



Exeter City Centre

A city centre vision for a **green** capital

Final April 2011

Our **Vision for Exeter** is to become

- a prosperous city
- a learning city
- an accessible city
- a city with strong communities
- a city that is healthy & active
- a safe city
- a city that cares for the environment
- a city with homes for everyone
- a city of culture

Source: Exeter Vision

INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGE: GROWING A CENTRE FOR A GREEN CAPITAL

‘There is a sense in which Exeter (though not a twentieth the size) is a bigger place than, say, South London – the sense of style, which comes out in small things as well as in great.’

Thomas Sharp (1946)

With its stunning landscape setting, good road and rail links and a pleasant historic city centre, Exeter is already known as an attractive place to live with a high quality of life. Exeter is a small city with a population of just over 120,000, but add its rural catchment to this figure and the city provides an important resource for a population of almost half a million people. This importance has only recently been fully recognised. Exeter has traditionally not always embraced its city status and perhaps tended to be seen as a slightly provincial place - with all its benefits and drawbacks.

Exeter is changing and is at a critical and exciting juncture in its development as a city. Following a period of major positive change over the past decade the city continues to attract investment and the population of greater Exeter could increase by as much as 50% by 2026. Exeter city centre will need to grow physically to respond to this growth and deliver everything a great city of its potential size and status requires. The reduced carbon agenda will also undoubtedly result in a change in the way development is approached and works.

This does not mean that Exeter’s fundamental character needs to change. Exeter is valued for its manageable scale, green and open character, pace of life and proximity to the stunning Devon countryside. Retaining and where necessary reinstating this charm - whilst providing a much improved City centre - must be at the heart of the City Centre Vision.

Before the Second World War, Exeter was known as a ‘jewel’ of not just local but national, if not international, importance. The city

retains many of its charms and historic attractions, but has also lost a lot of the elements that made it work as a compact historic city. This is not the first time Exeter found itself facing significant change and a lot can be learnt from previous successes and mistakes. The key is in retaining what works and embracing change as long as it supports the recognised qualities of the city. Growth and change can help repair past mistakes and strengthen Exeter’s sense of place.

Exeter’s location nestled in the Devon landscape put it in close touch with its surrounding countryside. Exeter is a green city in character and appearance and supports a population directly living off the local land. People move to Exeter to be close to the countryside and enjoy a healthier lifestyle. Local food production is amongst the most prized in the country and beyond. Demand for allotments is growing in the city and the success of the annual local food festival is testimony to the interest local residents take in a greener and healthier way of life. Most towns and cities have the aspiration to be greener and capitalise on the sustainability agenda, but few are in as strong a position as Exeter with its already existing ‘green capital’ at the heart of a low carbon region. Exeter’s excellent quality of life makes it possible to attract creative minds, investors and visitors. In a similarly exceptional location to Freiburg in south-west Germany, one of the world leading sustainable cities, Exeter could be in a good position to embrace a future as a genuinely green city – benefiting from the lifestyle changes, business opportunities and environmental benefits this status would bring.

Exeter could not just be a good, but a great place to live and work. It has the raw ingredients that make a fantastic city – a stunning landscape setting, a centre steeped in history that retains many of its features, a riverside within close proximity of the city centre, a well known university and a young population, a rural hinterland famous for its food and strong communities. We believe Exeter has a once in a lifetime opportunity to once again become the ‘jewel’ it was once known as. Exeter can establish itself as a ‘green capital’ that balances a cultural, retail and employment offer and city centre

environment to match that of much larger cities with a green and an environmentally sustainable place to live at a comfortable scale.

Exeter’s strategic location at the gateway to the south-west also presents significant potential to develop more strongly as a regional tourist centre.

In recognition of its potential and to help shape the change that is already afoot, Exeter City Council has commissioned a Vision for the city centre. The City is already clear about the future direction it wants the city to take and has demonstrated, by successfully attracting and delivering the Met Office and Princesshay over the past decade, that Exeter is ready to embrace and positively deliver change.

The City has expressed its general ambitions in the Exeter City Vision. The City Centre Vision builds on the successes realised to date and sets out a vision for the spatial development of the city centre over the next 15-20 years and beyond within the framework of the City Vision. The ambition of the City Centre Vision is to develop from the Exeter City Vision a narrative for the future development of the city centre that delivers the aims of the Exeter City Vision and harness’ the energy of the city centre for the benefit of the city as a whole and it should always be viewed in its wider context. The specific purpose of the City Centre Vision is to:

- provide a development context for a City Centre Transportation Strategy and other potential studies and projects in the City Centre.
- form the basis of a vision for any future City Centre Action Area Plan.

STRUCTURE

A Vision doesn’t mean much if it is not deliverable. This City Centre Vision is split into two distinct components to facilitate change over time:

- A number of framework principles help to bring out and build on those elements that are, or could be, memorable and great about Exeter; and
- four big moves or development projects that represent one way of delivering change within this framework over the coming years to deliver the ambitions of a prosperous and growing city.

The framework principles apply to the whole of the city centre and together create a basic structure within which specific development projects can happen. The structure builds on the essential qualities of Exeter’s city centre and sets out a long-term direction for change.

The big moves are place specific projects that can be turned into deliverable development briefs for specific sites. Together, the framework and the big moves set out the key elements that deliver the vision for Exeter city centre.

The spatial vision is not a blueprint for development, but sets out a direction and basic principles for change. Each big move has a number of different design solutions and it is not the intention of this vision to be prescriptive as long as the basic principles are met by the design solution. Equally, each big move can be delivered as a complete project or may come forward incrementally over time. A number of small steps can create a big move.

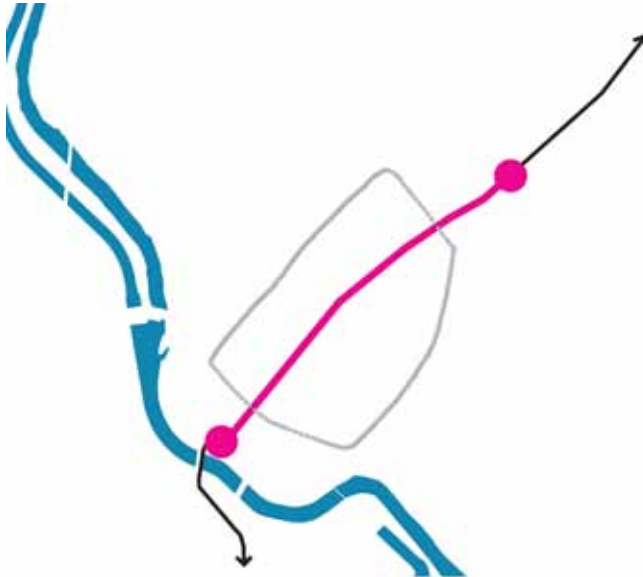
THE SPATIAL FRAMEWORK



Study area



An attractive secondary network of streets and lanes will connect the city centre quarters beyond the linear spine



Spatial events at either end of the linear spine will contain the energy within the centre



Buildings will reflect the underlying topography building on Exeter's vernacular

Exeter's setting and topography are perhaps its most important asset. Located on a ridge and on a river, and contained by rising landform on three sides, landscape and topography directly shape the physical form and character of the city. Its setting in the Devon landscape in close proximity to the sea and two National Parks is also one of the City's big selling points. The intricate topography and complex views across the city maintain a direct connection between the city centre and its surrounding landscape and help make Exeter the unique place it is.

Exeter city centre has developed along a prominent east-west ridge running down to the river Exe. Today's Sidwell Street, High Street and Fore Street combine to create a distinct linear spine along this ridge line, extending to about 1.5km through a sequence of different character areas. The city centre quarters 'hang off' this spine and the majority of primary activity faces onto it. Development behind this linear facade has traditionally been secondary and now creates problems as the city centre is trying to expand into what once were tight backs and service yards contained by the city wall. It is essential that any new development relates to the topography and linear spine to reinforce the sense of place and make best use of the underlying topography and views, whilst extending city centre activity beyond the linear spine.

Cities don't grow in a sequential way. Whilst there may be pockets of development potential within the city walls, the delivery of development of the required scale would be very difficult in the current form. For a natural 'ebb and flow' of development to take place in the centre there needs to be some spare capacity.

Principle 1: Future development in the city centre will 'hang off' the ridge to reinforce its importance as the spine of the city and make best use of the underlying topography. The energy will be retained within the centre by punctuating the linear centre at either end with a destination space.

Any new extended city structure should build on the foundations of the historic city structure – using the timeless and simple medieval "cross" formed by High Street, North Street and South Street as the basic platform for accommodating new pieces of city. Like a finely balanced set of scales it is vital that no one new piece tips this basic city structure over.

