

# A Public Art Strategy for Exeter

**Produced by** Art Work Exeter

**Date** July 2022

**Commissioned by** Exeter City Council, University of Exeter and Exeter Culture



# CONTENTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION
2. WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?
3. BEST PRACTICE
4. CONTEXT
5. PRIORITIES

5.1 Transparent & Inclusive Commissioning Practices

5.2 Place-making

5.3 Engagement & Participation

5.4 Developing The Creative Landscape/Creative Opportunities

5.5 Quality & Impact

5.6 Environmental Sustainability

## APPENDIX 1: TOOLKIT

## APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL QUOTES

## APPENDIX 3: CONSULTATION LIST

## APPENDIX 4: FURTHER INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Exeter is growing, both as an economy, and in size: Liveable Exeter's plan for the development of 12,000 new homes in eight sites across the city is a potential growth of the city's current population of nearly 40%. At the same time, the global pandemic, digitisation and the move to online retail has meant that city centres need to rethink their purpose.

By adopting the *Place-based Cultural Strategy for Exeter* (2019), Exeter City Council (ECC) and Liveable Exeter have embraced the ambition that Exeter will innovate and lead in the area of the environment, wellbeing, cultural literacy, creative making and heritage innovation, acknowledging the importance of arts and culture in place-making. The potential is there for Public Art to make a meaningful contribution towards a vibrant city and ecology for artists and organisations, as well as to promote greater and more meaningful community engagement and participation.

This report has been commissioned by Exeter City Council, in partnership with University of Exeter and Exeter Culture. It sets out new ways of thinking about Public Art in Exeter, focusing on how it can contribute to enhancing the city's unique heritage, culture and natural assets. Public Art is fundamental to place-making - a key strategy for the city.



LOVE IS THE HIGHEST ECONOMY by Still Moving. (Photo by) Exeter Phoenix 2022.

As well as the growth of the city demanding clearer guidelines for the commissioning of Public Art, there is a need for greater coherence and transparency around current practices across the city. There is also a need to make the process more inclusive and democratic, in terms of who gets to make decisions, and why. Exeter is home to an abundance of individuals and organisations with professional experience and expertise in the field of Public Art, the Creative Arts, cultural development, social practice, creative engagement and partnership working. Let's value and harness that wealth of talent.

In the creation of this Strategy, we consulted with artists and makers, curators and commissioners, consultants and specialists, community groups and individuals from across the city and beyond; we researched examples of exemplary work from within the UK as well as internationally. As a result, this Strategy proposes a series of Recommendations based on the following Priorities:

- **Transparent & Inclusive Commissioning Practices**
  - Establish a Public Art Advisory Group (PAAG) comprising stakeholders from across the arts, culture and heritage sectors, community, business, and civic realm.
  - Emphasise to developers that proactive, early engagement of artists through PAAG is integral to the planning application process.
- **Place-making**
  - Embed this Strategy - and culture more generally - into the Local Plan and the Liveable Plan, so that relevant expertise and community involvement are integral to local planning and decision-making processes.
  - Engage commerce more actively to create sustainable funding and investment opportunities.
- **Engagement & Participation**
  - Establish an [Urban Room](#) in the city centre, where creative processes and activities can be conducted as a part of democratic consultation about the built environment.
  - Celebrate what's here: as a part of modelling what *could be* here, look at what has been - untold stories, hidden histories, local heroes, Working Class history, social history.
- **Developing the Creative Landscape**
  - Foster a more vibrant, inclusive cultural ecology that encourages and supports artists and Creative Industries practitioners to engage in public realm working.
  - Encourage arts education 'in its broadest sense' through partnership.

- Quality & Impact
  - Map all the existing examples of Public Art, and conduct a *Review / Repair / Replace* audit (see pg 29). Create trails and creative resources for people to engage with the city's Public Art.
  - Prioritise high-quality, impactful projects – for wellbeing, for value, for engagement, for communities, for civic pride, for raising Exeter's profile as a culturally relevant city. The focus should be on the *temporary* and transitional, unless big budgets are involved.
  
- Environmental Sustainability
  - Position sustainability, reuse/recycling and bio-diverse outputs as core themes across the arts.
  
  - Have a decommissioning process and budget in place for all new Public Artworks.

We also provide a Toolkit (Appendix 1), that sets out a suggested structure and methodology for PAAG; commissioning guidelines; writing an artist's brief; budgets; and a maintenance checklist.

This Strategy is not intended to shut down commissioners from seeking to enliven and animate our public spaces; it is not intended to introduce a 'gatekeeping' agenda, or to suggest dominance of one set of ideals over another, with the concomitant danger of homogeneity that raises. Instead, it proposes that by encouraging a collaborative, strategic approach, the city can take the steps towards becoming an exemplar of cultural ambition. **Exeter is at a pivotal moment at which it can genuinely 'do things differently'.**

Art Work Exeter, July 2022

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Exeter is growing. Not just as an economy<sup>1</sup>, but in size: Liveable Exeter's plan for the development of 12,000 new homes in eight sites across the city is a potential growth of the city's current population of nearly 40%. Liveable's vision for the city incorporates the ambitions of the [Cultural Strategy](#) (2019), which envisages Exeter as a city that will innovate and lead in the area of the environment, wellbeing, cultural literacy, creative making and heritage innovation. The recent designation as a UNESCO City of Literature (2020) brings Exeter into a global network of Creative Cities.

The global pandemic, digitisation and the move to online retail has meant that city centres are changing. Alongside these city strategies, the University of Exeter has signed a Civic University Agreement, and there are new models of collaboration underway between Exeter City Council (ECC), the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) and the University as part of the Creative Arc programme. The potential is there for Public Art to make a meaningful contribution alongside these new collaborations and developments towards a vibrant city and ecology for artists and organisations. Additionally, there are some key learnings from the way in which public monuments have been discussed and dealt with that should be included in forward plans for the development of Public Art. Exeter City Council has also recently included public art within the Community Infrastructure Levy.

In commissioning this Public Art Strategy now, ECC is demonstrating that it is ambitious in its aspirations for the city and its people, and recognises that when done well, Public Art can contribute to enhancing the city's unique heritage, culture and natural assets. Public Art is fundamental to place-making - a key strategy for the city.

In the creation of this Strategy, we consulted with artists and makers, curators and commissioners, consultants and specialists, community groups and individuals from across the city and beyond. What we present here is a distillation of those conversations, consultations and surveys.

Key themes emerging from the consultation process:

- Artists and those with experience in the Public Art field (such as curators) should be integral to the process of commissioning and decision-making
- Properly hold what is already here
- There is a need for ambition and 'to take more risks'
- Temporary work is preferable to under-funded permanent work
- Communities should have a voice in what happens in the public realm

---

<sup>1</sup> "Exeter was joint 9th (6.4%) nationally for GVA growth Q4 2021. Predicted to be joint 6th (2.0%) Q4 2023." Irwin Mitchell UK Powerhouse Report 2022

We propose that all art for the city, including Public Art, should meet the key criteria of quality, inclusion and sustainability. To achieve this, we have produced this Strategy for those with responsibility for commissioning, funding, reviewing, maintaining and developing Public Art. It is for city planners, for developers, for private landlords and anyone who has any responsibility for activity and culture that takes place in the public realm. And this Strategy also advocates for adding more voices to that arena.

If we want the city to realise its cultural ambitions, then we need:

- a Public Art *policy* that creates the space for opportunity, engages the city's residents and communities, and is ambitious;
- those with current authority to commission work to engage with the expertise and knowledge of practitioners and organisations across the city - to take a step beyond 'business as usual';
- to create a landscape that champions inclusion and diversity, celebrates the city's assets, and amplifies its stories;
- to acknowledge the need to promote by example - environmental, sustainable, inclusive and net zero ambitions.

This Strategy is not intended to shut down commissioners from seeking to enliven and animate our public spaces; it is not intended to introduce a 'gatekeeping' agenda, or to suggest dominance of one set of ideals over another, with the concomitant danger of homogeneity that raises. Instead, it proposes that by encouraging a collaborative, strategic approach, the city can take the steps towards becoming an exemplar of cultural ambition.

**Exeter is at a pivotal moment at which it can genuinely 'do things differently'.**

## 2. WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?

*“In my opinion, for Public Art to really engage it has to be more than pretty things to make our spaces nice; it has to reflect Exeter right now. Who the people of Exeter are, how they are feeling, what challenges/threats we face, what questions are on our mind, how the spaces and places of the city are shifting and why. I think it would be amazing for Public Art to be something quite fluid and evolving, so rather than one or two sculptures that stay for decades, [there could be] temporary exhibitions or installations that provoke debate, invite connection, remind us that public spaces are not just to pass through but a chance to connect with others, to breathe, to be well.”*

Survey respondent

As this quote so beautifully articulates, ‘Public Art’ holds much within its scope. From a purely formal perspective, it includes myriad practices in the visual arts (such as murals and street art, sculpture, sonic, video and digital media), as well as performance, music and theatre. It can be a soundscape, a lightwork, a landscape intervention or an interactive installation. It can be street furniture or an architectural statement. It can be permanent or temporary, be that years, months, weeks or days; it can be a full-scale festival or a low-key encounter. It can be an activity, process or even a functioning business emerging from an artist’s interaction with a community of people, termed *Social Practice*. In essence, it is **creative work sited in the public realm, in places and spaces that are freely accessible to everyone.**

But it represents so much more. In contributing to making a distinctive public realm, it can also act as a vehicle for civic engagement and pride. Public Art can commemorate and celebrate; it can spark debate and challenge perceptions. As one consultee said, it can *“ornament, inform, stimulate, invite, provoke or cheer those who witness it. Public Art increases a sense of a place’s meaning or meanings, or potential meanings, whether we like it or not.”* As another commented, *“good public art should be about agency and about representing the people and the local community.”* A regular statement by people that we spoke to was that Public Art, like other forms of Art, when it was good, made people feel something, it touched them or moved them in some way. They might feel challenged or humbled, a sense of joy or a connection to something much larger than themselves.

*“It can elevate life to something more interesting for the moment - it’s transcendental, you go somewhere else - be taken somewhere else and be excited to be there!”*

Consultee



Art has the potential to transport people to another place, where the rules might be different; it gives them an opportunity to pause, think and reflect on their place in the universe:

*'Artistic installation is also a 'space of exception'. It isolates a specific space from the topology of the 'normal' world to reveal its inner conditions and determinations.'*

Boris Groys, *In the flow*. Verso 2016

Artists, through their practices, are the people who conjure this magic, and it is their singularity of vision that elevates work to more than just the materials and circumstances that comprise it. While we need people to come together to discuss values, to form briefs, select works, and participate in activity, it is the responder to the brief and receiver of the commission who will make the art... work.

*"I'm all for socially engaged practice, and especially for hearing those marginalised voices and breaking down that dominant mediocrity, but you've got to foreground the particularity of the artist, otherwise there's no point really."*

Consultee

There has been much research into the positive impact and benefits of engagement with and through socially engaged art, such as community connection, reduced isolation, sociability, positive approaches to risk and change. However, it is also a useful vehicle for authority to devolve responsibility - putting the onus on individual change when larger systemic issues are the root of the problem. Public Art engagement needs to be integrated into the full picture of city development, as a democratic and responsive process, not just as decoration:

*'None of these outcomes will change or even raise consciousness of the structural conditions of people's daily existence, it will only help people to accept them.'*

Paola Merli, from Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells*. Verso 2012.

Public Art is also an opportunity and a platform for artists, and this is crucial to a city's arts ecology, which Exeter is committed to developing and supporting (see 'City of Creative Making' in the *Cultural Strategy*). It is fundamental to effective place-making; it plays a key role in setting out a city's intentions, to its sense of self, its identity.

