As part of the visit, the Panel had a walking tour of the city, specifically viewing the areas of North Gate, West Gate, South Gate, and East Gate and their opportunities for redevelopment within the context of the Exeter Vision 2040, focusing on the historic significance of Exeter and improved place-making opportunities. Key historic sites that the Panel considered were the city walls, the Exe Bridge with the remains of St Edmund's Church, Exeter Cathedral, the ruins of the Hall of the Vicars Choral, and St Catherine's Almshouses and Chapel.





**Sites visited**

- A** Exe bridges
- B** Hall of the Vicars' Choral
- C** St Catherine's Almshouses and Chapel
- D** Exeter Castle

**Development sites**

- 1** North Gate development site
- 2** West Gate development site
- 3** South Gate development site
- 4** SW City Centre Quarter
- 5** East Gate development site

**Image 5:** Sites in Exeter visited by the Historic Places Panel. [© Historic England; background map © Esri Community Maps Contributors]

## 4 Planning, Cultural and Strategic Context

- 4.1 The Panel was provided with a brief overview of some of the key plans and strategies produced by ECC and their partners. These include the following:
- 4.2 **Exeter Vision 2040** – agreed by the Liveable Exeter Place Board in 2019. A high-level vision for the future growth and success of the city, focusing on seven key outcomes that touch on innovation, health, education, culture, sustainability, and connectivity. The initiative also identified eight potential sites for transformational redevelopment and regeneration.
- 4.3 **City Centre Strategy and Action Plan.** The Council is updating this document to ensure the city is fit for purpose for the future. Its focus is on supporting a vibrant economy to attract people to work, shop, visit, study, and invest in the city centre.



**Image 6:** North Street looking to Iron Bridge. [DP464556 © Historic England Archive]

- 4.4 Net Zero Exeter Plan – developed by Exeter City Futures.** Exeter has an ambitious goal of becoming ‘net zero’ by 2030 and the partner bodies involved in producing the Net Zero Plan are now tasked with delivering its aims.
- 4.5 Transport and Infrastructure Plans.** Strategies for future transport in Exeter focus on enabling low carbon growth and green travel choices. These include Devon County Council’s Transport Infrastructure Plan and Exeter’s Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- 4.6 The Exeter Plan.** Exeter City Council is producing a new Local Plan to guide future development in the city. The overall spatial strategy flows from the Exeter Vision 2040 and would steer most future development to a number of strategic brownfield sites. It is hoped that this would protect the city’s landscape setting, help to achieve net zero by 2030, enable nature recovery, and support the economy, health, and inclusion. Strategic sites are likely to include areas close to both the city walls and the former North Gate, East Gate, and South Gate. The plan highlights the importance of the city walls and seeks financial contributions from developers towards their upkeep.
- 4.7** ECC recognises the challenge of accommodating high density development in areas close to the city centre and its heritage assets. It has therefore commissioned research to inform the Local Plan and future development proposals. This will firstly identify important views of Exeter Cathedral and the city skyline, focusing on some of Exeter’s most prominent historic buildings. It will then assess the context and character of some of the key development sites, making recommendations for appropriate development heights and densities. The study was underway at the time of the Panel’s visit and will be published around the same time as this report.
- 4.8** The current Cultural Strategy covers the period 2019-2024 and the development of a new cultural strategy is in the early stages of delivery. The new strategy will focus on the importance of Exeter’s cultural sector and directly feed into the design and delivery of city place-making. ECC has recently commissioned Blind Ditch (an artist collective) to produce a study entitled: (Co)Mission - Ways Forward for Art and Culture in Planning and Urban Development in Exeter. The final report will emphasise the importance of getting communities to participate in, and drive an agenda that links urban design with heritage, sustainability, and well-being. Finally, a report drafted by Charles Landry (An Opportunity in the Making: Exeter & its Creative Placemaking) provides twelve case studies that seek to inform culture-led regeneration that highlight the value of “artistic thinking”. These three new studies are likely to be published later this year.
- 4.9** In 2019 Exeter was awarded a UNESCO City of Literature designation in recognition of ‘outstanding contributions to culture and creativity’.
- 4.10** The Panel’s recommendation will aid ECC in the bringing together of these strategies, reports, and designations into a coherent and holistic plan for the successful and effective delivery of its vision.