The city centre 'leaks' energy towards the east and western end due to the extra-ordinary linear nature of the central spine and a lack of containment at either end, following the removal of the city gates. A spatial interruption, or event, is required near the bottom of Fore Street and the top of Sidwell Street to capture the energy in the immediate city centre. Each event should be about arrival at a new place and signals the transition between commercial centre and edge of centre.

Principle 2: The distinctive character of the different quarters along the linear spine will be reinforced, creating area with their own unique character and focus. The different quarters and their attractions will be well connected beyond the linear spine.

There are currently six different, loosely defined quarters along the central spine (Cathedral Quarter, Castle Quarter, Guildhall and High Street, Princesshay and West Quarter). The character and focus of some of these is positive and clearly defined with good connectivity between quarters

(for example Cathedral Quarter and Princesshay). Other quarters (for example Castle and part of West Quarters) are less successful and poorly linked. Any new development in the city centre should serve to draw out the unique character of the different quarters - both in terms of their physical form and centre for activity - and create a series of linked spaces and routes at a secondary level beyond the linear spine to spread the pressure on the High Street and create a sequence of clear destinations. The linear spine will become a strong and active urban street fronted by a mix of uses with frequent openings into the adjacent quarters.

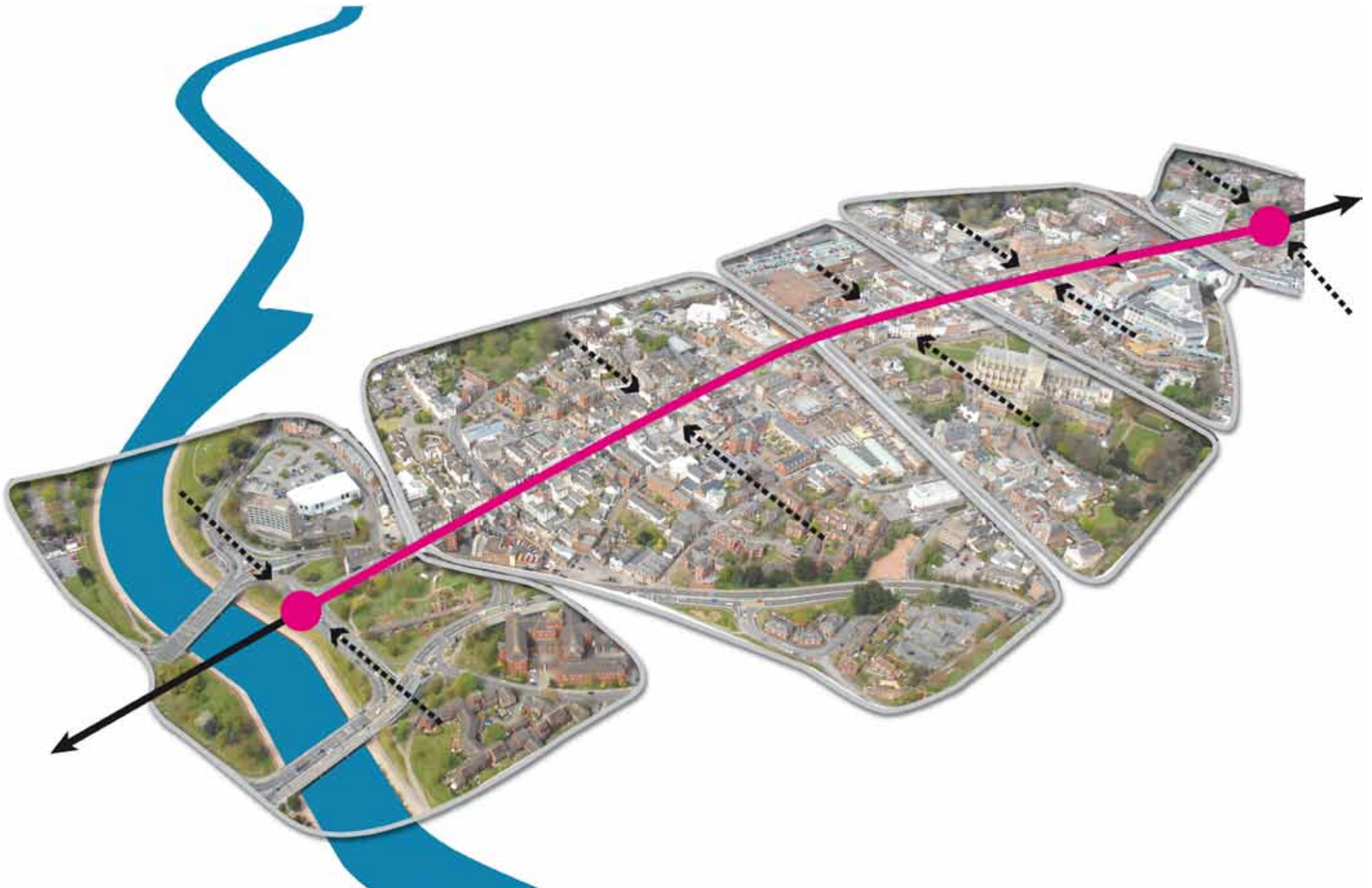
Principle 3: Any new development in the city centre will respect the city skyline and reflect the underlying topography.

Exeter is a low rise city. Few landmark such as the Cathedral and century church spires punctuate the skyline. The topography of Exeter creates great views of the city skyline from the surrounding hills and vice versa. Green hills form the backdrop to many views from within the city centre. Generally, historic buildings reflect the topography, with small footprints stepping up and down hills. This sensitive response to topography has been lost in the 20th century when some monolithic blocks (such as the Guildhall Shopping Centre) have started to obscure the landform and views towards the city centre.

The intricate and distinctive landform should be expressed by the built form. Working with Exeter's traditional built form (such as Colleton Crescent), occasional terraces of exceptional architectural quality can run along the contours to command special views. Tall buildings shall only be permitted in special circumstances. Where considered appropriate, they must be of great architectural quality and respond to the historic urban fabric.

A LINEAR CITY CENTRE ON A RIDGE

The linear ridge line will act as an urban spine connecting all city centre quarters. New places and 'events' will provide containment to the linear spine and retain the city's energy within the centre. Development in Exeter's city centre will reinforce the City's unique topography.



Settlement in Exeter dates back to prehistoric times and became the centre of south-west England in Roman times, when the basic urban structure of the walled city was established. In the 16th Century Exeter was the fifth wealthiest town in England outside London. Exeter remained a compact walled city until the early 1700s when development burst out of the city walls. The majority of today's city centre development is still contained within the historic walls. Exeter can make a lot more of its history, repair some of the urban grain within the city walls and improve the legibility of the historic walled city to ensure that Exeter's rich history will continue to play an important role in its urban form and character.

Principle 4: Development in the city centre will improve the legibility of the historic walled city and city gates.

The remains of Exeter's city walls are still very evident on plan, but are only partly visible or accessible on the ground. Efforts have been made recently to establish a circular wall walk, which has added a high quality pedestrian route in those areas where sufficient public space could be generated. Any new development in proximity to the city wall should incorporate high quality pedestrian links to and along the wall and mark historic gateways to the visitor.

Principle 5: Repair the finer grain of the walled city

A significant amount of the finer grain historic development within the walls has been lost to post-war development. The growth of Exeter's city centre represents an opportunity to repair some of the past mistakes within the city wall as it will free up space and flexibility within the walls. Development within the city walls should seek to bring back the tighter and smaller scale urban grain along the street elevation. Where larger floor plates are necessary, for example to accommodate modern office buildings, hotels or large shops they should be sensitively integrated. All buildings should reflect the underlying topography and present an animated and finer grain along their public face.

Principle 6: Create an exciting mix of contemporary design and historic buildings

Exeter is not a museum piece. A lot of the historic fabric has been irrevocably lost in the Second World War and post war years. Exeter's city centre is a lively, mixed place in which historic buildings exist happily next to contemporary buildings and uses. Development in the city centre should not lose these qualities or impose an historic importance on areas in which most traces of it have been lost. In contrast, Exeter can showcase how contemporary design can sit comfortably next to historic buildings as long as the urban grain and scale are respected.

A HISTORIC WALLED CITY

Exeter's rich history will once again be evident in the urban form of the city centre. Exeter will showcase how contemporary design can sit comfortably next to historic buildings.





Exeter has been using the ‘Capital City’ tag for some years to promote its primary status in the locality. Whilst not a capital in the true sense of the word (although the location of Devon County Council and the Courts), the label has been useful to communicate the ambition of a first-class city in the region. A capital city centre goes beyond the notion of a governing capital. It brings to mind a level of cultural importance that goes beyond economic success or governance.

Exeter’s population reaches well beyond the 120,000 people living in its boundaries, given the sizeable hinterland that relies on the city as its primary resource. Already today, Exeter’s city centre offers a lot more facilities than most town’s of a similar scale. Successful events such as the annual food festival demonstrate the scale of events the city centre is capable of hosting.