*“Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximise shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.”*

[Project for Public Spaces](#)



*On Tenterhooks produced by Oceanallover, Exeter City Council and Burn the Curtain. Exeter Quay, 2016. Photo by Theo Moye*

## 3. BEST PRACTICE

Based on our conversations and consultation with experts in the field of Public Art, plus research into examples of exemplary work from across the UK and beyond (case studies below), we propose that best practice incorporates the following principles:

- Quality – when commissioning work for the public realm, the intention must always be to strive for the best in terms of process, production and outcomes;
- Identity – all public realm artwork (both permanent and temporary) must have relevance for Exeter and its citizens, being in dialogue with and contributing to a sense of place that is inclusive, and embraces diversity in all its forms;
- Sustainability – taking inspiration from Exeter City Council’s Net Zero ambitions, the creation of new artworks needs to be carbon-neutral as standard, with ambitions to go much further in terms of environmental impact.

### 3.1 Values

Fundamentally, all best practice comes from a recognition of and adherence to a set of shared values, articulating what we stand for as a city, and what we expect from those with whom we collaborate:

- Trust
- Loyalty
- Co-operation
- Honesty and Integrity
- Inclusivity
- Transparency and Openness
- Generosity

We propose that these values are what shape our actions, our ambitions and our relationships in the city. They are fundamental to a coherent, fair and just society, and should form the basis from which we approach collaboration, partnership working and public engagement. By saying and showing that we hold these values, we can encourage people to be a part of plans that are ambitious, progressive and future-focussed, even though they may be perceived as challenging and risk-taking in their nature.

### 3.2 Involving Artists

It is often the case that Public Art interventions - particularly those associated with housing developments - are treated as ‘add-ons’ too late in the process. Engaging artists early allows for them to be embedded in the thinking process; this practice values artists as

experts in their field, and as such they should be considered as part of the team responsible for creating the brief, as colleagues collaborating with designers, architects and planners, and as members of the selection panel.

*“When I got to speak to the designer, I found that they had not considered involving an artist until after the structure was built - the mounts for artwork were essentially an afterthought. We talked about how an artist could influence the design and materials, meaning a more integrated approach with the potential for the structure itself to be an artwork, as opposed to having art put on it - he said that this was really interesting but had never been thought of as a possible part of the process in their team.”*

Consultee

This enables creativity to be a fundamental part of the whole process - and contributes to a greater likelihood of achieving a high-quality outcome. This early-stage collaboration also makes it more likely that the artwork will be more connected to its site. It also enables opportunities for creative engagement with the relevant community in the project’s design and development.

### 3.3 Community Consultation & Engagement

Prioritising long development time is, in essence, an inclusive action, and is integral to gathering momentum, engagement and feedback in order to inform the project’s direction and decision-making process. Involving people in a process that listens and holds their input in as high a regard as any other encourages buy-in, and contributes to citizens feeling part of the story of place. Decisions made out in the open, responding to input and findings, mean that outputs evolve out of the process, rather than being predetermined.

*“Plymouth will invite artists and community stakeholders to the table as often and as early in development discussions as possible, allowing enough time for false starts and valuing slow processes as a means to build relationships and knowledge, so that an exchange of expertise may take place.”*

(3) Plymouth Principles - Plymouth Culture/ Situations 2016

### 3.4 Pilot Projects and Temporary Interventions

Throughout the consultation process, conversations have returned again and again to the preference for temporary projects. This not only reflects environmental concerns - *“what are we doing making big lumps of material that have to be dug out of the ground”* (Consultee) - but recognises that impermanence can bring with it a vivacity that feels more relevant to the world today:

*“Public Art is often static - it’s been paid for and it stays there and people become blind to it. We’re already numbed from the advertising all around. It’s*

*got to be livelier - alive - similar to how we change exhibitions in galleries and museums, a rolling programme.”*

Consultee

Tests, trials and models can also invite feedback and morph as needed/required/valued by participants. Small iterations can lead to bigger decisions and more permanent outcomes. By occupying a space for a period of time, artists are able to create new worlds of what is possible, to explore common values in public space, to offer space to dream, to think and act as though things were different.

*“Through strategies of occupation and perpetuation the potential of public art to expose and respond to the encroachment of corporate interests on public space, to the diminishing opportunities for social cohesion and freedom of speech, and to the invisibility of the displaced and dispossessed in public life is considerable”*

Claire Doherty - *Out of time, out of place - Public Art Now*, Situations 2015

Sites that are due for development (such as the old Bus Station, in Exeter’s city centre) are ideal spaces in which to provide opportunities for creative engagement activities that invite communities to imagine, and to share ideas for what those spaces might become.

It is widely understood that engagement with communities leads to a greater chance of a work being ‘adopted’ by the people of that place. Involving people from the start, before any decisions are made, gives them agency and builds a culture of ambassadorship. Work that is ‘helicoptered in’ tends to garner reactions that criticise the cost, location and process.

*“Communities are responsible for Public Art, once the commissioners, artists, developers and everyone else has gone and the dust has settled.”*

Consultee

Sometimes it’s not about the geographical community in the location of the proposed new work, but the community that comes together to make the piece: a community of association, of interest.

Projects should look to use a set of basic outcomes from which to measure evaluation - arriving at these across sectors and between partners. Results of effective approaches, participant satisfaction, achievement of project intentions, and so forth, should be documented to provide a roadmap for subsequent projects in development. This will also deepen our understanding of local resonance.

Here we present some examples that we feel demonstrate best practice in Public Art.

An example of **large-scale Public Art that provides spectacle but also connects to a place and its people** is the [Crown Fountain in Chicago’s Millennium Park](#), a public park in the

city's business district. Created by Jaume Plensa, this interactive fountain comprises two 50-foot-high glass brick towers at either end of a shallow black granite reflecting pool. Inspired by the traditional use of gargoyles as water spouts for fountains, Plensa and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago recorded the faces of 1,000 Chicago residents, which are displayed in turn on the towers' LED screens. A water outlet in each glass screen provides the illusion of water pouring from the mouths of the individuals displayed. The artist intends the collection of images displayed on the LED screens to expand over the years to reflect the social evolution of the city. This piece of work not only directly connects to the communities of the city, but it provides an experience, a chance to come together and to play, and as a respite from the heat of high summer in the city.

**Public Art that tells the story of a place** includes [Mona Caron's murals in San Francisco](#).

The large-scale pieces focus on the social practice of using art to create social interaction, in which people reflect on the history, current state, and better potential, of the very space they find themselves in. 'Windows into the Tenderloin', for example, is a mural with miniature-detailed panels narrating life at this corner of the Tenderloin District, along with its history, legends, and an imaginary future. It was created through an immersive community process.

**A Public Artwork that combines identity, community and participation** is the [Cornish Dark Honey Bee Mural, in St Austell](#).

Created by PC Projects with ceramicist Simeon Featherstone and environmental designer Anastasia Sledkova, the work began with in-depth creative consultation sessions with the local community. The team asked people to draw designs depicting their ideas about the 'best thing' about the town. These formed the basis for 'icons', which were printed onto 11,000 individual tiles, and put together to form a giant design of a Cornish Honey Bee, 20m by 5m. The project "was about raising awareness of that particular insect, and about that insect's role in a sense of identity in [St Austell]. It was also the fact that the several thousand tiles were hand stamped by nearly a thousand people, working out of a little workshop called The Hive in an empty shop on the high street. All these people came in lots of different groups, and worked over several months to make these tiles. An absolutely great way of getting people involved very directly, and doing something that was very relevant to the place. And also maintaining the overall design concept, where you get something that's visually striking and artistically or specifically interesting, and kind of provocative. A really wonderful combination of process and product."

**Public Art can be fun - as evidenced by this interactive piece** by [Jeremy Deller: Sacrilege \(2012\)](#) is a life-sized, inflatable replica of Stonehenge, the British heritage and pagan site - essentially, a bouncy castle, an interactive inflatable pillow that viewers may walk and jump on. It is an energetic, humorous work that Jeremy Deller describes as "a way to get reacquainted with ancient Britain with your shoes off". A co-commission between the Mayor of London and Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, *Sacrilege* toured the UK as part of the London 2012 Festival, popping up in Exeter in June 2012, located in Belmont Park, where it proved to be fantastically popular.

**Architectural Public Art that also invites interaction** can be seen in The [William Mitchell murals at Hockley Flyover, Birmingham](#). Flanking the entrance to a pedestrian underpass beneath the 'Hockley Circus' flyover, the murals were commissioned as part of the Birmingham outer ring road development, opened in 1968. Designed to encourage public interaction with the artwork, Mitchell expressed pride that people felt encouraged to climb on them, noting that this allowed them to become a part of society. They recently attracted attention when climbers from the University of Birmingham Mountaineering Clubs – more used to scaling peaks in Snowdonia or the Lake District – took the sculptures and plotted new bouldering routes across them. In April 2022, the murals were granted Grade II Listed status.

**An example of Public Art that stimulates change, or potential change, and regeneration** is [Theaster Gates's Chicago Land Development Projects](#). Located in Chicago's most economically deprived neighbourhoods, the projects brought disused buildings back to life, to hold events as well as objects, demonstrating intelligent exchange with lasting change. His work [Sanctum with Situations in Bristol](#) was to construct a 'stage' from salvaged materials from previous sacred and hallowed local buildings for local musicians and sound artists to perform concerts. Performances ran on a rolling 24hr programme, the performance schedule was intentionally secret so the community would engage with artists in unexpected ways.

**Public Art can be a catalyst for the formation of a community:** some areas might not have an existing community at the location (ie a roundabout on a road), or have not been developed yet. Users, passers-by, the wider community can all be recruited in preliminary stages to help shape what interactions and investigations might look like. The [FLOW project in Exeter](#) started with an ambitious 'ribbon orchard' tree-planting scheme that involved residents via community and nature-focussed groups. There were investigations, tests and an Orchard Lab that helped shape the choice of trees and where to plant them . Commissioned artworks alongside included a set of samples to travel to other locations, and a series of usable (for humans and insects) art objects along the route that reflected the same themes. A continuing series of events (such as [wassails](#), held every January) act to further build a community of interested and accidental parties.

**Public Art that encourages us to see, experience and think of spaces differently** include [Trudie Entwistle's 'Incline'](#) (Scarborough, England, 2002). Commissioned by Public Arts as part of 'People Making Places' for the Yorkshire Forward Urban Renaissance Programme) temporarily transformed a public road into a sculptural green space. Providing a stage for performance, projection and cinema, it became a magnet for all ages to sit and enjoy the music in the last of the summer sun.

A future **work that links directly to environmental awareness**, through repurposing, includes [SEE MONSTER](#), a retired rig from the North Sea, transformed into one of the UK's largest public art installations to inspire global conversations about a sustainable future.

**Public Art that connects historical events to contemporary life** includes [Seeds of Change](#) (Maria Thereza Alves, 1999-ongoing). The piece is an ongoing investigation based on original research of ballast flora in the port cities of Europe. Projects have been developed for Marseilles, Reposaari, Dunkirk, Exeter and Topsham, Liverpool and Bristol. Material such as stones, earth, sand, wood, bricks and whatever else was economically expedient was used as ballast to stabilise merchant sailing ships according to the weight of the cargo. Upon arrival in port, the ballast was unloaded, carrying with it seeds native to the area where it had been collected. Communities in host cities were encouraged to plant the ballast seeds in a communal act of growing. In Bristol, the plants were displayed on a floating platform: *“It spoke to history and community and what we wanted to do to change the city. People really enjoyed it because of the plants, but they enjoyed going on a boat trip to the floating platform - the whole experience was a sort of journey”* (consultee).

