



Dear Councillor Findlay

EXETER CULTURAL STRATEGY 2026-2031

I am writing on behalf of Exeter Civic Society about the draft Cultural Strategy. We have completed the online form but we have additional points to make which are not covered by the questions in the form or where we want to make a broader point. Please treat this letter and our completed form as our total consultation response. I have attached a copy of our responses to the online text box questions for ease of reference.

First, the focus of the strategy is on creators and makers and making Exeter a city of creative confidence. While we recognise the value of creativity, many participants will be consumers, not producers or creators. Further thought needs to be given to how to enrich people's lives through culture without necessarily making them creators in their own right. Also, the focus on 'creative confidence' means that events that bind communities together such as fetes and fairs and which provide fun are ignored. But these are things which enhance the culture of a locality. Such events may well include creative or heritage activities to experience and enjoy.

Second, there are areas where the council and its unitary successor should take a clear lead and which cannot be done by a Partnership Board of voluntary members. These include:

- Establishing a more central and welcoming tourist office which could also act as a central hub for other activities and information, including learning. Exeter suffers from not having such a facility in the city centre. We have met tourists in the Custom House at the end of their visit to Exeter who say it would have been nice to have some information at the start. There are existing council facilities or vacant ones which could be used for this purpose.
- Improving the appearance of the city centre and reducing anti-social behaviour. We acknowledge this is part of the City Centre strategy, but it needs to be at least cross-referenced in the cultural strategy given this was one of the significant issues to emerge from consultation.
- A clear commitment to maintaining Exeter's heritage assets which are part of the city council's responsibility. For example, removing the plants growing on the Guildhall façade which are damaging its brickwork. And encouraging (or if possible requiring) others with similar responsibilities to do the same.
- A clear commitment to funding and supporting RAMM as a major cultural asset.
- Enabling and supporting local fetes, fairs and 'fun days'.
- Using the community builders to foster cultural developments in localities.
- A longer term aspiration to establish a large modern central venue which was one of the top priorities which emerged from the consultation survey.

It seems to us unlikely that any coherent action plan will emerge without such clear leadership and input.

Third, it is disappointing that few of the ideas, data and exemplars set out in the baseline report and the assessment have been taken forward into the strategy. Nor have the weaknesses identified been clearly addressed. Doing so would give the strategy a harder edge with better measures of achievement and more visible steps,

rather than its current series of vague aspirations and promises of further discussions with partners with no underpinning concrete actions. For example, specific steps to retain Exeter University graduates in the city; and a quantifiable target of getting near to or matching the tourist economies of York, Bath and Canterbury and the creative and cultural economy of Norwich.

Finally, we were also disappointed and surprised that the Civic Society has not been involved as a stakeholder given the nature of our organisation. We are a membership organisation. We have a strong and continuing visible role in celebrating and championing Exeter's heritage. Our blue plaques commemorating individuals are highly visible. Our 'Discovering Exeter' guides cover the history and architectural features of areas outside the city centre. They also cover, for example, the mosaics in the city. The area guides are being revised with the first on St. Leonard's and the Quay issued last year and a new one about Countess Wear published this year. Work on two further revisions on St. Sidwell's and St. James and the area 'West of the River' are in progress. We were also instrumental in securing the national registration of the grounds of Larkbeare House by Historic England and are currently discussing with the council a process for locally listing buildings under the new Exeter Plan.

I am copying this letter to Ian Collinson, Director of Place.

Yours sincerely

Andrew McKeon

Secretarty

26 June 2026

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EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY RESPONSE TO TEXT BOXES IN ONLINE SURVEY

Suggest project ideas or partnerships you would like to see

A central welcome hub for tourist information, bookings, exhibitions relating to the city and if space allows learning and research to make the City of Literature concrete.

A large, modern central theatre and concert venue. Consider an open air venue for the summer, e.g. on the old bus station site.

Greater involvement of students and young people in city culture e.g. a schools wide arts strategy through the Ted Wragg Trust.

Further develop the partnership between the University's Innovation centre and local heritage assets and organisations to make a more creative impact.

What is the single most important thing this strategy should achieve for Exeter?

Raising Exeter's profile in the tourist and creative industries by:

- sustainable funding, better maintenance and promotion of Exeter's heritage assets;
- improving the city's appearance;
- providing a better welcome for visitors with information available in the centre in person as well as digitally;
- showcase events, attractive to residents and visitors alike and which get national attention.

The result would be more jobs in tourism and the creative industries and a better cultural experience for residents. The aim should be to be ahead of comparable cities in terms of jobs and funding.

Which communities and voices do you think are currently underrepresented in Exeter's cultural life.

Groups who live in the suburbs and who do not go into the city centre regularly. Their views need to be better represented and more effort should be put into events in local centres.

People with long term mental health problems who can benefit from long-term volunteering in the creative sector. Historic England's research show the importance of connection with heritage in creating feelings of fascination, relaxation, restorativeness and a decrease in stress, see [Improving Mental Health Through Heritage | Heritage Counts | Historic England](#)

Ethnic minorities and low-income families.

What types of cultural activities best help bring people together in your community?

Fetes, local fairs, sports days, and fun days in the park. With council support our communities can do more of this.

Heritage projects, including walks, giving local communities a focus on undervalued aspects of their past – for example recent projects on Countess Wear's heritage and one in Whipton, helped by the community builder; and a Heavitree heritage walk.

Green projects e.g community gardens which offer well-being, engagement with the environment and climate change, and opportunities for creativity. They also foster pride of place.

Projects which take place in reality and not digitally.

How could creative activities help people engage differently with climate and environmental challenge.

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