We want to revive and develop the notion of Exeter city centre as the centre of a ‘green capital’ to highlight its potential - an ambitious place of culture and enterprise that makes the most of its location in the Devon countryside at the heart of a low carbon region. Exeter needs to grow as a place to fully embrace this status and deliver its benefits.

Principle 7: Match projected housing growth in Exeter with growth in culture, services, employment and retail. Exeter should be recognised as a cultural centre of the peninsula.

It is essential for a ‘capital’ city centre that Exeter’s cultural offer matches the other areas of growth in the city, such as housing, employment and retail. The cultural offer is often the less tangible element that distinguishes a great place – starting with a lively evening economy with restaurants, pubs, bars, events space, leisure facilities and the more traditional museums, theatres and gallery spaces. There is already a significant amount of dispersed cultural activity in Exeter that does not have the presence it could have. The refurbished museum will be a major cultural draw, and, together with the Phoenix Art Centre, Gandy Street, the library and the Castle, will create the heart of a Cultural Quarter.

Part of Exeter’s success as a cultural centre will be down to strengthening the ‘brand’ of the cultural quarter and centrally promoting events such as the Food Festival, Animated Exeter and the Exeter Festival. Importantly, with the growth of the city centre, the cultural offer will need to grow by adding new venues in central locations and promoting culture as a key part of Exeter’s identity.

The role of the city centre as an office location and place for employment should also be strengthened. There has been a move for office development to be located on the edge of town within easy reach of the M5 – a trend which is set to continue with new development at Skypark, the Matford Business Park and the Exeter Science Park. Whilst there is a place for edge of town development for certain types of business, it is essential for a city centre of the scale and ambition of Exeter to compete as an office location. Office staff are an essential part of life in the city centre and enliven streets, shops, cafes and restaurants at lunchtime. Employment in the city centre is limited and tends to offer limited flexibility. This trend needs to be reversed.

Last but not least, Exeter should become the premier shopping destination in the Peninsula with a continuously improving offer of department stores and specialist shops retaining or improving vitality in all commercial areas.

Principle 8: Create a true mixed use urban centre including more employment, housing and evening economy, delivered in a higher density, space efficient urban form.

Until recently, Exeter’s city centre comprised primarily retail development with little activity past 6pm. The new development at Princesshay successfully introduced residential development and a greater choice of restaurants within the heart of the city. The extension of this mixed use centre will encourage a stronger evening economy and help create an ‘18 hour city’.

Historically, Exeter’s built form has been low but very compact, contained by the city walls. War

damage and unsympathetic post-war development have fragmented the tight urban grain. Surface car parking and wide road corridors further emphasise the loosening of the urban form along the edge of the city centre. The energy of the built form is allowed to ‘bleed out’ and the city structure has become hard to read. New development in the city centre should once again be compact, space efficient and should be respectful of the old city form and scale. Larger scale development should be sympathetically integrated in the existing urban fabric.

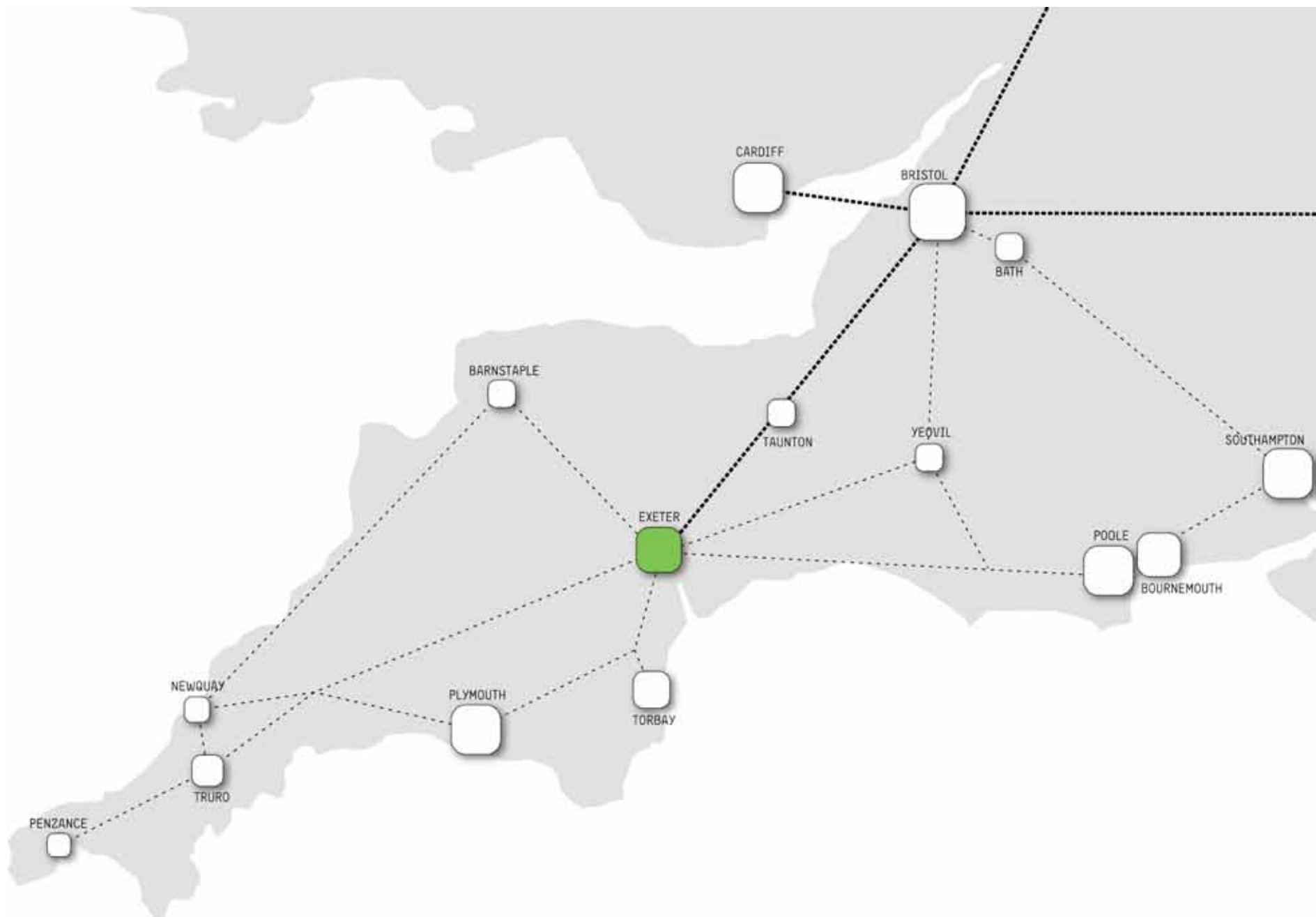
Principle 9: Become a genuinely ‘green’ place that moves beyond the standard sustainability agenda and takes advantage of local enterprise and business opportunities

Exeter’s location in the Devon countryside with its reputation for local produce and green living, combined with a young population and growing investment in business make the city an ideal candidate for a pioneering green city. Exeter already is a green city in character and appearance and attracts people who enjoy a healthier lifestyle. All of this puts Exeter in a great position to become a beacon for sustainable and healthy living, embracing new technologies and attracting creative minds from within the ‘green’ industry.

There are many ways towards becoming a greener city centre – the already planned provision of a district wide renewable energy network; an attractive public transport, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and improvement of air quality by reducing traffic in the city centre; reducing energy in new construction and insulating existing housing stock; improving biodiversity links; creation of jobs in green technologies and a reduction of CO₂ emissions in line with the draft supplement to PPS1 and the Exeter Climate change strategy (2008-2018) are just a few examples. These ‘hard’ measures need to be paralleled by public awareness campaigns and showcasing of Exeter’s green ambitions – to engage local people, attract visitors and investors, and establish a name as the centre for a ‘green capital’.

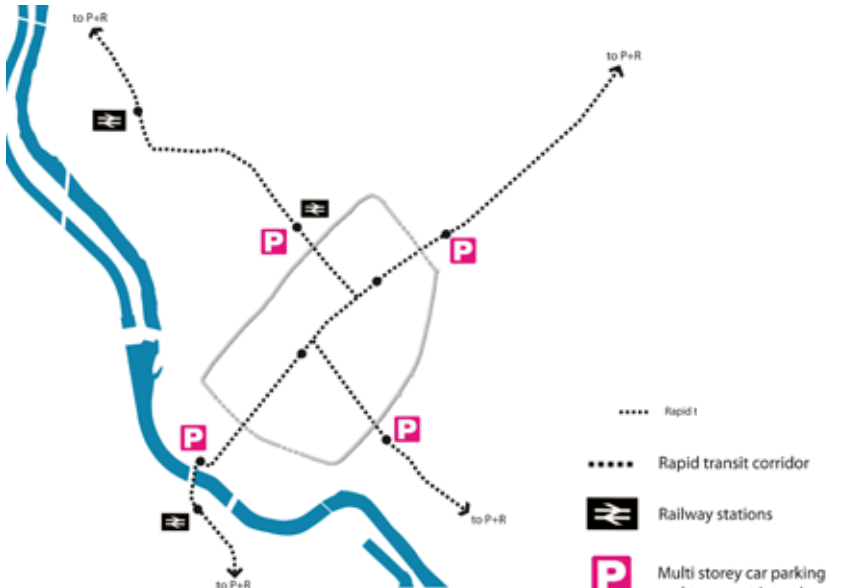
A CENTRE FOR A GREEN CAPITAL

Exeter city centre will be known as the centre of a 'green capital' – a cultural and economic hub embracing green technologies at the heart of a powerful region, with all the facilities associated with a capital city. Exeter will complete its jump beyond county town status without losing its local charm.