## 5 Exeter City Council's Questions to the Panel

**5.1** The Panel was asked three questions by ECC and our commentary is pitched at a level set by the ambition set out in section 4. Panel members, with their broad expertise, have suggested ways in which the city's vision can be realistically achieved in order to assist ECC in achieving its goals. It was not possible for the Panel to be made aware of all the work that is being done by ECC, and therefore there may be recommendations that include work that the council has in place and/or has begun.

**Q.1:** How does the Panel feel the city can best take advantage of the opportunity provided by redevelopment at North Gate, East Gate, and South Gate, and what might the key design and planning principles be to optimise their capacity, whilst ensuring they better complement the historic city, and support Exeter's growth ambitions around increased density and carbon reduction targets?

### Panel Response

- 5.2** The Panel endorses ECC's ambition to accommodate a growing population within the city. This would contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and healthier environment for its citizens.
- 5.3** ECC is commended on setting out its vision in the Liveable Exeter Placemaking Charter, and the Panel strongly supports the Charter's inclusion of important tools to ensure quality outcomes of development such as a Design Review Panel, Planning Performance Agreements, and a Pre-Application Advice Service.
- 5.4** The Panel also notes that useful preparatory work is underway, in particular the ongoing research into views, densities, and heights referred to above, and that this will inform The Exeter Plan.
- 5.5** ECC communicated to the Panel that it is currently undergoing a re-structure to create a more dynamic working environment across planning, culture, and the environment. Whilst this is welcomed, it was unclear to the Panel if ECC will subsequently have the level of resourcing commensurate with the challenges it has set itself in its ambitious vision for the city and its ultimate delivery. An organisational audit would identify any gaps in roles, mindful that expertise in brownfield development processes, development economics, and stakeholder engagement are crucial to ECC and will ensure that it can deliver its vision. The Panel recognises that the work ECC needs to undertake is resource-hungry and encourages ECC to make a strong business case for additional funding to support the delivery of its vision as and when funding streams from Central Government become available.

- 5.6** The Panel was asked to advise on the key design and planning principles to deliver redevelopment at North Gate, East Gate, and South Gate. The Panel is supportive of the redevelopment opportunities at North Gate and South Gate so long as they engage with Exeter's rich historic environment and address public need. The Panel has concerns regarding potential heights of new buildings, particularly at South Gate due to the topography of the site and its views of Exeter Cathedral. Hopefully, this will be addressed through the forthcoming heights and densities study that has been commissioned, and subsequent statements of justification for site allocations.
- 5.7** The Panel has reservations about the decision to include Sidwell Street within the East Gate area strategic development site. Sidwell Street is a classic example of a successful, good-quality post-war rebuilding with an attractive tree-lined boulevard. During the Panel's visit there appeared to be a high-level of commercial and residential occupancy and noted that the accommodation over the shops provides an affordable living option that would support further activation of the city, potentially by students. The Panel are concerned that the redevelopment of Sidwell Street could harm the distinct character and fragile economy of this area, and that a business case for its inclusion as a strategic development site has not yet been made. Instead, a policy of working with entrepreneurial small local developers to find innovative ways to successfully redevelop vacant or underused buildings might bring the change that is desired. The potential reuse of the Civic Centre could provide the catalyst for change that the East Gate area needs as a focus for enhancing Exeter's liveable credentials and forming a better connection with the city centre. This might include an improved hierarchy of road-to-building ratios with reduced areas of highway tarmac and more greening.
- 5.8** The Panel also has overall concerns that the proposals for these sites are possibly being progressed ahead of what would be a sufficient foundation of baseline work. Whilst ECC will have much of this work in hand, the Panel would advise that there are essential pre-requisites ahead of the allocation of strategic brownfield development sites. This baseline of work would help ECC demonstrate a process-led approach that is rigorous, robust, and accountable, and will give ECC greater control over the future urban character of its city.
- 5.9** The Panel believes that this is an opportune time to reflect on the deliverability of their strategic vision and whether there has been effective and continuous community engagement. The renowned urbanist Jan Gehl, coined the now well-used adage; 'first people, then space, then building, the other way round never works'. The Historic Places Panel wholeheartedly agrees with this approach to regeneration and place-making and it is only with meaningful community engagement that the commercial success of development can be achieved.