**Public Art can be a prototype as a part of testing activity, for the development of spaces.** *Jubilee Park* in Gothenburg, Sweden, is a new project, on a former dockland site. The city had no concrete plan for what the development might hold, so invited a number of creative agencies to create prototype projects and structures. These include a sauna, an orchard park and a beach. This is a part of [Prototyping Gothenburg](#) - a method of using a ‘temporary permanence’ for the space between an industrial site and an urban neighbourhood (3-5 years) to be occupied with testing activity in partnership with the population of the city, and colouring and directing the final direction of developments.



*Urban Outfitters commission by Vhils. Exeter High Street, 2011. Photo by Greame Pow.*



## 4. CONTEXT

*“Unless there are proper budgets there can’t be anything other than temporary work. I don’t think we should litter our streets with poor Public Art.”*

Consultee

Exeter has a blend of commissioning routes and agendas. Traditionally, the Local (ECC) and District (Devon County Council - DCC) have been the entities most responsible for Artwork in the public realm, but in recent years the landscape has changed, and an increasing number of other bodies and organisations have taken up the mantle. What follows is an outline of the main commissioners/deliverers of Public Art in the city, with reference to some of the current issues.

**Exeter City Council** are funders of cultural activity in the city and have previously curated their own festivals and public/outdoor performances, and historically commissioned murals at a number of locations (in the 1980s and 90s). Like other UK local authorities, arts and cultural activities are funded through Section 106/CIL contributions, the neighbourhood funding aspect of the latter feeding into the Exeter Grants Programme, the main form of funding for independent art and community projects in Exeter. ECC has also received Arts Council England’s Cultural Development Fund and Cultural Compact money. They are regarded as guardians of the existing Public Art assets. **RAMM**, the city museum funded by the City Council, has contributed to activity in the public realm, with 2021’s *Museum At Large* being its first foray into commissioning a body of outdoor works, albeit temporary.

**Devon County Council**, via its Highways dept, has been responsible for commissioning large-scale works around the region. Along with developers, they have had command of the largest scale of budget for new works and have tended to opt for the monumental. Partnerships with other large bodies and agencies have meant a number of agendas are served with each work.

In the city centre, **InExeter** (a body that manages the Business Improvement District) has been commissioning temporary and permanent works as a part of place-shaping and wayfinding activity. This has taken various forms including: multicoloured umbrellas suspended over the High St, new murals in unloved transitional spaces, and ongoing support for street, music and art festivals.

The two main retail spaces - the **Guildhall Shopping Centre** and **Princesshay** - have both commissioned work as part of their marketing agendas, and participated in cross-city initiatives that feature temporary Public Art and performances. These include: walkway murals, art in shop windows, installations and interventions, a pop-up ‘beach bar’, and pop-up elements of festivals. The both also host ‘inherited’ Public Artworks from previous iterations and incarnations of their sites.

**The University of Exeter** has traditionally commissioned sculpture for its campuses, but more recently, under the aegis of the [Arts & Culture team](#), there has been a move toward ‘purposeful encounters’, and an increasing remit to commission new cultural activity and high-quality art works. The micro-commissions have resulted in soundscapes, wassails, and a video and sound installation on a Stagecoach bus; in addition, the team supports other arts organisations and activities through match-funding. New academic courses at the University, such as the MA in Curation and the MA in Creativity, are producing or contributing to arts initiatives and activity in the city. The [Outside the Box](#) programme, funded by the AHRC and curated by the Drama Department, saw performances take place in green spaces across the city, including Riverside Valley Park, Northernhay Gardens and Bartholomew Cemetery.

**Exeter City Living** (ECC’s property development arm) has commissioned temporary, community-engaged work from a local artist as a mechanism for connecting with communities around its proposed development site. Hoardings around a former old people’s housing complex were designed in collaboration with schoolchildren and attendees of events at a local community centre.

Independent cultural operators, such as **Art Work Exeter**, **Blind Ditch**, **MIDI**, **Burn the Curtain** and **Kaleider** have developed, commissioned and delivered Public Artworks in the city, with varying levels of community engagement and participation, sometimes in partnership with each other, and often as part of a festival. Examples include: Art Week Exeter, where independent producers such as Paula Crutchlow, NOSE, Miss C\*s Graffiti Academy and John Wigzell held spaces and commissioned multiple artists and performers over the course of a week of activity; and Exeter Street Arts Festival, where independent producers are given free reign to shape the programme for individual performance stages.

Current processes vary, from individual commissioners choosing to work with a particular artist for a chosen outcome based on knowledge/ proximity/recommendation (see [Scotty Gillespie’s murals and designs](#) for InExeter, the [Alice Mary Art walkway mural](#) for Guildhall Shopping Centre); open calls with shortlisting by an internal panel ([RAMM’s Museum at Large](#) project); ongoing relationships between a commissioner and artist/s (ie Michael Fairfax and DCC Highways Dept); to approaches where all applicants get to participate in some way ([Miss\\*C’s Graffiti Academy’s Bridge & Tunnel Paint Jam](#)).

While the city refreshed its Commissioning Guidelines in 2017, these have not been consistently referenced or adhered to, and there is an ongoing lack of consistency in conjunction with a lack of transparency around processes. One example is the 2017 ‘Rainbow Gate’ architectural installation, where no record of the commissioner or selection process can be found, yet the work is attached to two local authority-owned buildings, so presumably was sanctioned by someone on behalf of Exeter City Council.

In one survey for this Strategy, 54% of respondents felt that processes suffered from a “*lack of transparency about who makes decisions and where the money comes from*” with one

saying: “Exeter does not seem to have a clear and consistent approach to public art. It feels like a lot of voices.”

The Heavitree Arch (lead artist: Michael Fairfax) was a multi-partner work, involving both the County and City councils, and continues to have a divided audience. Criticism stems from how the consultation was conducted, with some people being clear that there was not much local support for the work to go ahead and that it was pushed onto the community. Our own conversations with people around this work have covered the fact that it has lofty intentions and a high-quality finish, but that it was not reflective of the local community, was poorly sited and was very expensive for something that wasn't perceived as required or wanted. Other works as a part of the same Heavitree project are more popular, such as the text on the pavement and around the tree on the opposite side of the road. Perversely, the public toilets there are permanently closed, so there is less reason for people to congregate/ occupy this space.

Public Art in the city has a varied reputation, with accountability for upkeep being as much a controversy as new commissions (InExeter paid for the Vhils work (see below) to be cleaned after it was paint-bombed, as the corporate owners declined to have the work done).

The fact that the city does not have a catalogue, map or guide to its Public Art assets is a missed opportunity. A number of conversations with people across heritage and culture sectors, as well as respondents to the surveys, showed a concern that this is indicative of a number of issues here. We pose that if the city's historical assets aren't properly held or regarded, the history and story of the city isn't firmly rooted and the views and lives of the people who live here are regarded as insignificant.

*“The lack of community engagement in projects is evidence of the continuation of the view that city centre space is ‘distemic’, which is to say it does not have an identifiable community associated with it.”*

Consultee

[Exeter Memories](#), a grassroots-hobbyist website, provides the most comprehensive guide and is generally a fantastic resource on city history. However, the website is the work of one man and has ceased to be updated since 2017. Some entries would benefit from a rewrite to reflect changes in attitudes and the growth of understanding around statuary and memorial works, with a post-colonial lens, following the powerful Black Lives Matter movement, in particular. This website and associated social media group (and other informal/ grassroots social media groups such as [Exeter Past and Present](#) on Facebook) are an indication of the groundswell of support for longer-standing, community-focussed artworks.

The [murals](#) of Andrew Stacey/Andrew Alleyway were painted in the 1980s and are much loved by people who grew up in the city during that time; the overpainting and rendering of the *West Street Festival 1979* mural is still lamented on public fora and social media groups. It is worth noting that often these works depict ordinary people. The age of these pieces

means that they will require serious reevaluation at some point in the next five years; remedial work has been carried out on an ad hoc basis on many of the works. As an example, the Maddox Row ‘witches’ mural is now flaking over 50% of its surface and has recently, for the first time, been graffitied.

It is important to be transparent in how these wall-based works are evaluated, and how any decision - whether to attempt to conserve them versus seeing the site as an opportunity for a new commission - is made. As these sites already hold public interest, there is potential to galvanise communities of interest around the development of a new commission, regarding how the people of today's city are represented.

Pop-up activity, such as [Brendan Barry's walk-in camera obscura projects](#) (and [Sam White's Light-Play](#) before that), gave audiences a route into art making. Interactive mobile installations such as [Stephen Hodge's Where to build the walls that protect us](#), invited hands-on participation in thinking about the future of the city in light of rising sea levels. The processional, multi-partner *On Tenterhooks* (created by [Oceanallover](#), commissioned by ECC in 2016) brought wide-scale participation, using existing social structures such as schools and choirs, and through an impermanent, spectacular work, to wider audiences.

There are some striking examples of less traditional and semi-permanent standalone pieces across the city centre, such as the [Vhils commission](#) (2011), by Urban Outfitters on the High Street; street art pieces by Bristol artist [My Dog Sighs](#) in John St; the graffiti wall in Belmont Park (annually repainted for the Respect Festival); the willow sculpture at St Sidwell's Community Centre and the benches and insect hotels - both by James Bond - alongside the [FLOW orchard project](#).

The city is host to a number of well-executed and high-quality memorials and sculptures, many by internationally respected local resident artists. Notable examples are: the *Exeter War Memorial*, which stands proudly over Northernhay Gardens, by John Angel FRBS; *The Deerstalker* by E B Stephens ARA; and the *Livery Dole Martyr's Memorial* by Harry Hems. All of these were funded by public subscription and are considered assets to the city's heritage. Exeter has a history of moving many of its statuary and monumental works to different locations, with some being put into storage on a temporary and permanent basis. There is only one woman represented amongst the statues - Queen Victoria, on top of Marks & Spencer - and symbolic female figures on the *EWM*. The remainder are city grandees of note, sharing their names with roads and buildings, as was the way.

*“I don't have a problem with the statues, they were the communication technology of their time - we don't need to make more these days, as we can celebrate people and their achievements and hold all this digitally.”*

Consultee

One work of contention is the statue of General Sir Redvers Buller, astride his horse. The City Council is planning to install a reinterpretation panel, created by academics and activists, to address the fact that Buller was a key player in Britain's colonial activities (and

atrocities, although not in himself a cruel person, and commended for his treatment of his troops). There was a small backlash of protest (reflective of a national response by a minority to the way statuary is being re-evaluated) including a death threat being sent to a Councillor of colour, when ECC stated they were looking at relocating the statue. It is hoped that the panel will satisfy both sides of the debate, although it will need to be firmly held and publicised as a statement of intent for it to work.

*“There’s something about accepting that [Public Art will] be controversial for some people, that some people will hate whatever you do. That’s not the same as thoughtless offence being caused. I think that’s the confusion around people who aren’t able to conceive that celebrating slave traders or memorializing them might cause pain and hurt to people who are still feeling the results of that system is very different from, ‘I don’t like what that looks like.’”*

Consultee



*Exeter Traceries by Katayoun Pasban Dowlatshahi. Princesshay, 2006. Photo courtesy of the artist.*

# 5. PRIORITIES

## **Ambition:**

*To have a high-quality, varied, and impactful Public Art portfolio, that enriches Exeter's cultural offer and reputation; strengthens its wellbeing and place-shaping ambitions; provides opportunities for its artists, producers and makers to develop as creators; and enables its residents (including young people) to have agency, experience creativity, and to develop as active participants and audiences in the cultural field.*

1. **Transparent & Inclusive Commissioning Practices:** the processes around commissioning, selecting and funding Public Art are clear and open.
2. **Place-making:** the Public Art Strategy - and culture more broadly - is embedded into local investment and city planning developments.
3. **Engagement & Participation:** citizens from across all communities of geography, interest and need are involved in appropriate ways, and their voices are heard and valued.
4. **Developing the Creative Landscape:** Exeter's cultural ecology thrives, providing opportunities for artists to engage in public realm working, while giving everyone the chance to develop as active participants and audiences in the cultural field.
5. **Quality & Impact:** Exeter's Public Art is championed and celebrated for its quality and ambition, enhancing the city's reputation as a cultural destination.
6. **Environmental Sustainability:** New Public Artwork and the activity around it acknowledges the climate emergency and the necessity to reflect environmentally sensitive approaches at all stages.