Illustrative movement framework



Public transport strategy diagram

Principle 10: Prioritise pedestrians in the city centre and discourage cross town traffic

As Exeter grows both in population and economic activity, so will the pressure on its transport infrastructure. Exeter’s city centre streets were not designed for the growing volumes of people and traffic. A significant volume of the traffic currently using the city centre is avoidable cross town traffic generated from within the city. By removing traffic from the central zone more space will be generated for people and enhance the offering of the city centre as a destination.

In order to create a city centre of the highest quality to rival the best European examples, providing easy access and a pedestrian friendly environment linked to a clear public transport and car parking strategy are essential. Other historic cities in the UK (for example York or Bath) and mainland Europe have successfully excluded traffic from the historic core during daytime hours. Largely pedestrianising the area within the city walls during core shopping hours (for example 10-6pm) would enable people to move around freely without worrying about cars or buses in the daytime and still maintain activity in the evening. To encourage public transport use and minimise conflict with pedestrians, clear designated rapid transit corridors should be created and maintained through the central area.

Car parking for residents and shoppers should be strategically located on the edge of the pedestrianised zone, in close proximity to the city gates and within a short walk of the main attractions. Provision should continue to be made through parking provision and public transport to accommodate the less mobile. Car parking should be strategically sign posted to reduce unnecessary cross town traffic. For visitors from outside Exeter and daily commuters, a rapid and direct bus service should provide transport from Park and Ride facilities on the edge of town and from St David’s Station into the heart of the city.

Over time, opportunities to remove multi storey car parking from within the city walls should be explored when circumstances arise. Surface car parking in and around the city centre should be replaced by multi-storey car parks to maximise usable space and improve the public realm. All changes to the transport infrastructure should be phased to change user behaviour over time.

Principle 11: Make public transport the preferred means of getting into the city and remove conflict between pedestrians and buses

At present the High Street acts in effect as a linear bus station which compromises the quality and safety of the pedestrian environment. Bus traffic should be rationalised to only permit key through services within the city walls along clearly marked dedicated routes which will reduce conflict with pedestrians and still maintain a reliable, visible and frequent service. On some routes and entries it may be possible and desirable to make public transport the only means of accessing the city centre.

Principle 12: Create a clear network of interconnected high quality pedestrian dominated streets, public spaces and parks

There is currently a limited number of attractive pedestrian routes away from the main linear route of Sidwell Street/High Street/Fore Street. Where links exist they are often through back lanes and service areas, discouraging people from exploring areas immediately beyond the linear centre. To maximise the space, character and quality of the city centre, a series of attractive circular walks should be created connecting the different quarters and public spaces. The lanes, streets and spaces should be overlooked by positive development and entice people beyond the High Street into the different city centre quarters. The pattern and hierarchy of movement should be determined primarily by the place function of the street network, not by its traffic function.

Principle 13: Improve pedestrian and cycle access and enhance the arrival experience

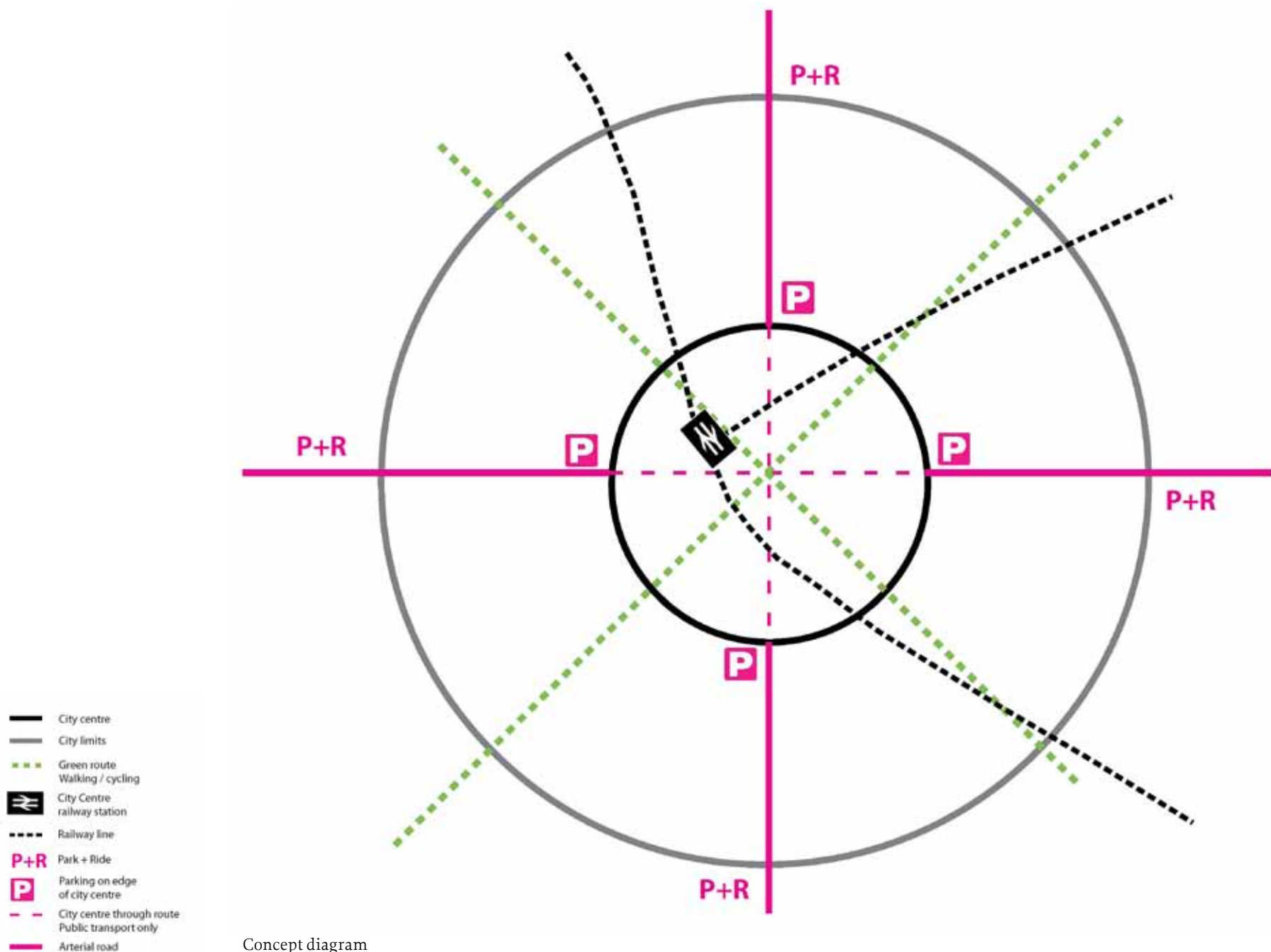
Great places allow for natural way-finding and make it easy and enticing for people to move around. Road infrastructure and traffic on the eastern and southern side of the city centre are one of the biggest barriers to making Exeter’s city centre work efficiently and be more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. Western Way, the Inner Bypass and Exe Bridges were primarily designed for traffic to access and bypass the city centre and in doing so create a perceived barrier with the adjacent residential neighbourhoods.

Over time, development has turned its back on the road, compromising pedestrian access into the city. The inner ring road now forms the edge of the city centre and needs to work better as a series of streets. Whilst retaining their strategic function, the main transport corridors around the edge of the city centre must become attractive streets addressed by development, facilitating frequent pedestrian and cycle permeability. High quality pedestrian environments that will allow people to easily and safely get into and around the city centre and shape peoples’ understanding and enjoyment of the city. Roundabouts on the edge of the city centre should become tightened junctions overlooked by positive development and with generous high quality space for pedestrian and cyclists on their desire lines. High quality cycle links to the city centre with easy access points and safe and convenient parking should help make cycling an attractive alternative to the car. This change will most likely happen gradually as a series of smaller projects, but together these will contribute to a significant change in the quality of the city centre experience.

Promoting active travel including the provision of high quality walking and cycling routes throughout the city centre are integral to delivering a ‘green capital’.