**Image 7:** Nos. 13-31 Sidwell Street. [DP158319 © Historic England Archive]



**Image 8:** East Gate development site opposite Civic Centre. [© Historic England]

- 5.10** ECC should commit to a continuous programme of community engagement to understand what types of cultural places they wish to support and create. The Panel strongly encourages the creation of an Urban Room (an adapted shopfront or other public space for civic activism) to support this work. It would provide a neutral space within the city centre where people can engage in the process of urban transformation and would be an effective public engagement tool in Exeter. Such a space would foster discourse co-curated with local groups such as CoLab to ensure the seldom-heard voices of Exeter's people are listened to. This could support the work of the Liveable Exeter Place Board (established as part of the delivery of the Exeter's Vision 2040) to assimilate the energy of the local people into a vision for the city's future that sustains civic pride. A helpful narrative that ECC may wish to adopt to encourage greater public participation is to shift the dialogue from units and sites to homes and communities. This may help ECC to gauge the views of the community on aspects of design such as heights, densities, and massing. The Panel is encouraged by the Deputy Leader's commitment to a better and more effective community engagement programme.
- 5.11** The InExeter BID has been important in establishing relationships with the businesses of Exeter and has undertaken valuable work producing neighbourhood characterisation studies through its mapping of quarters within the city. The Panel recommends that this work needs to go further and consider the experience of each neighbourhood – what you see, hear, and smell, and how the neighbourhoods relate to each other. This can help define community types and the value of their contribution to the character and vibrancy of the city overall. A simple exercise for ECC to consider when identifying areas for redevelopment is to ask what the community is like now, what will the community be like afterwards, and does the city want that change? We would recommend that ECC needs to better understand the potential implications of changes to the character of neighbourhoods, and neighbourhood characterisation studies would provide them with this essential information.
- 5.12** The Panel recognises that the Exeter Vision 2040 is a high-level regeneration framework, from which the draft Local Plan flows, steering future development to strategic brownfield sites. The Panel commend ECC for the work done thus far. The Panel would now suggest that a Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) is needed to support that work. The purpose of a SRF is to set out the environmental, social design, and economic objectives of an area as guidance for future development, rather than to set out specific criteria for determining planning applications or identify specific building design. It can contain technical analysis and suggested massing to enable a realisation of the Council's vision which could be instrumental in its successful delivery. The principal benefits of an SRF include creating a collaborative partnership approach to regenerating an area and de-risking the planning process, thereby attracting investment.
- 5.13** The panel would encourage ECC to consider exemplars of SRFs that have been produced in other cities which will help to illustrate the scope, ambition, and benefits of such an approach. The Panel advises that ECC consult with Historic England for further advice.



**Image 9:** Fore Street Flea, an initiative by InExeter and local traders. [© Historic England]



- 5.14** A SRF for Exeter would best be undertaken by consultants in close collaboration with ECC and its stakeholders. It would consider all of the city's brownfield sites and under-used buildings, not just those that the Panel were asked to comment on. This would provide ECC with a holistic city-wide place-making strategy that builds on community engagement and neighbourhood characterisation studies.
- 5.15** The SRF would enable ECC to identify tangible and therefore investible development propositions with a broad definition of their economic value in terms of density and massing, but also in terms of sustainability and the environment. The aim should be to identify typologies but also adaptive re-use opportunities to prioritise the preservation of embodied carbon. This forms part of The Exeter Plan supporting the view that heritage should be seen as a value-adding asset rather than a constraint on development. The SRF would also help the council to phase its development plans by identifying short, medium, and long-term projects. This could offset the cost and complexity of some of the desired links, against the gradual accrual of financial value as development is enabled.