## 5.1 Transparent & Inclusive Commissioning Practices

**Aim:** The processes around commissioning, selecting and funding Public Art are clear and open.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** This Strategy's key ambition is to provide recommendations for making the commissioning process more transparent, open and inclusive. We anticipate that this approach will more effectively engage all stakeholders (commissioners, funders, artists, residents and publics), but also simplify the process overall, and provide the framework for ensuring that work intended for the public realm is of high quality, impactful, engaging and valued.

During the consultation process for this report, it was mentioned repeatedly that people felt excluded from the process, and that work often pops up as if out of nowhere: *"A decision is made and you find out later."* This was cited as a reason for much of the Public Art in the city being considered as poor examples: *"People have mixed feelings about the work that has been commissioned already in the city, part of this is because they weren't involved."* Among the general public, where there should be pride, there is at best ambivalence; among arts practitioners, there is mistrust.

By commissioning this Strategy, ECC is demonstrating its desire for a more coherent approach, one that pulls together the aspirations and recommendations highlighted in the *Cultural Strategy*, the Liveable Vision, and the *Co-mission* report by Blind Ditch. This coherence in turn contributes to a clearer message about Exeter and its cultural landscape - not just in terms of opportunities, but in how it values the role of culture in relation to development and growth, and its intention that everyone can be equal partners on that journey.

*"Art should not be commissioned for the sake of filling a space, and should not be developed by Council committees. The process should be as organic as possible with a broad range of people encouraged to express an opinion during the development of an artwork."*

Consultee group

**Recommended Actions:** Establish the framework (see Appendix 1.1 for structure details) for a Public Art Advisory Group (PAAG), to provide the necessary guidance based on expertise and experience in the field. This Group would ideally comprise stakeholders from across the arts, culture and heritage sectors, community, business, and civic realm, to ensure quality and encourage creative engagement. PAAG can support the team developing the Local Plan, and the Liveable Exeter Masterplan. There is also the potential for the creation of a Culture Unit (a suggestion in Blind Ditch's report: *(Co)Mission - ways forward for art and culture in planning in Exeter*) that could hold responsibility for convening a rolling Advisory Group/working groups around proposals for commissions.

For ECC/Liveable Exeter to proactively identify Public Art opportunities in capital works (such as development of the old Bus Station, for instance) as early as possible in the project planning process, and involve the PAAG. City-led commissions should be timed to allow for artists to leverage their creativity to contribute to the overall vision for a site, and help to shape its functional design.

Emphasise to developers that proactive, early engagement of artists is integral to the planning application process. Not only will developers be expected to begin planning for Public Art early in their process, but it is a stipulation that they engage with the PAAG, this Strategy, alongside the Local Plan and the Masterplan, before they begin to form their team, or draw up draft plans.

A threshold of £5k should be observed. Where commissions sit below this, there is less need for deep consultation (but still drawing upon existing knowledge) and a focus to spend on high quality work. It is anticipated that this will be for performances, temporary installations and events, small wall-based murals and one-off participatory artist-led social activities. Cultural partners (if they are not the commissioners) should be involved in conversations about intentions and potential, and processes for fair selection.

If commissioning a larger (£5k+) project, then a project-specific Advisory Group will help to define the project and establish buy-in and potentially credibility. The group should comprise those with key interests in the project or site, including the commissioner, possibly a representative of a funder, artists/creative practitioners, individuals with knowledge specific to the site (historians, heritage experts), members of the public/ community; local councillors for that location and relevant portfolio holders. It is important that no one works unpaid, and that community members remuneration should be provided and budgeted for, without undue bureaucratic processes. Members of this group should form part of a selection panel.

Above £5K spends need to have transparent artist engagement processes, these include:

- Open call-outs,
- Limited call-outs,
- Accessible Artist Briefs and alternative application formats,
- A long lead-in time, for each stage,
- Appropriate selection panels,
- Paid development time for short-listed artists,
- Publicly shared progress reports and opportunities to observe and comment along the way.

Refuse to accept timeframes shorter than six months for any creative or cultural commission; respect that artists have lives and other work. The longer people have to think, digest and respond, the richer the outcomes will be.



## 5.2 Place-making

**Aim:** the Public Art Strategy - and culture more broadly - is embedded into local investment and city planning developments.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Since it commissioned the *Place-based Cultural Strategy* in 2019, Exeter has continued its trajectory as a Local Authority with a stated commitment to putting arts and culture at the core of its thinking. It is considered supportive in its approaches towards independent cultural activity across the city, demonstrating “*an openness to arts in the cracks where ... they are willing to support the development of and growth of cultural infrastructure*” (Consultee); this is evidenced in the growth of the ‘cultural quarter’ around the High Street end of Sidwell Street, and on Paris Street, including organisations such as TOPOS, Art Work Exeter, Maketank and Positive Light Projects.

ECC has embraced the idea of place-making/place-shaping as an effective driving force, and recognises the arts as integral to this process. It is actively seeking expert guidance on how to further embed culture in the future development of the city (see the Blind Ditch report, plus Charles Landry’s report, which is due in October 2022), and we advise that this Strategy be read alongside these documents.

For place-making to be truly effective and transformative, it requires buy-in from all aspects of civic life, including city authorities, developers, and other institutions; everyone “with a stake in growing the shared value and values of living in a place”<sup>2</sup> needs to be pulling on the same rope. With economic growth predicted to continue, there is also a great opportunity to harness more support from the business sector in contributing to the city’s arts and culture offer. Regarding business, Council Leader Phil Bialyk has said, “*Our attitude is that the answer is yes – now what’s the question? We try to look for reasons to do something. That contributes to a very successful city here in Exeter*” (quoted in Business Leader Magazine, 4.2.2020). Let’s see that same commitment applied to the arts.

As the business sector grows, with a concomitant increase in staff, and new businesses seek to establish themselves here, the potential audiences for and participants in arts activity also develops. An attractive cultural offer is a positive draw for staff recruitment purposes, and raises Exeter’s reputation as an appealing location to do business. The City Council has amalgamated its arts and community budgets, and has reduced these over the last five years (in response to drastic reductions in central Govt. funding). The commercial sector is ‘booming’ in Exeter, particularly the Creative Industries - cultural activity needs an increase in funding to meet the needs and desires of a growing professional community. Now is the time to have the conversation about how the Council could support leveraging funds from other sources.

There’s a long tradition of (and contention around) businesses sponsoring art, but could Exeter lead the way in creating a city-wide fund to which the business sector contributes?

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sustainableplaceshaping.net/resources/>

This fund could be overseen by PAAG, providing opportunities for micro-commissions, match-funding for city-wide initiatives (such as festivals) or for larger and more ambitious pieces of work.

It is worth considering that an estimated 0.5% slice of the city's annual Community Infrastructure Levy income would deliver around £40k - enough to run a post or small team. 1% would allow for the same amount to be banked for more ambitious future works. [Percent For Art](#) is a thriving scheme in many other countries (since the mid-C20th) that takes 1-2% income from all development projects for arts funding. There is a great opportunity here as Exeter could potentially operate this as a statement-of-intent around culture being a driving aspect in city development.

**Recommended Actions:** Capitalise on the relationship between economy and place by embedding culture as a tool for local planning and decision-making, and in so doing, align with Exeter's wellbeing agenda. By stating Exeter's priorities, values and, crucially, *policies* around this from the start, and by having the confidence to say, "No, your proposals are not for us", Exeter can use its nascent City Plan to step into its authority as a vibrant city with lots to offer.

Reinforce Exeter's cultural ambitions not only for Public Art and other commissions, but also at streetscape and neighbourhood scales, including supporting the development of community-led initiatives that enable creative community engagement with urban projects.

Offer developers and potential commissioners the potential to increase the weight of their spend by forming a mosaic of funding around their contribution. By using inclusive practices, having socially focussed outcomes and transparent processes, projects will be eligible for match funding from traditional routes (HLF, ACE, Historic England, etc) and able to commission more impactful works as a result.

The budget for any new Public Artwork should include provision for a review in the future - this may lead to repairs, conservation, remodelling, re-siting or even removal. Organic and growing features may need close husbanding for an initial growing period and periodic attention. Communities around works like these are fundamental, with initiatives such as Adopt-a-tree being key to their survival outside the agreed maintenance plan.

Our understanding of Public Art is that it can take myriad forms, from the temporary to the permanent, from the micro to the majestic. The unifying factors are that it happens in the public realm and requires the engagement of the public to activate it. In Exeter we have a raft of inherited statuary, a collection of permanent sculptural and wall-based works and an irregular programme of events, performances and longer-term socially engaged projects. New commissions need to come from an understanding of what is here - culturally, demographically, physically. The positioning of any new work, connection with cultural infrastructure and messaging and what it contributes to the story of place need to be mapped out in any proposal.

Let potential commissioners know that the public realm is a shared space ([The Commons](#)) and decisions about how it looks and feels are to be undertaken in conjunction with others, through consultation and in response to how the resident population have spoken. The exercise of privilege by imposing the world-view of people who have the authority/ permission to do so (and have continued to do so) is an act of exclusion.

The city has multiple initiatives for promoting itself internally and externally - Visit Exeter, Exeter Live Better and InExeter being the most prominent. They are mainly operating as a form of tourism-marketing, in service to the growing commercial and professional sector. There is potential to work with these initiatives to create a philanthropic initiative for funding cultural activity - from which they and the sectors they serve all benefit greatly.



*Aftermath Dislocation Principle by Jimmy Cauty. Commissioned by NOSE for Art Week Exeter. Exeter Quay, 2016. Photo by Stephen Hodge.*

## 5.3 Engagement & Participation

**Aim:** Citizens from across all communities of geography, interest and need are involved, and their voices are heard and valued.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** As we have already identified in this report, Exeter has a poor reputation when it comes to proper consultation and engagement; survey respondents and consultees cited the general sense of feeling ‘done to’ rather than ‘through and with’. The top-down approach creates mistrust in the process, and is ultimately exclusive and divisive.

The city is about to embark on a grand scheme of urban development, with a number of developers bringing their own agendas and allocated budgets for the provision of Public Art. Coplan Estates and Welbeck CP, to name just one current proposal, have a plan to develop the Haven Banks area and have stated they will be ‘*Creating opportunities for new public art to be displayed on the site.*’ But what they mean by this, and who they intend to involve, is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the majority of developers still operate on the assumption that ‘public consultation’ constitutes inviting local residents to view and share opinions on a series of design mock-ups and presentations.

For Public Art to be really effective, there needs to be a shared sense of ownership and involvement. For this to happen, we need to start from a holistic perspective of what we want for the city as a whole, and who is involved along the way. This should focus on being as transparent and inclusive as possible with an understanding that some people require different approaches and resources to feel invited and be able to participate at the same level as others. We need to acknowledge who the guardians and custodians of the future will be and how they are included now.