AN ACCESSIBLE AND JOINED UP CITY CENTRE

The city centre will be a place for people - a predominantly pedestrianised central zone with restricted vehicle access during daytime hours and car parks on the edge of the central zone. Easy to use and direct public transport will be the main mode of transport for visitors to the city centre and will run a long a clearly designated route within the historic centre. The city centre will be easily accessible on foot via clear, attractive and safe streets from surrounding neighbourhoods.



Concept diagram



Exeter’s prime location on the river Exe is a major asset that is significantly underplayed. Post-war transport infrastructure at Exe Bridges and Western Way separates the city centre from its riverside. The historic quayside is valued and attractive, but its small scale and poor connection to the City centre fail to make the most of it. Visitors have to choose whether to visit the city centre or the Quayside – they present themselves as separate parts, poorly connected parts of the City. Exeter should once again embrace its riverside as a destination and a place to live, work and play. Achieving this change is ambitious and requires significant infrastructure changes. However, it also creates fantastic development opportunities along a south facing waterfront.

Principle 14: Create a new place on the river at Exe Bridges

The linear spine of the city centre High Street drops off towards the river and loses its energy. Faced with dominant road infrastructure and out of town development on the other side of the river, there is no incentive to draw people towards the riverside. A new destination at the bottom of the hill is needed to create a new place at the intersection of the natural river valley and the man-made city structure. This place will reconnect the City centre with its river and improve the link between the two parts of Exe Valley Park. Rather than an alternative to the historic Quay, the new riverside will create an added incentive to visit this part of the city, provide an improved route to the Quay, an attractive circular walk between the City centre, riverside and the quayside and access to the surrounding countryside.

Any new development on the riverside must be of the highest quality. It must present its best face to the river and create a positive transition in scale and character between the City centre and the river.

Principle 15: Improve foot and cycle connection to the river and surrounding countryside and create more usable green space in the city centre

Few cities in the UK, among them some of the most attractive such as Bath and Edinburgh, can boast a setting as picturesque as Exeter. Because of its ridge line location and intricate topography, views of the surrounding hills are available from most areas of the city centre. This feeling of being in the Devon landscape yet in the centre of a lively city is unique and colours the character of the place, giving a feeling of space and rooting the centre in its locality.

Access to green space is one of the most important aspects in creating quality of life in a city environment. Exeter has a great advantage in its location and proximity to high quality natural green space. There are a number of green spaces in the city centre and the riverside is a fantastic resource for residents and visitors, however access to and connection between these green spaces can be improved to complete a green space network of the highest quality.

The City Centre Vision connects into Exeter’s Green Infrastructure (GI) Vision, which conceives Exeter as a compact city with a clear distinction between urban area and countryside. It sets out strategic GI corridors of significant scale on the edge of the city centre. Significant steps have been made towards the provision of a safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle network to connect the city centre green spaces with the strategic GI corridors to create seamless attractive pedestrian and cycle routes from doorstep to countryside. This network should be further enhanced and extended. Where possible routes along this network should be ‘greened’ with tree planting. Improving access to existing green spaces on the waterfront at Exe Bridges and better link the City Centre with its riverside.

Principle 16: Reduce the impact of traffic and road infrastructure on the riverside

The riverside at Exe bridges is dominated by flood protection and road infrastructure and has a traffic dominated ‘out-of-town’ feel. By removing the traffic dominance from the riverside a much richer place can be created. The green space around the old city wall can be integrated in an urban park with a soft riverside rich in biodiversity. Flood defence systems should be designed in sensitively as part of the public realm.

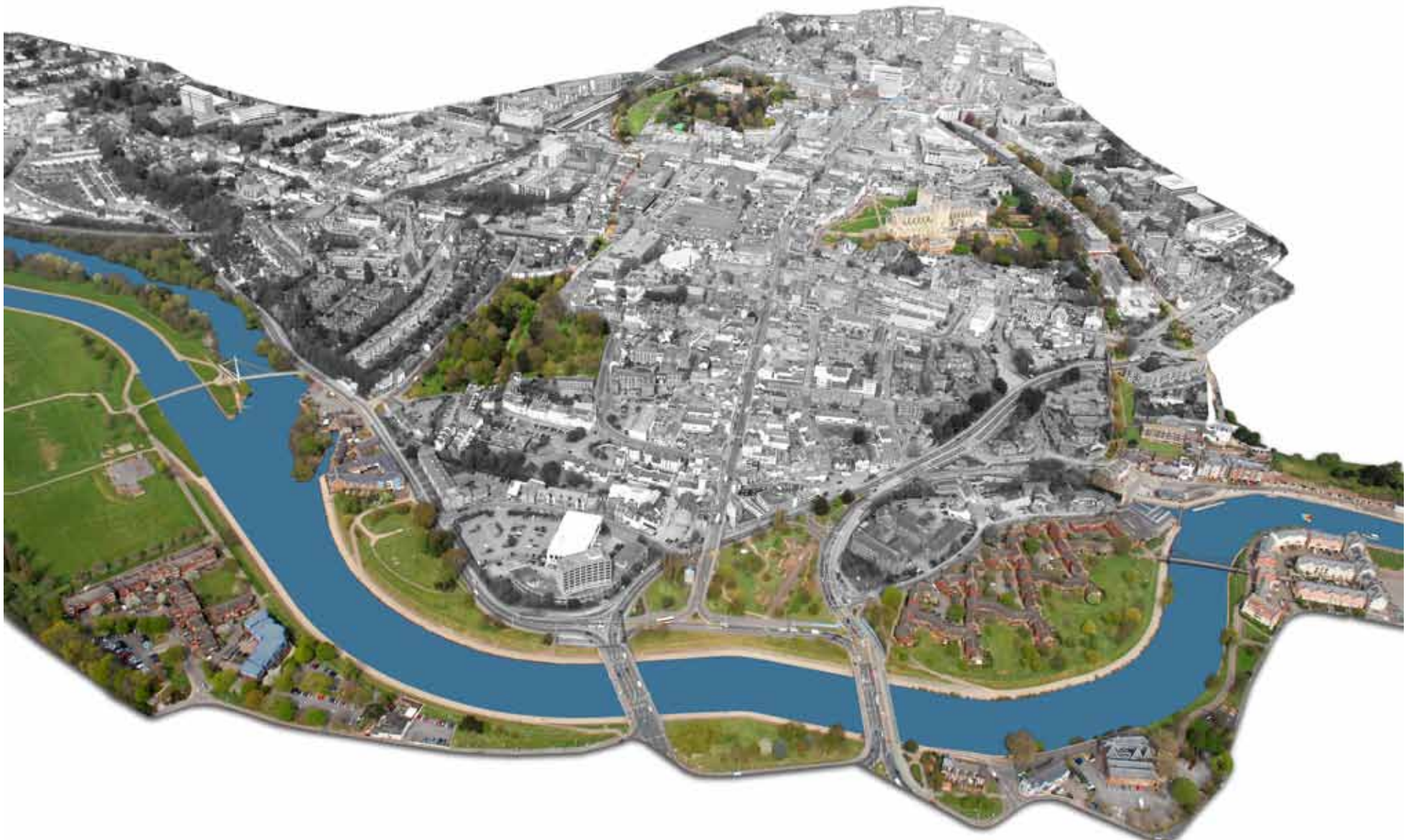
Principle 17: Increase urban biodiversity by creating and connecting habitats within the built fabric and along the riverside

Exeter is a green city with significant areas of green space within the compact city centre. The value of these spaces can be significantly enhanced by improved green linkages with new green spaces, urban tree planting. Green architecture, including green roofs and terraces, can also contribute to the urban biodiversity network, all supporting the vision for a ‘green capital’.

The Exe Valley Park is both an important recreational resource for residents of Exeter and a significant green corridor that connects the heart of the city with the surrounding countryside. Improved links between the city centre and the riverside will help to connect the northern and southern areas of the park with each other and with other green spaces in the city centre.

A GREEN CITY CENTRE WITH A RIVERSIDE

Exeter city centre will make the most of its riverside as an integral part of the city centre and a seamless link to the surrounding countryside. Exeter's city centre will be green in the true sense of the word and will have a linked network of green spaces and streets.



THE BIG MOVES

– MAKING THE VISION REALITY

The Vision spells out where Exeter city centre wants to see itself in the future. It is the first in a number of steps towards turning Exeter from a good to a great place.

The principles above create a flexible framework for growth over time. Within this framework, a number of specific projects will together help to realise Exeter's Vision as a 'Capital city centre'. These larger projects – or 'moves' will be accompanied by a series of smaller moves that will come about as opportunities are created, for example turning Western Way into a series of strategic streets fronted by development.

Delivering this change is of course a major challenge. The speed of delivering change will be directly linked to the economic climate in which the City is operating. The 'Big Moves' set out in this document could therefore happen in quick succession - judging by the significant leap Exeter has already taken in the past ten years - or over a longer period of time. Speed is not of primary importance as long as the momentum of change is carried forward. What is essential is that the bigger Vision is kept in sight as change happens. Only once all the big moves have been made will Exeter have realised its full potential.