**Image 10:** The Exe Bridge and St Edmund's Tower within the inner ring road. [DP464548 © Historic England Archive]

- 5.16 The Panel was encouraged to learn about DCC’s plans for transport infrastructure, walking, and cycling and would urge DCC to pursue bold strategies to ensure low carbon growth and green travel choices within the city. The Panel was not briefed on all aspects of local transport planning; parking standards for new developments, for example. The Panel was impressed by the rail connectivity in and around the city and the additional stations that have been created in recent years, and that options for car clubs and electric bike schemes are being explored.
- 5.17 To support the city’s carbon reduction targets the Panel recommends that DCC adopt brave proposals to better enable low carbon growth and green travel choices within the city, and welcome their work on the upcoming Local Transport Plan for Devon and Torbay. The Panel suggests that a strategic transportation study or a movement study that is ambitious, and an updated green infrastructure strategy are important components that the city will need in order to realise its targets. This work would provide short, medium, and long-term answers to the growing demand for the reduction of traffic within the city walls.



**Image 11:** Glimpsed view of the Cathedral across Magdalen St from Topsham Road. [DP464554 © Historic England Archive]

- 5.18** Tangible actions that a strategic study might enable are the redevelopment of multi-storey car park sites, the promotion of car-free residential developments through ECC's parking standards and planning policies, and the restriction of car parking within the city walls to blue-badge holders only. These actions could help to enforce the use of the existing park and ride schemes, and provide opportunities for their expansion, contributing to an alternative revenue stream for ECC. There is evidence that traffic volumes are not growing, and the city ranks very highly nationally for both walking and cycling, suggesting public support for motor traffic reductions.
- 5.19** There are real opportunities in the South Gate strategic development area to reconnect the city with its quayside but to be successful this requires radical and bold adjustments to the city's inner bypass road network. This would open up additional regeneration opportunities such as the under-used multi-storey car park above the quay, noting that some car parking may be required to service the quay.
- 5.20** The reduction of traffic in the city centre could provide opportunities for pavement widening and increased pedestrianisation, which would contribute to a more culturally vibrant and inclusive city centre that could include the provision of play areas, more seating, and connecting green infrastructure.

### Panel Recommendations

- 5.21** Establish a continuous and meaningful community engagement programme with the city, that includes an Urban Room.
- 5.22** Ensure ECC has the skills, capacity, and baseline studies to enable sensitive regeneration by:
- undertaking an organisational audit to ensure that ECC has the resourcing and expertise required to deliver the ambitious vision set out in the Liveable Exeter Placemaking Charter;
  - commissioning a Strategic Regeneration Framework to provide ECC with a holistic city-wide place-making strategy;
  - undertaking a detailed strategic transportation study or a movement study to understand Exeter's future transport needs and actively reduce the need for car parking within the city walls;
  - producing an updated green infrastructure strategy to support the city's ambition to 'be a carbon neutral city by 2030 and recognised as a global leader in addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges of climate change and urbanisation'.

- 5.23 Undertake more in-depth neighbourhood characterisation studies. In Exeter may be able to help with the delivery of this work and the renewal of the BID should be actively supported. The BID makes a huge contribution to the city's commercial success and attracts both investment and cultural activities.
- 5.24 Consider the removal of Sidwell Street from the East Gate strategic development site in The Exeter Plan.

**Q.2: How might Exeter make better use of its heritage offer, including its city walls and fine scheduled monuments, to engage its citizens to help implement the bold and ambitious, new cultural place-making agenda to attract more visitors and inward investment?**

### Panel Response

- 5.25 Exeter is a city with a rich heritage offering and the Panel is impressed by the quality and number of heritage assets in the city, not least its city walls which are a rare survival. Most of the city centre is designated as an Area of Archaeological Importance highlighting the importance of archaeological remains in Exeter. There are also conservation areas covering much of central Exeter.
- 5.26 During the visit the Panel heard of the city's cultural and historic relevance as a place of radical thinkers and innovators and Exeter could be promoted as the cultural capital of Devon. To better promote Exeter as a tourist destination and attract inward investment the city needs a narrative that celebrates its heritage and demonstrates its value to Exeter. Such a narrative would help provide the city with a marketable brand.
- 5.27 The Panel encourages ECC to create a collaborative and colourful narrative to articulate Exeter's impact on the world and show how its story is embodied in the city's historic structures. The narrative needs to be one of public ownership and the Panel would recommend as a starting point a built environment audit to identify the heritage that is important to its citizens and seen as worth celebrating. This will help establish the opportunities.
- 5.28 The Panel encourages ECC to involve and deploy the Liveable Exeter Place Board's network of cultural and educational institutions as well as the BID to support the development of a shared narrative. The UNESCO City of Literature designation must be part of this narrative, identifying authors that have lived and worked in the city. The story of Exeter as a key message of the Exeter Vision 2040 could be a driving force that will help to cement civic pride and encourage people to live, work, and visit.