Throughout the consultation process, time and again the conversations turned to the amount of time it takes to commission work properly, to build trust and confidence: “*It takes a long time of finding a way to be, to build the space to build people’s confidence to say what they think, and then go on to discuss what you might do*” (Consultee). While online surveys may be appropriate for a general consensus, specific communities will require specific approaches. These can range from in-person attendance where people are (community buildings and events) to materials produced in specific languages and long lead-ins with signalling via social and print media. The recent proliferation of Community Builders and cultural infrastructure organisations are networks to be utilised and built upon, they offer the activation of conversations from the perspectives of people who understand those community dynamics.

Exeter’s population is rapidly growing (currently [131,099](#)), with the new developments possibly increasing that figure by 60,000, so it will become even more important to employ appropriate ways of supporting people to contribute to the growing story of place. Cultural organisations such as Theatre Alibi (with its *St Thomas Stories*) and Interwoven (with its resolutely grassroots *Squilometre* projects) are already working with communities to reveal

and amplify local histories, but there are opportunities to further unveil hidden histories, and to ensure representation of diverse voices in retelling the story of the city.

There is an opportunity here to rethink our relationship to Public Art so that inclusion is integral, that the process and anticipated outcomes can flex to adapt to what this involvement brings up. Processes need to start with an understanding of the importance of diversity, equality and inclusion. This means that extra time and specific effort will need to be deployed to ensure people have an equal opportunity to respond and participate in a way that is meaningful to them. Community members will need to be supported to develop critical tools, to be able to participate in commissioning. The potential is to empower groups of people to be able to further input into cultural and urban developments of the future.

*“Urban pedagogy... to create the possibility for inhabitants and local partners to become familiar with and become more active municipal urban planning processes, both in order to make these processes more accessible and to create places and processes through their participation that point towards other possibilities and that test what a city can be.”*

Joanna Zawieja - Public Art Sweden. *Curating Context*, Art and Theory Publishing 2017

The intentions behind each Public Art project - for instance, ‘celebrating local heroes’, ‘promoting sustainable travel’, ‘reflecting cultural identities’ - can shape how people are involved in processes, as well as indicating the appropriate composition of selection panels, participant groups, and so forth. Local Councillors (for instance) are fine ambassadors and should be involved where their local knowledge and community understanding or portfolio can be utilised to the benefit of each project, rather than given automatic seats at decision-making tables.

Messaging about intention needs to be transparent and open to feedback from the start of the project. Why is this work being proposed for this location? If it is about an obligation to spend money, there will be more value in contributing that money to a pot towards more ambitious projects.

**Recommended Actions:** Consider the creation of an [Urban Room](#) in the centre of the city, where creative processes and activities can be conducted as a part of ongoing democratic consultation about the built environment. This type of work is already underway here, now is the time to show that the results are being listened to, not that the exercise has ticked a box.

Ask what people would like the city to *look* and *feel* like. Offer examples and listen to responses. Publish responses and say how the city will use this information in decision-making. Regularly refer to this. Show how developments and new works are responding to what was shared, as both quick wins and deeper outcomes. Encourage other sectors to use this database to ask ‘big’ questions.

Look to stratify the local population according to multiple characteristics (older people, geographic location, ability, hobbies, heritage, diet...) and identify the best ways of communicating with each group of people. Log what has worked well and where a rethink is required. Focus on hard-to-reach citizens. Work across sectors to share data and build a living document. Information like this is already being collected by Community Builders and infrastructure organisations - it is essentially 'audience data' but with teeth!

Celebrate what's here: as a part of modelling what *could be* here, look at what has been - untold stories, hidden histories, local heroes, Working Class history, social history, the Speedway, Black Gls... Collaborate with the cultural organisations already working in these communities (Theatre Alibi, Interwoven) as well as the networks that connect other diverse communities (Exeter Communities Together, Inclusive Exeter, Hikmat). Working class stories are not felt to be held in high regard here, and yet this is the community with the longest duration in the city. In striving to ride the wave of new development and growth, the city has often overlooked the opportunity to reflect on what is already here.

Trust the process and let go of control: commissioners should have a voice at the start, but should not be guaranteed a veto or say in the final outcomes of a piece of work. Project members, decision-makers and panels should be composed of people as befitting the objectives of the project, not those who think they should be there, who have usually made decisions or feel entitled to be at the table through their elected or salaried position. Experts have their place - in ensuring high-quality outcomes and impactful works. Be prepared to change plans, to adapt and incorporate new perspectives.

## 5.4 Developing the Creative Landscape

**Aim:** Exeter’s cultural ecology thrives, providing opportunities for artists to engage in public realm working, while giving everyone the chance to develop as active participants and audiences in the cultural field.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** As identified in the *Cultural Strategy*, Exeter has ambitions to be a city that recognises the value of creative making and cultural literacy, and yet persists in leaving the big decisions that impact our shared public space to those in civic roles. We have here a number of artists, curators, creative producers, musicians and sonic specialists, dramaturgs and academics with extensive experience in Public Art, some working within institutions, others operating on a freelance/independent basis. We can harness their expertise.

Artists and arts organisations need to be a part of the conversations that shape our city. Not just in terms of arts commissions, but as advisors to developers and design teams, and the planning process; as artists-in-residence; as facilitators for creative engagement. It is important to recognise that artists and curators have deep connections to people and places, with an eye for what *could be*. There is a contemporary malaise where *social experience* has been eclipsed by *social media* and people are reported to be using their imagination less - due to the proliferation of messages about multiple stress-factors, such as the rise of the cost of living, the COVID-19 pandemic, food scarcity and environmental collapse.

As numerous consultees have pointed out, artists are specialists in creating spaces for us to project our imaginations, to look and think together: *“Imagining as a pleasurable activity and as a grappling hook to drag yourself into the future - we cannot achieve change if we cannot imagine it.”* In this post-pandemic world, now more than ever we need new mechanisms for navigating our daily lives:

*“The time for collective dreaming and social imagination is now. We need to grow, rehearse, practice and embody change. This is the work. And we must act as though everything depends on it. Because it does.”*

Amahra Spence, 25 April 2022, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

We want to foster a more vibrant, inclusive cultural ecology that encourages and supports artists to engage in public realm working. We need to consider where there is scope for improving the information, advice and support available for them alongside the opportunity to show (and prove) that this work is integral to the aspirations of the city. A key factor in this is how work is shown - employing and supporting curators and producers for short-term activity and events means that there is a high-quality approach, holding space for encounters and artefacts that can range in scope and impact. The [Superlambanana](#) in Liverpool was just one small part of a programme of works, yet through public adoption

became a defining and iconic piece with its own social media profile, website and merchandise range and is referred to as the ‘unofficial mascot of Liverpool’.

*“The knowledge in an art artist's practice is singular - it's not about that common denominator. So I think the role of the curator is still really important for enabling that space for that singular reality.”*

Consultee

A creative environment supports wellbeing through providing creative opportunities, engagement, connection and space to challenge and be challenged. We have educational bodies and arts organisations that all offer routes for community groups and participants into experiencing art and art making, but often this is project-based, short-term and funding-driven. Can we seek to bring everyone along on a journey of discovery and learning, where the outcomes are for a critically-engaged and culturally-literate citizenship and the outputs are Public Artworks that reflect shared values and inclusive practices?

*“The forces of mediocrity are very powerful in middle England, but we must view that as an opportunity. A Public Art Strategy has to steer away from this empty pretence of art, towards something that is actually challenging and interesting. It doesn't have to be unpleasant or upsetting, but it's got to shake things up, these complacent ideas of the mainstream.”*

Consultee

Since the pandemic, and the subsequent increase in online shopping, there has been a (national) decline of the commercial aspect of the High Street. Exeter has the opportunity to change the way we use and view its central spaces, for them to become places for more creative engagement, for experiences. Temporary works such as [Luke Jerram's Park and Slide](#) on Bristol's Park Street, Jeremy Deller's *Sacrilege* in Belmont Park, the brightly coloured pianos for Exeter Street Arts Festivals, [Kurt Perschke's Big Red Ball](#) all activated city spaces in different ways and gave people the opportunity to experience it with a different view. Can we continue to test in this way and move towards more permanent and ‘needed’ new creative spaces for interaction and being together?

*“Artworks can create cultural connections to a place, places we know can change and people get re-attached to the place they live.”*

Consultee

The Creative Arc initiative is championing collaboration between the University and the Museum, with smaller partnerships for the delivery of pilots and involvement in ‘sandpit’ conversations. Could this almost oxymoronic *heritage innovation* approach include business and commerce - where the white-heat of new ideas meets the gravitas of the old structures? The previous attempt to include both commerce and sport in the Exeter Cultural



Partnership didn't offer those partners a way in that they valued, but creativity and innovation are the lifeblood of business - now might be the time to open those doors to new conversations. The fact that the University offers an MA in Curation and Business means there is a thirst for this type of knowledge and thinking in the corporate world - can we offer 'internships' for business people in our cultural institutions and organisations?

**Recommended Actions:** Encourage arts education 'in its broadest sense' through partnership, throughout the range of providers. Investigate broader, joined-up programmes where communities of people can learn and contribute in an informed way to conversations about our relics and The Commons.

If bringing in high-profile artists for 'big-ticket' commissions, look to provide learning, mentoring or shadowing opportunities for early-career artists wanting to gain experience. This could take the shape of workshops and talks. Investigate ways of providing 'shadow' work experience across projects, where emerging cultural practitioners are given paid opportunities to learn about the work and sector that they might like to enter.

Invert the position where artists are offered 'exposure' for their work as payment, by offering businesses caché for being a part of innovative creative networks on a pay-to-play basis.

## 5.5 Quality & Impact

**Aim:** Exeter's Public Art is championed and celebrated for its quality and ambition, enhancing the city's reputation as a cultural destination and vibrant place to live.

**Challenges & Opportunities:** A lot is made of Exeter's unique position (two coasts within reach, countryside visible from the heart of the city) but the city centre experience ([New Economics Foundation 2005 Clone High Street](#)) and suburban living ("*Why do I need to go into town? We've got all I need here.*" Wonford resident) don't necessarily reflect this. The growth of independent business areas (Fore St, Gandy St, Sidwell & Paris Sts/Eastgate) offer high-quality products and services with a progressive and positive entrepreneurial spirit that the other parts of the city benefit from, but they rely on a middle class flow of finance and circular economy approach, plus infrastructural support (InExeter, Exeter Markets) to survive.

Exeter is a city steeped in history, albeit somewhat hidden. The recent E-Universities delegation spent time talking about the city's mediaeval Underground Passages as an asset that needed to be 'signposted above ground'. We also heard from historians interested in seeing the Roman heritage of the city as a 'leaping off point' for new contemporary art in the public realm, so that the city's history isn't seen as a stuck/stuffy scholarly affair. One consultee was amazed by the lack of representation of so many of the historical stories here "*William the Conqueror built that castle, what those Roman and Mediaeval city walls have seen, and the buried Roman bath house - this is the city's inheritance, this stuff is free! Why aren't we shouting about it? Where is the big sexy book of Exeter's history?*"

Individual heritage locations have their own agendas and campaigns which coalesce once a year during the national Heritage Open Days, and have more recently started regular talking events together, as a sector, but Exeter remains a hazy patchwork of Roman infrastructure remains, politico-philanthropist-related place names, Blitz-vandalised urban layout and mid-century sub-brutalism.

The loss of the Tourist Information Centre was mentioned repeatedly during our conversations. How do visitors navigate the city without this vital resource? The Custom House on the Quay hosts a small selection of brochures, but a city centre location is much missed. Could the small ticket office in the Corn Exchange at the top of Fore Street become a *What's On* information centre for *all* of the city's cultural activity, if not a TIC?