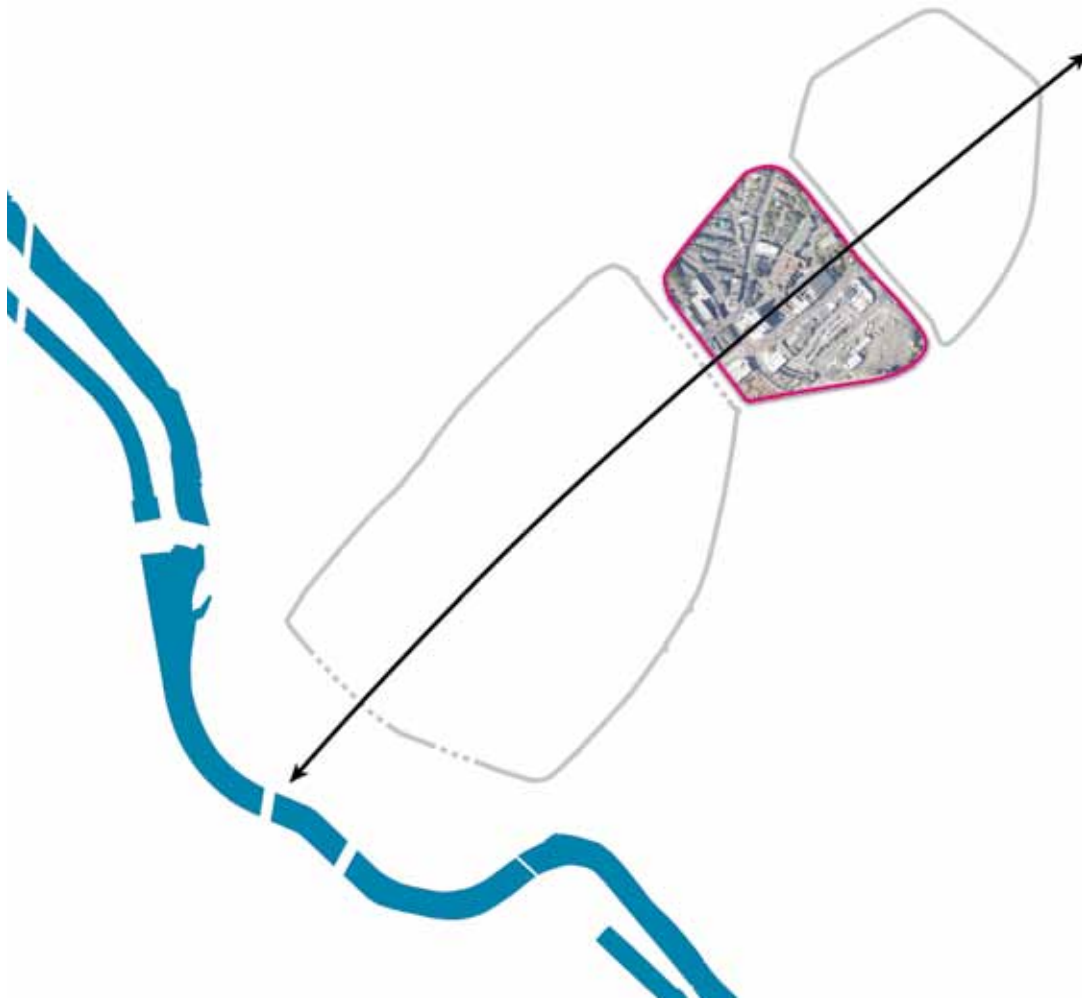
In line with the Vision for a green city centre, all big moves should contribute to the planned district energy network.



Illustrative example: East Quarter



SPACE FOR GROWTH



The Objective

The principles above set out basic rules for the growth of Exeter's city centre beyond the historic city walls. The first big move deals with creating space for the growth of the city centre in line with Exeter's ambition to establish itself as a 'capital' city centre with a cultural, retail and employment offer and city centre environment to match that of much larger cities.

Given the city's topography, its location along the urban spine and proximity to Princesshay and High Street, and the general condition and age of the built fabric, the most obvious location to grow the city centre is to the east.

By stepping outside the historic city walls, the new quarter to the east of the wall – here referred to as East Quarter – will be less constraint than development within the city walls and can have a different character. Development must of course still be sympathetic to its wider historic setting in scale, character and response to topography, but offers greater opportunity for redevelopment of a significant scale. Its location adjacent to Princesshay helps to consolidate a high quality mixed use centre of true city scale.

The bus station is one of the key arrival points into the city and redevelopment at East Quarter will need to incorporate a re-developed bus station offering a much improved arrival experience. The new development must positively address the surrounding streets and contribute to an improved arrival experience from Heavitree Road and Western Way.

Potential Solution

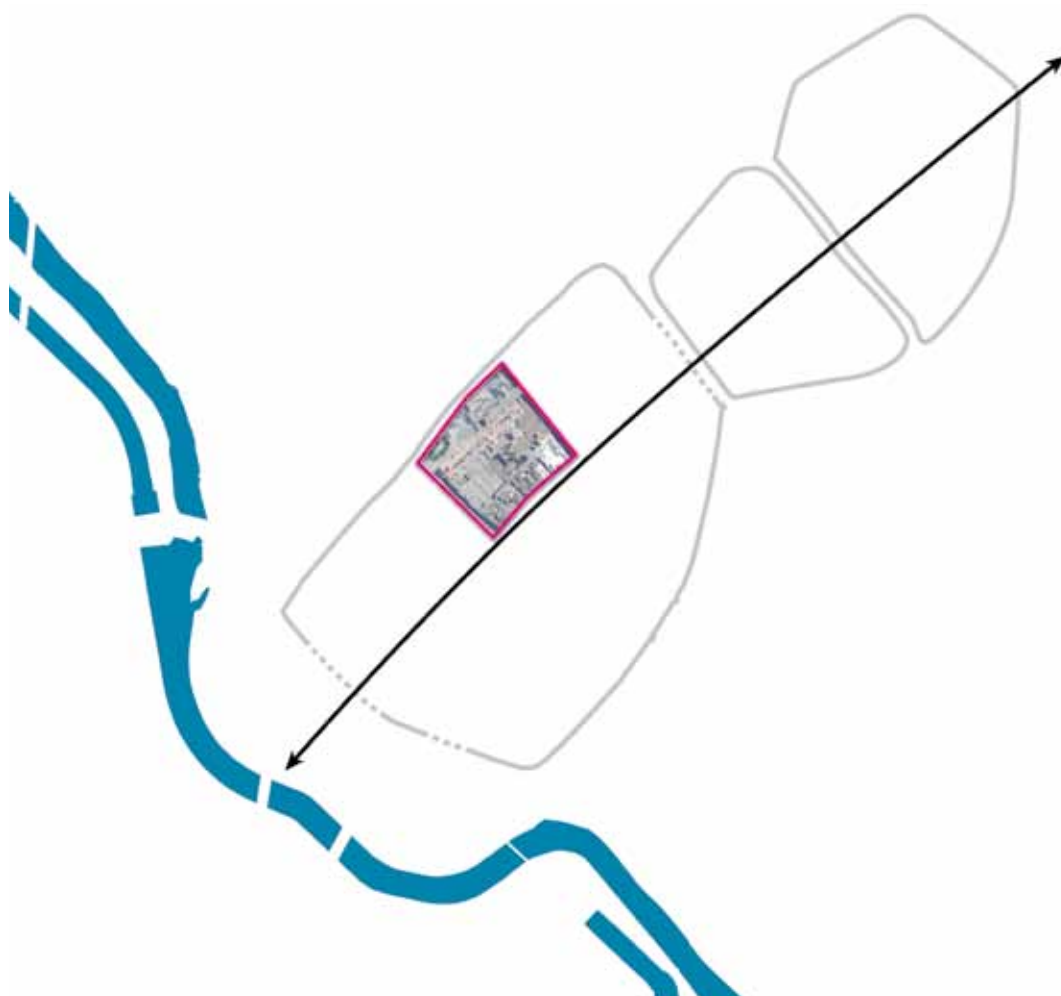
There are a number of different potential forms new development at East Quarter could take. The illustrative montage to the left shows one possible solution with a new public space at the Paris Street / Sidwell Street junction, a strengthened active street frontage and improved public realm along Sidwell Street. In this illustrative example, new development addresses Sidwell Street as its main spine and retains a fine grain of shop frontages at ground level, allowing larger floor plates to be accommodated within the block. Beyond Cheeke Street there will be transition in character between the new city quarter and 'St Sidwell's' – a mixed use quarter with a reduced scale, local and specialist shopping facilities, food and drink outlets and student accommodation.