- 5.29** Caleb Hedgeland's Model of Exeter in 1769 which the Panel saw in RAMM is an engaging way to connect people with eighteenth century Exeter. ECC might commission a model of Exeter in the twenty-first century, in both physical and digital formats. This could be achieved in collaboration with Exeter University. Such a model could be fantastically communicative to its citizens and help to articulate some of the messaging of the narrative and would be a useful centre piece for the suggested Urban Room.
- 5.30** The Panel was impressed by the city's Cultural Strategy 2019-2024. They also commend RAMM on its heritage-focused public engagement work and congratulate them on their creative ideas.
- 5.31** There remain opportunities to better connect the various cultural and community groups across the city with the city's heritage. It is hoped that the Liveable Exeter Place Board will help to bring these voices together as a coherent resource for ECC to engage with as an equal partner in the promotion of the city's heritage and cultural offer. The Panel hopes that the updated cultural strategy, which is still in its early stages, will cast the net wide and map the groups of all kinds of stakeholders in the city, to include sport (the football and rugby clubs); the considerable resources available from the Exeter University, Exeter College, and Exeter Cathedral; and micro-businesses of all kinds including gaming, technology, and local food production.
- 5.32** The Panel advises that an expanded and enhanced farmers' market that supports local businesses and the surrounding farms, possibly on a better site away from passing motor traffic, could be conceived and implemented with partners such as InExeter. A regular, possibly weekend, farmers' market would draw in local visitors.
- 5.33** The enrichment of the city's relationship with its community groups could also provide access to the city's ecosystem of craft, art, music, and literature. Cultural programmes are invaluable: they generate growth and an impetus for the lively occupation of vacant spaces (including heritage assets) with pop-ups that can become permanent and cherished parts of the local economy and support a vibrant city life.
- 5.34** The Panel commends ECC for the inclusion of a policy to celebrate the city walls within The Exeter Plan which will provide funding streams for its repair, maintenance, and enhancement. This is particularly important in light of the condition survey undertaken in 2019 that identified eight areas of the wall that are in poor structural condition, exacerbated by climate change. The walls are currently in the ownership of ECC, Exeter Cathedral, and several private owners and there is a need for a joined-up approach to their conservation and the need to find their significance within a twenty-first century Exeter. The promotion of careers in traditional building skills through working more closely with Exeter College, Exeter University, and Exeter Cathedral's stone masons to provide placements and apprenticeships would help with their long-term conservation. The use of double scaffolding when works to the walls take place would offer opportunities for public engagement. The Panel suggests that ECC may want to consider the transfer of the ownership of the walls to a trust. A single owner can significantly simplify the management of a heritage asset.

- 5.35** There are numerous ways to engage the local community with the city walls and encourage an excitement about their future role within the city. A masterplan competition that would help to find creative ways to knit the separate sections of the city walls together as a public engagement piece, with lighting schemes, connecting playgrounds, and public art could achieve this. The Superkilen, a kilometre-long public park in Copenhagen, may be a useful case study.
- 5.36** There are also opportunities to connect other heritage assets in the city. The connection between the RAMM with Northernhay Gardens and Rougemont Gardens, or the Phoenix Arts Centre and the library, could be improved by opening the doors between them or with shared cultural programmes.
- 5.37** The city needs to do more to encourage university students to visit and engage with the city centre which may encourage them to live and work in the city after graduating. There are opportunities for the university to re-use vacant sites, such as the Debenhams building, for lecture halls, as has been done in cities like Liverpool.
- 5.38** There are also opportunities to better promote the city's UNESCO designation as a City of Literature, and working with the city's educational institutions may be a way to achieve this. The Panel was struck by how little the designation is promoted within the city.