In considering how we might better hold the city's assets, we create the opportunity to create a more compelling, cohesive narrative about the city and its heritage, its place in the contemporary world, and its vision for the future.

**Recommended Actions:** Assess the options around maintaining current works in the public realm on the basis of Review, Repair, Replace. This addresses not only the need to improve the management of the existing portfolio of Public Art in Exeter, but to think holistically about what is considered when commissioning new work.

Review: Conduct a mapping exercise of the current conditions of existing works and relics to assess what work is needed. Are the original artists still around? Does this require specialist conservators and craftspeople to attend?

Conduct a mapping exercise on the context of existing works. Are they relevant - do they need recontextualising as our understanding of history and heritage shifts? Recontextualising work could be conducted as live engagement scenarios with relevant communities, so that the process itself becomes an engagement opportunity as well as an end in itself.

Repair: Where works require restoration, repair or conservation, seek to include them in a programme of activity that looks to enhance local skills and knowledge. Conservators as workshop leaders, where the participants are encouraged to learn more about conservation techniques and the possibility of a volunteer team for low-level works can be formed.

Replace: Opening up existing spaces for new stories. Building on the culturally rich heritage of the city in a way that grows Exeter's reputation as a forward-thinking city for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Create a map of all the examples across the city (Exeter Culture have a map function embedded in their website that they have offered for this use) to support tours (in collaboration with the Red Coats) and trails that residents and visitors alike can engage with. An online resource could include anecdotal stories and perspectives, from works' genesis to current opinion - all collected as a part of the mapping exercise (a 'soft' volunteering campaign). Give people an easy way in - suggest routes and trails, based on stories and lives of people in and from the city, architecture and landmarks, recent and far historical happenings.

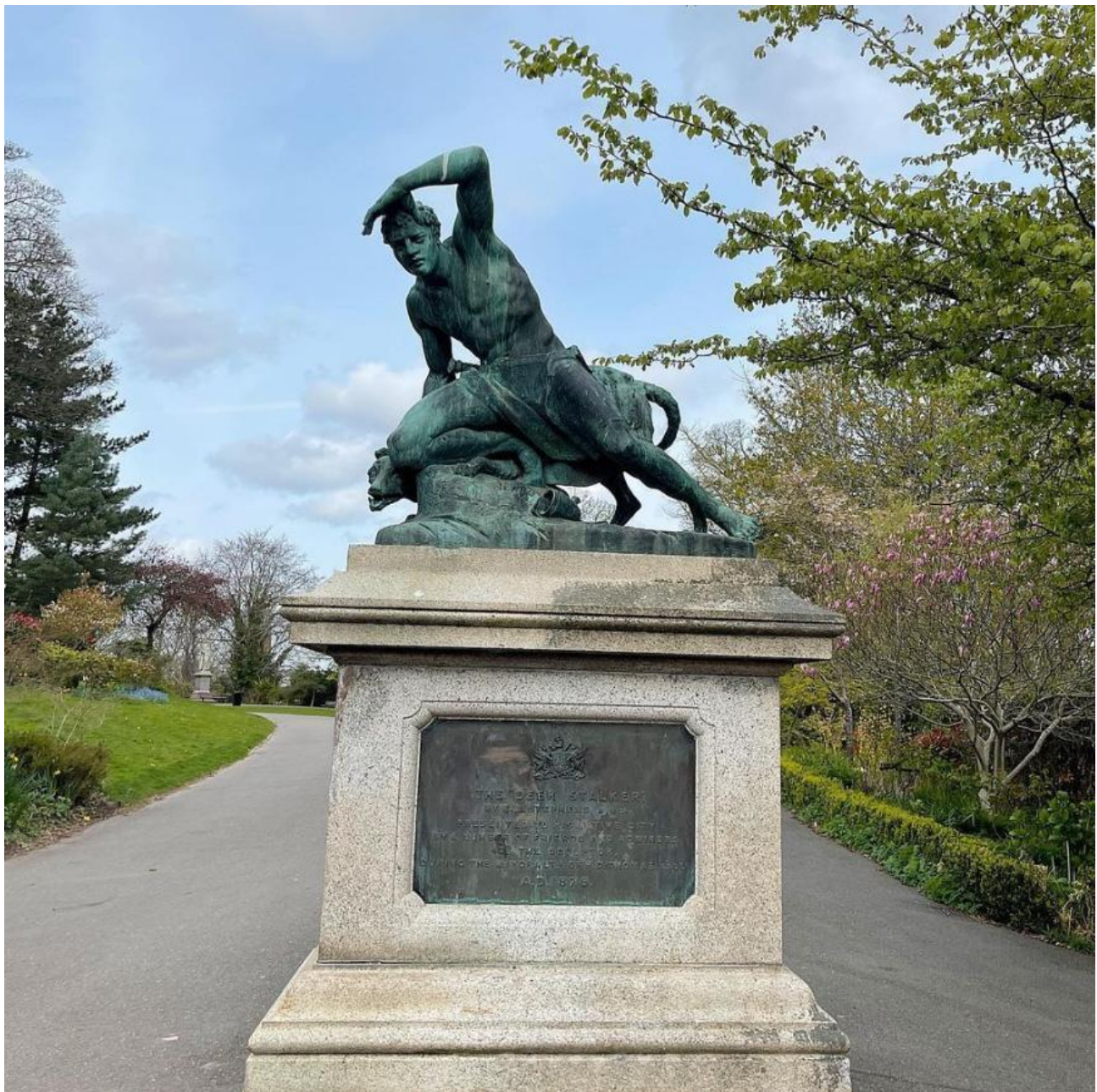
Link with all heritage, culture and tourist sites and resources. Create opportunities to engage with maps and trails during festivals and events. Create educational resources (in partnership with educators) and deliver them to all schools, then invite pupils and students to create their own readings and resources.

Be ambitious - and prepared to take risks: Consider pooling money until there is a sizable amount to be spent and commission a large-scale consultation-driven engagement to discover how ambitious we can be. Look elsewhere for inspiration, ask for ambitious proposals. Find 'big' partners (energy providers, infrastructure companies, large-scale employers) to support the funding and delivery of larger-scale works and activities.

Prioritise high-quality, impactful projects – for wellbeing, for value, for engagement, for communities, for civic pride, for raising Exeter's profile as a culturally relevant city. The involvement of experts, artists and curators is vital. Creative practitioners and professionals should be involved at the very start of any plans; their expertise in delivering multiple high-quality outcomes and outputs alongside structuring engagements for meaningful impact is invaluable. The ratio between development time and final commissioning spend is

a changing formula that contemporary thinking says should err towards longer engagement and wider involvement - the higher budget = longer development time.

Larger-budget projects should necessarily look to a national call-out for internationally recognised artists with experience in delivering high-quality outputs. Producers, production companies and arts organisations with greater experience than those with local scope should also be considered and invited to tender for partnership, commissioning and delivering works alongside the creatives of the city.



*The Deerstalker by E.B. Stevens, 1878. Commissioned by public subscription. Initially sited in Bedford Circus, now in Northernhay Gardens.*

## 5.6 Environmental Sustainability

**Aim:** New Public Artwork and the activity around it acknowledges the climate emergency and the necessity to reflect environmentally sensitive approaches at all stages.

**Challenges & Opportunities:** Exeter has the largest concentration of climate scientists in the UK, situated across the University and the Met Office. In conjunction with the Environment Agency, the city has reviewed its topographic position and installed flood defences. The city has a CIC - Exeter City Futures - with a board containing representatives from the main large-scale employers in the city, leading its Net Zero ambitions. A Climate Emergency has been declared, but the city still hosts an airport, has diesel buses and has periods and places of noticeably high air pollution.

Public Art is often outdoors, in the public realm, where a connection with the climate is unavoidable. Works and artists that embrace this are pertinent and necessary now. Devon has organisations across sectors, including ECC ([Executive](#), 9th July 2019), that have declared a Climate Emergency and signed up to the Devon Climate Declaration, which details a series of actions, in particular 4: *We will lead in the global response to climate change through our collective action, innovation and influence.*

It is worth noting that 83% of respondents surveyed about *what is important to them, their family and neighbourhood* said 'The Environment': *"Outdoor Public Art is important - you become more aware about the weather and nature, it reminds people that they are a part of something bigger, not just in an urban context but critical to us responding to climate and environmental emergency."*

An ambition stated by several consultees and survey respondents was to remove buses from the High Street (and was also reflected by 100s of participants in a city-centre RAMM engagement project that ran simultaneously to this consultation): *"it would improve everyone's health and wellbeing. We could grass over the whole high street, people could sit, there could be temporary performances, temporary art, it would have a festival feel."*

Exeter has beautiful green spaces all around and yet lacks many easy routes out into them. The Green Circle is a popular natural resource that has been shaped and defined by the people who use it and is currently the subject of an interactive Public Art performance-exploration, *The Imaginarium of Us* by [Burn the Curtain](#).

As an internationally connected city - through the University, and the global UNESCO Creative Cities network - there is the opportunity to look outwards for inspiration. As referenced in the Blind Ditch report, [The Biophilic Cities](#) network connects cities internationally that are embracing natureful design in order to share methods, approaches and successes.

**Recommended Actions:** In alignment with its carbon-neutral ambitions, Exeter must position sustainability, reuse/recycling and bio-diverse outputs as core themes across the arts.

Integration of new artworks into development, infrastructure, architecture and the very materiality of developments should be considered foremost, as an integral part of the design process. Materials and processes proposed should reflect a harmony with the carbon-neutral agenda. Scoping the impact of manufacturing, travel and installation should be fundamental factors of any new construction and would do well to dovetail with the [Net-Zero 2030](#) themes of *Sustainability* (Regenerative Design) and *Capability* (Collective Action towards carbon neutrality).

Partnership working with nature and climate-focussed groups and organisations, on a national and international scale will support ambitions to be and show that we are a part of the response to climate change and help build a coherent message that can resonate with and through communities and the way these issues are reflected in the city's cultural offer.

The budget for any new Public Artwork should include provision for a review in the future - this may lead to repairs, conservation, remodelling, re-siting or even removal. It is recommended that any permanent work is 'revisited' every 5 years, against agreed criteria, to ensure that it is still relevant and appropriate to its location. This decommissioning policy should be reflected in the brief and contract. The decision to decommission would be based on: work no longer being fit for purpose - its condition/aesthetics no longer matching original intentions; work becoming irrelevant to its location and context; accessibility issues; it is no longer economically viable to repair or maintain.

# APPENDIX 1: TOOLKIT

## A1.1 Public Art Advisory Group (PAAG) Structure

As the group providing high-level strategy advice and guidance to those seeking to commission Public Artwork, PAAG should comprise:

- Group Leads: 3 individuals with direct experience of commissioning, delivering and/or producing Public Art (such as, curators, lead artists, commissioners from arts institutions/organisations)

An individual representing the following:

- Youth Panel (Liveable Exeter is due to establish a Youth Panel; RAMM already has one)
- Exeter Civic Society
- Exeter Communities Together/Inclusive Exeter
- Community Builders
- Exeter City Council Arts & Events Team (including the Arts & Culture Portfolio holder)
- A Disability-focussed arts organisation

We do not expect the lead/director of these groups to attend, but a representative - to keep the group fresh and flexible.

The PAAG should meet quarterly and have a means of democratic decision-making, where any member can veto a proposal with due reason.

The Values, as outlined in the Best Practice section of this strategy document, should form part of the basis for evaluating proposals, along with the engagement plans and environmental concerns.