By creating space for new development outside the city walls as the first step, subsequent regeneration in the compact centre will be facilitated.



Illustrative example: North Gate





BALANCING THE EFFECTS OF GROWTH

The Objective

There are parts of the existing centre that are not working as well as they could. In particular blocks to the west of South and North Streets and the Harlequins Shopping Centre off Paul Street are prime city centre locations which are not working as hard as they could and their built fabric is in need of renovation. Whilst commercially successful, the Guildhall Shopping Centre is a very large inward looking block which presents blank facades to two strategically important streets (North Street and Paul Street) and blocks attractive views from the north towards the city centre. Given their prime location, these sites could all be much improved as city centre environments and a key part of a mix of city centre destinations.

However, delivering change in a tight city centre with a growing population would be difficult without additional land to - temporarily or permanently - relocate some of the current uses. As is natural in the ongoing evolution of urban development, a new piece of city outside of the city wall will – at least temporarily - draw the energy of the city away from the existing centre. This effect would be balanced by the second big move, the regeneration within the city walls.

The first two moves are therefore directly linked. The first big move provides space for new development outside of the city walls which will in time open up opportunities within the walls to redevelop existing post war blocks into well connected mixed use areas of the city and a central destination to counterbalance the new quarter beyond the east gate.

An urban structure of two mixed use city centre destinations at either end of High Street will ultimately result in a strong and balanced city centre with the main pedestrian movement between the historic core and the East Quarter.

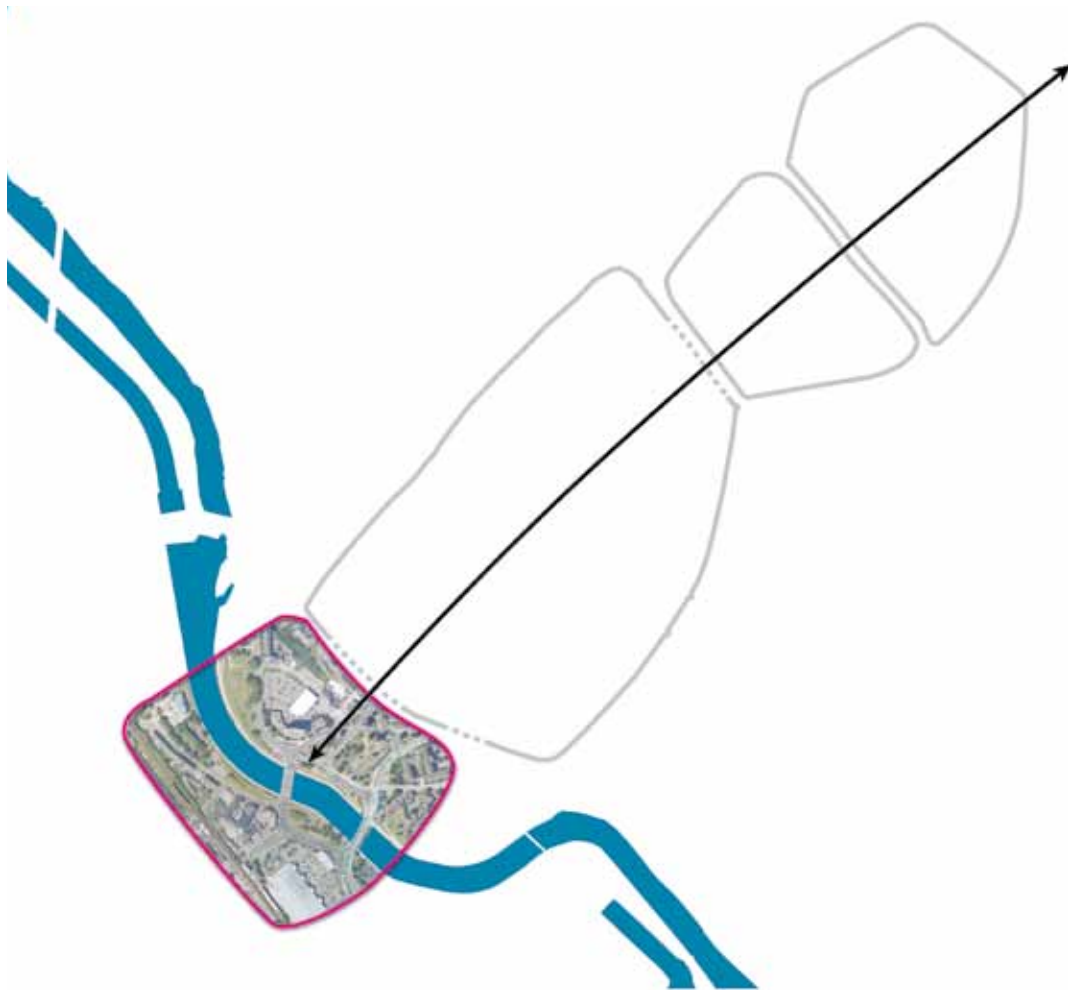
Potential Solution

There are a number of different forms the regeneration of this area could take. For example, the refurbishment of Guildhall and Harlequins Shopping Centres including the removal of the majority of car parking within of the city walls, the creation of active facades to key street elevations, and a built form that better reflects the underlying topography in wider views, would allow for a more sympathetic integration of buildings within the historic centre and a better pedestrian environment. As shown in the illustrative montage to the left, North Street could become an attractive pedestrianised street with active fronts on both sides and residential development on upper levels maintaining daytime and evening activity. Paul Street could be turned from a service street to a positive street with an active front and generous pedestrian space. A shared surface and breakout space at the junction between the two streets could signal the arrival in the historic centre.



Illustrative example: Exe Bridges





A NEW PLACE ON THE RIVER

The Objective

At present Exeter City Centre is largely turning its back on the riverside.

The historic quayside is separated from the city centre by road infrastructure. Development around Exe Bridges has an out of town feel, is dominated by traffic and fails to create a cohesive townscape. Exe Bridges acts to inhibit pedestrian traffic to the city centre from west of the Exe. Green spaces and heritage assets in this area are currently isolated by flood defences and highways infrastructure.

The first two moves will have created an extended and stable historic and commercial centre with its main focus between the historic cross and Cheeke Street. In order to avoid the energy of the linear city centre draining away towards the river, the third big move creates a significant new piece of city on the river, centred on Exe Bridges.

A new place at Exe Bridges could take a number of different forms, as long as it creates a positive destination at the bottom of Fore Street, mitigating the dominance of flood defence and transport infrastructure currently segregating the city from its riverside, and improving the experience for pedestrians and cyclists travelling to and along the riverside and between the city centre and the areas west of the river.

Importantly, a new place on the river should not provide an alternative to the historic quayside. It should offer a different destination that provides an attractive place at the junction of the central spine of the city centre and the River Exe.

Potential Solution

A taller and much denser mixed use urban development adjacent to St Thomas station – potentially a new office address - with attractive and direct links across the river could create a destination at the bottom of the hill and provide links between the city centre, riverside and areas west of the river that are attractive pedestrians.

A new pedestrian and cycle bridge along the line of the historic bridge, with more direct at grade crossings, could connect an improved public space at St Thomas Station with an arrival space into the historic centre at the bottom of Smythen and West Streets that is connected to the existing green spaces, heritage assets and riverside.

A new cultural building, such as a theatre, and extended riverside park on the east bank of the river, overlooked by residential development stepping up the hill towards the city centre could complete the revitalised city centre.