### Panel Recommendations

- 5.39** Engage with the community of Exeter to identify and celebrate the city's story. Some ideas include:
- better promote the city's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature;
  - commission a Model of Exeter in the twenty-first century, in physical and digital formats as a comparison to the 1769 Hedgeland Model;
  - run a competition on creative ways to promote and celebrate the city walls as a real asset to the city. This could be achieved in collaboration with other stakeholders;
  - work with InExeter and the local farms that border the city to expand and enhance the farmers' market.

### Historic England Supporting Advice

- 5.40 ECC may wish to engage with Historic England to carry out a designation review of heritage assets such as the city walls, some of which were first designated almost a century ago and have not been revised. This would establish the extent of special interest and not only increase their expert knowledge of the structures, but also help with the management of those assets and bring clarity in the redevelopment of key sites.

### **Q3: How might the city improve West Gate/Exe Bridges by addressing the impact of the inner bypass and reconnecting the city centre to the river?**

#### Panel Response

- 5.41 The Panel commends Liveable Exeter's vision for Exeter's growth 'as a connected city consisting of thriving living communities set within an exceptional environmental setting'. To achieve this the city must create new links and better connections across the city, and most vitally between the city and its river which is severed by the inner bypass road network.
- 5.42 The bypass cuts the city off from the River Exe, its quayside, and the suburb of St Thomas; isolates the medieval Exe Bridge on a traffic island; and doesn't encourage people to walk down Fore Street, which currently terminates at the northern section of the bypass.
- 5.43 ECC must work with DCC to implement bold adjustments to the city's inner bypass road network to reconnect the city and improve its environmental setting.
- 5.44 There are short-term opportunities to connect these disparate elements of the city with simple improvements in signage and creative public realm approaches to creating links to the quay, and the other side of the river.
- 5.45 This would need to be combined with increasingly bold adjustments to alter the road network and incremental changes over a medium to long term period of about 20 years, enabling a modal shift for the community, which should make it possible to achieve the transition. A significant step could involve the closure and ultimate removal of the Western Way, and possibly Frog Street and New Bridge Street, ending the isolation of the medieval Exe Bridge in a traffic gyratory.
- 5.46 This medium-term vision for radical modal shift in movement between the city and its hinterland can be seen in parallel with the opportunities that could emerge from a SRF of the city within and immediately outside its city walls, and a strategic transportation study. Reducing the need for car parking spaces within the city should provide the options for re-possessing public realm and multi-storey car parks for more beneficial uses.



**Image 12:** Western Way cutting through the city walls by the former South Gate. [DP464553 © Historic England Archive]

- 5.47 The adjustment of the inner bypass would support InExeter’s investment in Fore Street which is beginning to animate the street with initiatives such as the Fore Street Flea. The reconnection of Fore Street with the West Gate area and the River Exe would draw people along the road, incentivising the occupation of vacant shops. The recommendations of the Fore Street Public Realm Initial Analysis (LDA Design, February 2023) could help to guide these improvements.
- 5.48 The incremental changes would also provide increasing opportunities for public realm and green space improvements to better connect the community with the riverside and its hinterland. The green valley walk accessible via the quay and the green circle demonstrate the possibilities.

### Panel Recommendation

- 5.49 Work with DCC to plan bold adjustments to the inner bypass road network to reconnect the walled city with the River Exe. The recommendation to undertake a strategic transportation study or a movement study (paragraph 5.22) would support this work. This should be carried out alongside a strategy for the phased public realm and green space improvements that will connect the community with its riverside and hinterland.



## 6 The Panel

The Historic Places Panel provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places.

List of panel members who attended the visit to Exeter on 12 – 13th September 2024:

Ben Derbyshire

Nairita Chakraborty

David Dunne

Honor Fishburn

Daisy Froud

Ian Harvey

Jennie Palmer-Jones

Geoff Rich

Chris Smith

Katie Wray



# Historic England

The Historic Places Panel provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places.

A list of current panel members and previous review papers can be found on our website: [historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel](https://historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel).

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