

EXETER CONSTITUENCY PROFILE

Challenges and opportunities

The constituency covers most of the cathedral city of Exeter in Devon. Two wards of the City of Exeter (St Loyes and Topsham) were transferred to the neighbouring East Devon constituency after the last review by the Boundary Commission for England. Parliamentary seats in Devon were increased from 11 to 12.

Exeter's electorate is 80,475.

Electoral record

In General Elections since 1992, Liberal Democrat support has ranged from 12% to 20% (average 18%). Labour has held the seat since 1997 (Ben Bradshaw MP) with a decreasing share of the vote and never an outright majority. Opposition votes have been split by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Our share of the vote has held in the past two elections, but Conservatives have increased at Labour's expense.

Local election support for the Liberal Democrats grew significantly over recent years, typically around 25% pre-Coalition and peaking at 32% in the County Council elections in 2005. Since 2010, local election support is around 14%. Exeter has a strong Labour presence, a moderate Conservative presence and election-time activity from Greens, UKIP and other fringe parties.

Exeter City Council has 40 seats (36 seats within Exeter constituency, in 16 wards) and has a Labour administration. Elections are held in thirds, with one third of seats up for election in 2014 and another one third in 2015.

Liberal Democrat representation increased steadily over the decade to 2010, peaking at 14 seats. Currently there are 5 Liberal Democrat city councillors in 5 wards (3 of which were re-elected since May 2010).

From May 2008 to Sept 2010, Liberal Democrats had the largest party on Exeter City Council and formed a minority administration.

Exeter Constituency has 8 Devon county councillors. In 2010, there were three Liberal Democrat county councillors; currently there are none.

Local party – time to grow again

As elsewhere, membership of the local party has declined gradually over the past decade. It has stabilised with 86 members now. We have the supporters, but not enough active members. Here's an opportunity to meet voters and find out more about Exeter through a recruitment campaign linked with the local and parliamentary

elections. The University has a Lib Dem branch, with attendance on our Executive Committee.

Exeter's local party is primarily organised through its Executive Committee, who co-ordinate campaigning activities, policy development, election organisation and social/fund-raising events and activities.

EXETER – THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE

Looking forward – positive signs

Exeter has come through the recession in better shape than much of the South West. There has been a growth in jobs and in our education sector. We have a younger demographic than surrounding areas of Devon and a high proportion of service sector and retail employees. The local economy has been strengthened with the expansion of the University of Exeter.

Total population is around 119,000, with three times as many people coming to Exeter for work, shopping and leisure and tourism.

Employment growth in 2008-2010 was 2.3%, compared to –6.4% in Plymouth and –0.9% in the South West as a whole. Exeter outperforms most UK locations for job density. Between 2008 and 2012, Exeter was in the top 10 nationally for job creation; 76% of all locations in the UK had actual job losses. 35,000 workers commute into Exeter daily.

Exeter is closely linked to the large-scale development east of the M5 in East Devon: a science park; airport expansion; a business park; and the new town of Cranbrook. Growth in jobs and homes will have a positive impact on the city for shopping, leisure and related jobs.

Arts and entertainment are flourishing, mostly on a small scale with an emphasis on local and regional artists and performers. The wonderful Norman Cathedral and historic buildings attract visitors from elsewhere in the UK and abroad.

During 2012, Royal Albert Memorial Museum was named Museum of the Year (Art Fund), University of Exeter was named University of the Year (Sunday Times), and Exeter College was named College of the Year (Times Literary Supplement).

Local issues

Exeter is attracting major retailers such as John Lewis and Ikea, but there are concerns about the intensity of retail development in the city and the emphasis on national chains. Through the City Centre Strategy and other initiatives, local organisations are pressing for more emphasis on space for leisure/cultural use and for smaller independent retailers.

Planned growth on the east side of the city near the Pinhoe and Topsham has had local objections, as has proposed residential development adjacent to Alphington

ward in Teignbridge. Traffic and associated parking challenges in central locations are a common source of friction.

Despite the substantial cultural presence in Exeter, funding has been variable.

Exeter City Council's Labour administration has embarked on a programme of capital projects which are raising debt levels to unprecedented heights. This is having an impact on services. Labour blames the Coalition, despite the Council having access to more funding through the New Homes Bonus. A flash point will be the deteriorating standards of the local environment.

On the plus side, Exeter has an active and successful community projects sector.

Exeter Bus Station is overdue for a full overhaul, but Council plans for a new bus station near the present location are on hold. Labour is proposing a £20m swimming pool to anchor the development. Neighbouring redevelopment of the city centre site by private sector partners has also been delayed by the economic situation, but is expected to come forward within the next two years.

Exeter's mainline rail links and areas along the flood plain of the Exe have been seriously affected by flooding in successive years. Funding is allocated and preventative works underway, but the risks remain significant and on the political agenda.

New rail stations for the local network are planned and there has been an increase in park-and-ride services. However, traffic across Exe Bridges continues to be a daily problem and a priority issue for the Chamber of Commerce and other businesses in discussions with Devon County Council and the City Council.

To find out more - contact with the local party

For more information on the constituency, contact:

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Please note that she cannot be involved in a candidate's campaign.

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