## **A1.2 Site-Based Commissioning Guidelines**

### **1. Preparation**

- a. Identify site/location
- b. Establish Advisory Group
- c. Define vision/intention
- d. Secure funding
- e. Develop artist's brief

### **2. Artist Selection**

- a. Open Call / Limited Call / Direct Invitation
- b. Selection Panel
- c. Issue Contract

### **3. Proposal Development**

- a. R&D (consultation/engagement etc)
- b. Outline Proposal
- c. Detailed Design/spec
- d. Approvals

### **4. Delivery**

- a. Production & Fabrication
- b. Installation or rehearsal

### **5. Completion**

- a. Sign off and Handover
- b. Maintenance Arrangements where applicable
- c. Promotion & Launch or Performance
- d. Monitoring & Evaluation



## A1.3 Writing an Artist's Brief

An Artist's Brief sets the vision, direction and scope of a commission. Rather than being a prescriptive document that seeks to fix outcomes, it can be open to allow for possibilities to emerge; it can be a point from which to explore and develop ideas, and encourage and facilitate ambition.

We recommend that the Advisory Group for each project is involved in contributing to thinking around the Brief. A Brief might include some or all of the following:

- Vision, aims and objectives of the commission
- Context: location/site, architectural context, geographic or social dimensions, background to the project
- Information about the commissioner, including Values
- Role of the Artist: project scope and deliverables; any partners or teams the Artist will be working with; permissions and insurances
- Consultation and community engagement requirements
- Opportunities and challenges, including physical or technical constraints
- The budget for fees, design, fabrication or production and installation
- Copyright and ownership
- Project management structure
- Timeframe
- Maintenance requirements
- Life expectancy of the final work
- Decommissioning requirements
- Selection process
- Submission: closing dates, address and contacts (for addressing queries)
- Appendices: maps, drawings, photographs and other useful material for artists
- Contract outline and requirements

## A1.4 Budgets

Project Budgets should cover:

- Project management fees
- Recruitment costs
- Shortlisted artists' fees
- Commission budget to include: artists fees and VAT if applicable, design, fabrication, transportation and installation
- Permission fees and technical needs e.g. structural assessments
- Contract costs
- Site works and preparation
- Consultation costs
- Documentation
- Launch
- PR/Media
- Evaluation
- Ongoing Maintenance
- Contingency

## A1.5 Maintenance Checklist

- Consider maintenance and health and safety requirements at brief setting stage
- Set aside a sum from the overall budget for maintenance. Investigate whether this can be a commuted sum, negotiate with maintenance officers to maintain for a period of x years in return for the sum
- Enquire as to whether the commission can become part of the general maintenance for that area
- Determine who will be the eventual owner and that they are prepared and equipped to deal with maintenance issues
- Consult with engineers, technical and maintenance officers as you write the brief
- Negotiate with the commissioned artist on the maintenance schedule
- Require a costed maintenance schedule from the artist in draft at shortlist stage and in full following commission
- Will the commissioned work have to go on the special maintenance requirement list? Arrange this if necessary
- Encourage a liaison meeting between the artist, contractor and any maintenance or technical officers prior to fabrication if possible and certainly before installation. (Write this into the project manager's brief if appropriate)
- Is there a clause, which contracts the artist to maintain the work for a specified period? If so then identify the appropriate officer and timetable mechanism for putting this into action
- Monitor maintenance, wear and tear and appropriateness of the work at least every two years

# APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL QUOTES

The consultation process was so rich, with conversations demonstrating the depth and breadth of people's knowledge - and emotional investment in contributing to a more inclusive, ambitious and generous cultural landscape - that we felt it important to include as much of the material as possible. What follows is a selection of quotes from consultees and survey respondents:

*"Public art should represent the people, represent the place."*

*"If you are celebrating something that refers to the place itself, for me it's about drawing out the history that's not celebrated and not in the museums. It's the working class. People's history. It's women's history."*

*"In a sense it's subversive to celebrate working class people publicly."*

*"A lot of the debates relate to the instrumentalization of art in service of other purposes, which are social, political or environmental."*

*"I think it's possible for public art to be more political. But in a way, opening up a street space for new possibilities does have a politics to it. It allows you to reimagine the everyday, which is a powerful thing."*

*"Sense of community, welcoming, brightening up the city... When it's done well it is: collaborative, it increases participation (in other things), people are encouraged to stretch their ideas, capacity and ability. It brings revenue for tourism, it becomes a city of interest for other people."*

*"I'm not sure what I think about the Angel of the North in artistic terms, but it undoubtedly does something amazing. And when you make things that are really huge, they do something amazing. And that is going to affect place making, ambition, and pride. And I can see the value of that."*

*"What I'd like to see is something that functions like a biennial; getting the funds in place to bring in some really exciting and interesting stuff on a temporary basis, with the scope for work from international artists through to local grassroots activity. With a bit of a legacy and, ideally, the ability for it to build, and with the possibility - as probably happens every Liverpool Biennial - for something to become part of the fabric of the city. And that might be a piece of art, or it might be a community relationship, or it might be a way of doing things. I think that would be wonderful for Exeter."*

*“Public Art (performance) is important in how it can bring people together, connecting without barriers.”*

*“I don’t think public should be a sticking plaster for health and social inequality, it should be in addition. Once we’re well educated, and our health is good, and we have equality all over the country, art is there to make our life worth living and worth engaging with, but it shouldn’t be there to fix social inequalities. But that’s what they expect us to do!”*

*“Public Art should act as a catalyst for other activity.”*

*“Whether it’s a tree planting scheme, a beach clean we’ve stimulated, it’s about engagement in your environment. The storytelling of the past is only relevant if it makes people do something in the future, otherwise we keep repeating the same stuff over and again.”*

*“Public Art has the opportunity to explore that territory where there’s this slippery shifting dynamic between the people that occupy public spaces and how we chose to create stories and narratives around them.”*

*“Usually when [Public Art is] being contested is actually when our sense of community is being contested.”*

*“If public art is about maintaining this fixed old majority, or dominant narrative, that’s totally useless. I’m not saying that we should just automatically throw away the old narrative, but we should engage in a constant process of renegotiating. Restorative place through public art.”*

*“Foucault talks about the apparatus - the museum, the family, the school, all of these kind of machineries - as reproducing dominant narratives, and it just shows how important public art is.”*

*“Identity and its relationship to placemaking is not just seeing reflections of ourselves in the places we live. We should be reflecting on how the public sphere is shifting and changing, with multiple perspectives, not saying that it is fixed (in a monument) - ‘this is us’ for the next however many years. Try not to be too fixed about it.”*

*“Now what everybody says is that you have to have community participation, community involvement, and that’s great. But you have to be very careful: You don’t pay lip service to that. It’s easy for councils to come up with things or to come up with this idea that gets ticked off, but isn’t really embedded in the actual making of the art.”*

*“You have to have faith in your artists. If you get a good artist in place who knows what they’re doing and has experience, if that’s the way you are going, then you should leave them to do it. And they should have direct contact with the stakeholders. The more middle management you have, the more it just gets lost in the mix.”*

*“If you are bringing in artists from somewhere else, say from London or from wherever, the process must have them connect with artists locally or groups locally, or that they're represented, or they're asked in the mix.”*

*“[Communities] should be involved in the decision making, perhaps to do with the design or to have ideas about what was going to be represented. I try to make sure that they have that kind of civic agency. They have some kind of connection to it. That's not always appropriate to all public arts, but I think if you are trying to make it embedded into a community and have it accepted and make it part of the community, then that really does help.”*

*“The idea of celebrating the unsung heroes, the everyday, the normal, is extremely beneficial.”*

*“I believe in making public art popular because it's public. We are bombarded all the time by the visual pollution of advertising. It's in our faces all the time. And yet somehow they want public art to be abstract or high brow or it's got to represent something. People need a degree in fine art to understand it. No, it's public space, for the public. Let's celebrate what they wanna celebrate. And they'll also love the idea of their own history being told.”*

*“People love trails. I think there is something innate in wanting to go on trails and find things and discover things. You can relate it to history. If you're gonna spend money on public art, you've gotta make sure it's easy and accessible for people to find interesting. And for them to find. Trails allow people to go on a journey, and the whole point of new art is to navigate through the city differently.”*

*“For me, it's about facilitating the local communities' needs and desires and wants. There was a lovely quote by Platform, the art group: ‘communities of interest, communities of the dead and communities of the unborn as well.’ It's about trying to understand what all those aspirations and needs and desires are, and then producing a brief for an artist as part of that process.”*

*“There's a distinction between process and product. Some things are very product-led and that's usually down to the money that's involved and where it's come from and how it's supposed to be spent. And that's usually what's driving the process. So, we want an object over here, or we need something to be part of a building or other physical things that we're hoping for. And then there's the process, which is how we engage people in that or how we understand what people want. And there are practically infinite permutations of the two things together. And that's what constitutes public art.”*

*“I also see a role though for antagonistic processes as well as consensual ones. So I think, perhaps controversially, that you need a combination of the two.”*

*“I think the processes that you go through are actually what makes the art really fascinating.”*

*“It really amuses me when you get these socially engaged practitioners who say, ‘we don't wanna take that person's money’. And I think that's just completely instrumentalizing what we do. If you're interested in public space, if you're interested in this highly negotiated dance that takes place, then what are you talking about? For me, that's the really interesting political space that you are working within. I think that's incredibly interesting and people who just want a simple life should be doing something completely different.”*

*“A level of knowledge and expertise in curating art is essential to open up possibilities that might not be obvious to someone who doesn't have a very wide frame of reference in that field. Ideally, a panel with representatives of council, curators/artists, and residents, possibly funders, depending on the situation. But the weighting of this might vary.”*

*“The city needs some art that reflects its heritage - the Roman history, what celebrates it? Could these be the subject of new commissions of contemporary art? Maybe ECC needs to stop pushing the model of development as progress and take time to reflect and celebrate what we have already?”*

*“In Lyme Regis there's a converted beach hut which is now a sauna, and it's hugely popular.” (As an example of modelling/ testing/ showing people what could be through a pop-up initiative). <https://shorelinesauna.co.uk/about>*

*“The process of deciding and the processes of model making need to be accessible so that people can see how things are made. The object is just an object, but it has a story of its making - it's about letting people into this, so that they can share in the story. You never know what will captivate someone, but the story is a way in. So, if there's no story, there's nothing to connect to. ‘We’ as culturally literate and educated people have ways of connecting with work, so what about the people who don't?”*

*Context: “It's interesting in relation to what's going on with monuments to people with sketchy, colonial pasts, and one of the responses is that we need plaques and information. I think it's really important that those resources are available at that time [of commissioning and installation], but how long do those resources need to be around? Because if it's successful it beds into the world and becomes part of it.”*

*“Exeter wants to be seen as a cultural place, in terms of tourism, as a cultural destination, and if you're going to do some interesting public art as part of that, you can be really ambitious and it can be really interesting. I understand why it's political, but all the things that are problematic about public art tend to do with politics.”*

*“Who should be involved in commissioning: arts professionals with a national/international horizon, who can see beyond the walls of their own city. A brave, risk-taking, conscientious troublemaker without political skin in the game.”*

*“I think the idea that work can be temporary, and become more permanent if it feels successful is good. Because if everyone hates it, then that's fine, we were always going to*

remove it. Wasn't that an interesting conversation to have? We've learned something about what people like."

"To me, that's a more interesting framework to think about art that happens in relation to the public, rather than thinking about the circumstance in which public art happens because somebody wants to build a shopping centre or block of flats. And then, if you're lucky you get a bit of art and if you're unlucky, you get a funky bench."