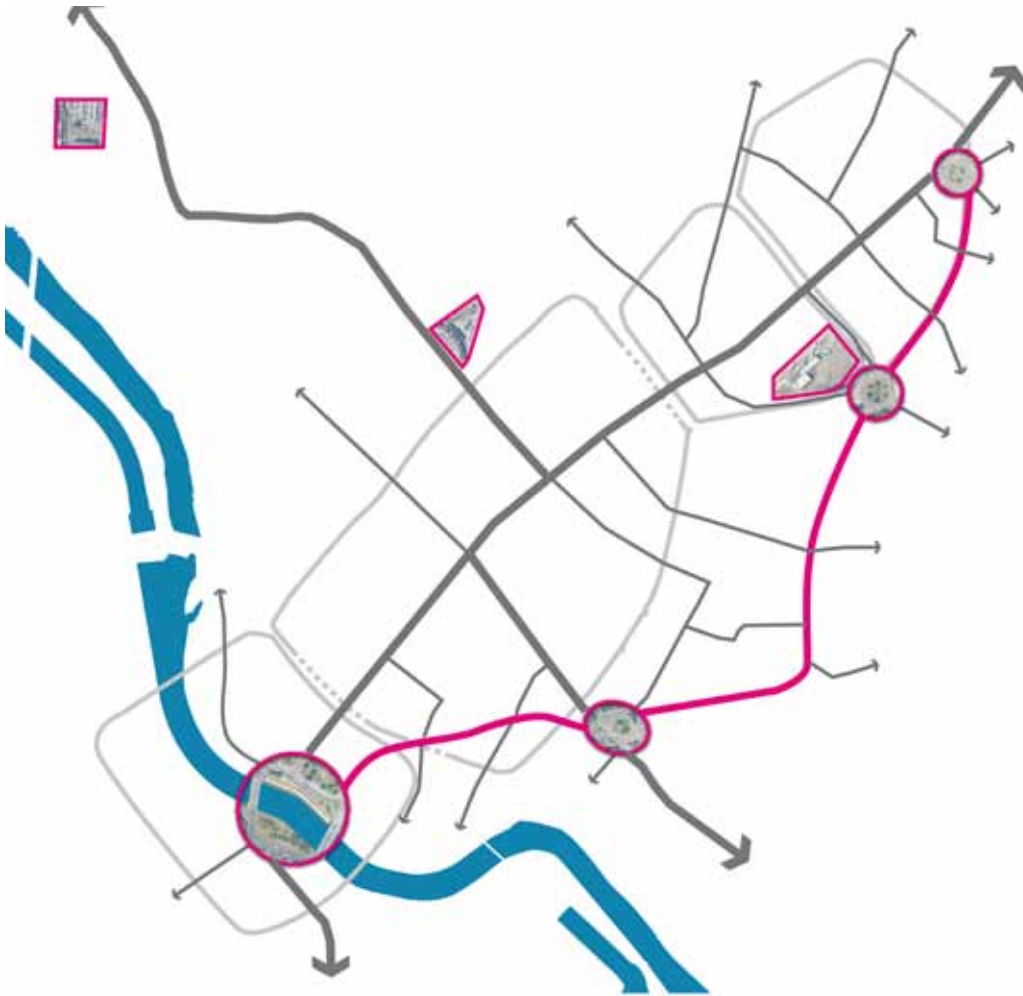
Illustrative example: St David's Station Square



Illustrative example: South Gate



A SENSE OF ARRIVAL



The Challenge

At present Western Way creates a physical barrier between the city centre and neighbourhoods in the south-east. Traffic dominated roundabouts make it difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to enter the city from neighbouring residential areas. The first impression to visitors entering the city centre from this direction is one of poorly defined urban form along wide strategic road corridors dominated by transport infrastructure and surface car parks.

Equally, the arrival experience from central rail and bus stations is not positive. St David's station visitors are faced with surface car parking and a narrow alleyway before making their way into the centre. Central station, in itself an attractive building, does not have the setting appropriate for such an important city centre destination. The bus station is land hungry and unattractive, surrounded by low, incoherent post-war development in need of regeneration.

The fourth big move seeks to improve the arrival experience into the city centre at rail and bus stations and along strategic streets and from surrounding neighbourhoods.

Potential Solution

The illustrative photomontages on the left demonstrate one way of achieving this move at St David's Station and at the junction of Western Way and Magdalen Street / Holloway Street. For example, a new pedestrianised square could be created at the front of St David's station, clearly articulating the desire line between the station entrance and a widened pedestrian route into the centre. By accommodating car parking in a multi-storey facility on the current overflow car park, a new mixed use building on the site of the existing surface car park could enclose an arrival space of appropriate scale and positively address the new square. At Central Station, reducing the drop off bays and creating a larger pedestrian space could improve the setting of the station. A new, tighter bus station surrounded by development could be integrated as part of any new development at East Quarter.

The severance of Western Way could be repaired by replacing the roundabouts at the intersections between Western Way and Magdalen Street / Holloway Street; Heavitree Road / Paris Street and Blackboy Road / Old Tiverton Road with signalised, pedestrian friendly urban junctions. Whilst not reducing its strategic traffic function, development along Western Way should enclose a series of strategic streets with frequent pedestrian and cycle friendly crossing points. Not only would this move significantly improve the pedestrian and cycle environment and approach into the city centre. Tightening of the junctions would also create development opportunities in prime locations.

Exeter city centre will once again become the ‘jewel’ of the south-west.

The city centre will embrace its part in the future of a genuinely ‘green’ city – a cultural and economic hub embracing green technologies at the heart of a powerful region, with all the facilities associated with a capital city. Exeter will complete its jump beyond county town status without losing the human scale, local charm and green character it is valued for.

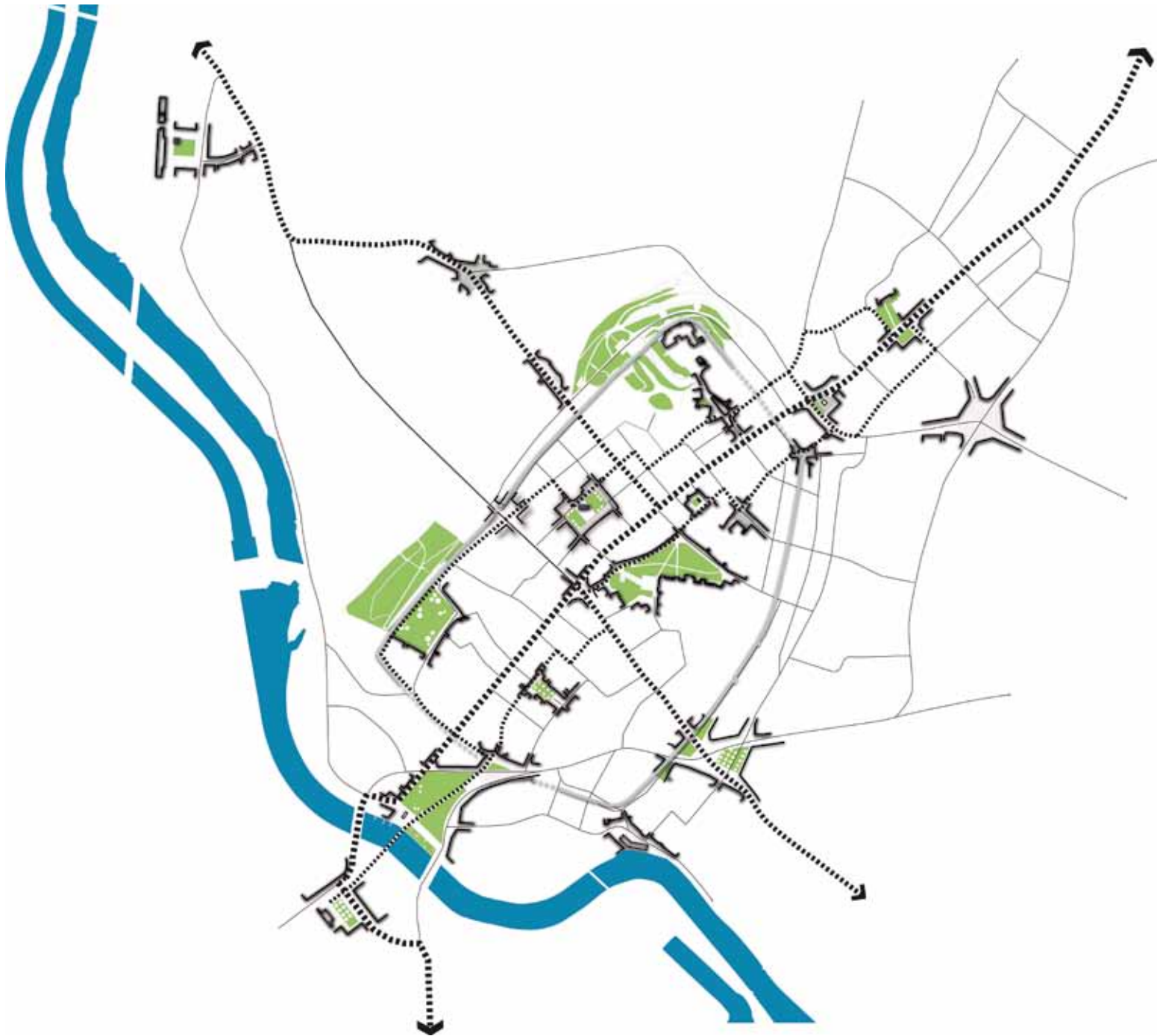
The linear ridge line will act as an urban spine linking eight distinctive city centre quarters to create an interconnected series of destinations and events throughout the city centre.

Exeter’s rich history will once again be evident in the urban form of the city centre. Exeter will showcase how contemporary design can sit comfortably next to historic buildings.

The city centre will be a place for people - a predominantly pedestrianised central zone with easy and attractive access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Exeter will be known for the quality of its city centre riverside, its green space network and seamless link to the surrounding countryside.

A CITY CENTRE FOR A 'GREEN CAPITAL'



Exeter city centre will be made up of eight loosely defined urban quarters hanging off the linear urban spine, each focused around a public space or destination. The transition between the quarters should be seamless to create a cohesive urban character. A secondary street network will connect the different destinations beyond the linear spine.