"In order to support or complement public art, the city needs to own it with pride. I think people are quite scared of it because it's a difficult thing to articulate, but if they want to have public art, it requires bravery to own it and own its whole problematic nature. And by its very nature it is likely to be sometimes problematic or controversial. And to say that's part of why it's really important as part of the fabric of our society, our culture. And by doing that, to feel all right about letting go of the control. I think that's what the city needs to do: to absorb that into its identity as a cultural city council. I know the city believes in culture, and I know they work really hard to protect culture in spite of the crushingly hard deal they get from central Government."

"An advisory group that is devolvable to each project - devolving where possible to people who are going to be experiencing the work (regularly). It retains expertise, destabilises the 'they know best' factor and retains high quality. There aren't any great models for this yet."

"Rotating group, energy and alive in thinking, 3 yr cycles. Keep moving, people who enjoy thinking about what makes good art/ engagement. Skills + competency over time."

"Currently there are gatekeepers with public money, the funding process is time-consuming and draining without any real exchange. A decision is made and you find out later. It would be better if there was trust in - longer term relationship building and maintaining."

"The arts has visionaries, they should be being helped to get that vision offered to the public with the option to move things forward, with evolution and conversation. Rather than 'tick these boxes to access funding'."

"Maybe there needs to be more people in decision making roles [in the council], people invested in culture, not a post-holder/ employee. Something like an Exeter Art Organisations Committee."

"Often commissioning some Public Art is viewed as a quick fix, so the timing is too short for proper engagement. It is about the opportunity 'to equip communities with some thinking tools' - not just asking what they want. 'Providing tools and broadening horizons'."

"It should all flow from the project intentions. A period of upskilling/ raising critical capacity before the brief stage (opportunities that sometimes need to be grasped)."

"A budget should 'travel' with the artwork, this is about future work/ updating/ replacing."

"A commissioning group should be set up to track alongside developments."



*WHO: "When agree to give permission [to developers], there should be some public art that runs alongside it. There should be expectations [for that] from builders. It can't all be on the local authority. The private sector has to be engaged. What percentage of the money is set aside for it? Then it's about asking councillors to support it in their wards and communities, to advocate for the necessity for it."*

*"Have the community involved after the work is commissioned. We shouldn't be asking people who have no expertise or experience. I don't know why we've decided that people in arts and humanities aren't experts. Once work is commissioned then you can work directly with the community to see that the work is meaningful, and has relevance to that community. Some communities don't want things foisted on them, but the first thing to ask is the location, which should be agreed beforehand."*

*"The first thing is to identify the site, then find out who owns it, who has shared ownership, if there's a community that engages with it. So you need a team of people experienced in working with public art. You need an expert to start the process - you need a project - who will lead on identifying the appropriate location, then seeking the relevant artists. Starts with a location."*

*"If you want immediate success, go for temporary work. And I don't think work has to be entirely socially engaged, I've been a specialist in that practice, and I feel that a lot of artists miss out because they don't have a socially engaged practice and yet they make great public art."*

*"Flying things in is another issue. It's difficult, because you want high quality and profile, but you also want to support the makers in the city and the region."*

*"It is important to emphasise the vital role of creative producers, skills of which would not be present in the city council."*

*"You need an experienced artist and creative producers with local knowledge. Don't make it for a community, create a community. Then that community of people continues to build/grow."*

*"I like the mash-up of artists and non-artists. We mentored the non-artists, and we didn't want to parachute in with work as we didn't know the city, but we had the expertise to mentor in the framing, content and delivery of tours, and that's what we did. Call on different disciplines to become mentors."*

*"Building trust is important. Once you build a relationship with people, you can make something that they might not like but it will be stimulating for them. You can't do it the other way around. Confidence building.... Trust building. Eventually some people rise out of that community who are excited by the prospect, then they become the group that brings the thing forward."*

*“People in charge of public money are often trying to be responsible in having to justify its use... it’s hard to say, ‘we tried something that was a failure’. But it’s better to admit to that risk of failure.”*

*“In developing a project, is there someone local who can be involved, get work in kind, expanding it out into the communities who don’t think they’re involved, and suddenly they get interested... High-quality objects means that after that first process has taken place, the thing is on the ground, if it’s quality it catalyses other activity.”*

*“Bad quality is often to do with budgets surrounding public art – the less of it made would be better.”*

*“The process must encompass all of these possibilities for failure, and accepting that not everything is good because ambition is high, so has to be allowed. There are ways of the thing evolving from one stage into another; a lot of them are put down, artist or funder has no relationship to the community, and it falls into disrepair that it has to be taken away, or is so inert that it becomes an obstacle.”*

*“First question: why are you putting it there? So the percentage for art scheme, which is good on one hand, the majority of the work is rubbish, on a new housing development in which there’s no community. Or it’s an appeasement of some local narrative. That might be a way that a thing develops, but it’s not the right criteria in the first place.”*

*“Let’s think about why it’s here and what it tells us; art should look like and the relationships between communities and those making decisions.”*

*“Local engagement is really important. Longer embedded relationships. People who understand the dynamics of the communities within which that work is emerging, people who understand how to hold that conversation and open that space up. A certain sort of expertise - also about understanding what commissioning means, engagement process that can lead to an informed understanding of the dynamics and relationships.”*

*“There is a complementarity to different strategies for producing - grassroots engagement processes take a long time, they involve a huge amount of energy and personal investment and many people, and there is also a value in making quick decisions for short-life span/ high impact work. You can’t do the bigger stuff without the engagement.”*

*“Identity and its relationship to placemaking is not just seeing reflections of ourselves in the places we live. We should be reflecting on how the public sphere is shifting and changing, with multiple perspectives, not saying that it is fixed (in a monument) - ‘this is us’ for the next however many years. Try not to be too fixed about it.”*

*“How do you reinvent a formal commissioning practice when developer-led agendas are increasingly crucial in the visibility and practicality of that commissioning strategy? How do you redefine that practice? How do you get beyond paying the piper and figure out relationships to development agendas - not just tokenistic community art - that can create really valuable outcomes through an interesting and valuable process?”*

*“Micro-commissions that can lead to bigger works - bringing on artists’ ideas (this is something that the University’s Arts & Culture team excel at).”*

*“The thing I really like about an artist is their complete singularity. The knowledge in an artist’s practice is singular. It’s not about that common denominator. So I think the role of the curator is still really important for enabling that space for that singular reality. The trouble with Exeter is it’s very ‘common denominator’. It’s kind of the capital of middle England, and they don’t want any singularity, they’re absolutely completely terrified of it.”*

*“If Public Art is about a process, a conversation, you need a temporary rolling program, a program of temporary commissions.”*

*“If public art is about maintaining this fixed old majority, or dominant narrative, that’s totally useless. I’m not saying that we should just automatically throw away the old narrative, but we should engage in a constant process of renegotiating. Restorative place through public art.”*

*“But it’s a very particular old set of knowledge to be able to make an interesting, challenging conversation in a public context. So it should be a combination of communities and experts, but not necessarily the institutional blocking type of experts. You probably want artists, curators and communities.”*

*“There’s been a bit of talk around critical tools and the experts could actually be the people who deliver or educate on critical thinking, critical tools for communities so that a community is formed around the subject. So around the commission, as it were, and the experts are brought in to support that community of people, to have the critical tools to be able to engage with the commissioning process.”*

*“Curating is a creative practice. But it’s also about being able to talk and make relationships with lots of different contradictory agendas, and talking to a local council and getting permission to do something.”*

*“Because it’s about making meaning in the public context, you have to engage all those different communities in the conversation; you have to really co-create. Because meaning comes out of that dialogue. You don’t ask them to do something that they have no experience in doing, which is leading an arts project. You work with them and an artist to develop a really meaningful project together. And everyone comes out surprised rather than going into it basically knowing what’s going to come out at the end, and just ticking the boxes as you go along. So obviously the process has to be a big consultation with everyone who’s involved in our public realm, but it also means critiquing what is this public realm and whose interests are at stake? So you have to have a bit of that too. You have to be a bit Marxist at the same time.”*

*“It’s got to be about process and relationships. That’s ultimately what curating is.”*

*“You’ve got to go into the unknown with the process. You don't know what's going to come out of it. But because you've got an artist in there it's like taking their subjectivity on that journey is what's gonna produce something of real quality.”*

*“There's always this sort of safe pyramid where people are allowed to do stuff, but the thing that's going to be really distinctive is allowing the free radicals to bring their connections.”*

# APPENDIX 3: CONSULTATION LIST

Brendan Barry, Artist and Co-director of Positive Lights Project  
Simon Bates, East Devon District Council  
Rob Bowman, Curator  
Matt Burrows, Contemporary Art Curator, Exeter Phoenix  
Sarah Campbell, Associate Director, Arts & Culture at the University of Exeter  
Dr John Wedgwood Clarke, Academic Director, Arts & Culture at the University of Exeter  
Paula Crutchlow, Blind Ditch  
Anne-Marie Culhane, Artist  
Patricia Dixon, Arts Practitioner & Consultant  
Exeter Canal & Quay Trust Board  
Exeter Civic Society: including Hazel Harvey, Keith Lewis, Pamela Wootton  
Lara Goodband, Contemporary Art Curator, RAMM  
Nick Hall, MIDI/Exeter Street Arts Festival  
Suzanne Heath, Curator and Producer  
Cleo Heard, Artist  
Professor Stephen Hodge, Wrights & Sites, and University of Exeter  
InExeter Board: Ann Hunter, Nikki Fairclough, Patrick Cunningham  
Alex Murdin, Artist and Curator

Stephen Pettet-Smith, Artist & former Arts & Health Lead at Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital Trust  
Preston Street Union: Megan Calver, Fliss Shillingford, Gabby Hoad, Becka Nutt, Betina Amtag, Pete Kingston, Dan Cray, Catherine Lewis.  
Carrie Reichardt, Artist  
Jonathan Scott, Heritage and Engagement Lead, Exeter Cathedral  
Adam Atkins, Magic Carpet Arts for Health  
Josie Sutcliffe, Co-director, Dreadnought South West  
Professor Nicola Thomas, Head of Cultural Geography, University of Exeter  
Professor Tom Trevor, Curator, and Creative Arc Academic Lead at University of Exeter  
Professor Cathy Turner, Wrights & Sites, Co-director of 'Outside the Box' at University of Exeter  
Marcus Vergette, Artist  
James Lake, Artist  
Members of Ubuntu and Exeter Communities Together  
Community Builders: Laura, Chloe, Bernice, Ebbie, Willy.  
Exeter Malayalee Association (Roby)

# APPENDIX 4: FURTHER INFORMATION

## **Place-making**

<https://reimagineplace.ie/resources/>

<https://landezine.com/book-project-process-park-by-mareld/>

<https://homebaked.org.uk/>

<https://www.citiesforum.org/news/superblock-superilla-barcelona-a-city-redefined/>

<https://architecturefoundation.ie/>

## **Public Art**

<https://upprojects.com/current/>

<https://www.situations.org.uk/>

<https://ixia-info.org/>

<https://www.orielmyrddingallery.co.uk/pillars-of-society>

<https://www.furtherfield.org/>

<https://we-are-low-profile.com/>

<https://www.power.film/>

## **About Us**

Art Work Exeter was formed in 2016, to deliver the first Art Week Exeter. The team for the Public Art Strategy was led by Creative Director, Stuart Crewes, who has been engaged in art commissioning in the city since 2012. The team also included Professor John Butler - former Head of Exeter School of Art and a founding member of Spacex gallery; and received consultation from Suzanne Heath - independent producer and member of ixia; artist-consultant Patricia Dixon, a specialist in learning, participation and strategy development; and was supported by Belinda Dillon, writer and editor - seconded from Exeter Culture.



# Art Work Exeter