

Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy survey open until 30 March 2026

Your voice matters – and an informed response will make it count

Exeter City Council is currently running an [online survey](#) on the future of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (nCIL). We strongly encourage Trust members to take part. This is an important opportunity to ensure that the Council hears clearly that residents expect meaningful engagement with Exeter St James Community Trust on the lawful allocation of neighbourhood funding — including for projects identified in the Neighbourhood Plan, such as Queen’s Crescent Garden.

Before completing the survey, we invite you to consider the following context so that responses reflect the full picture.

Background

In July 2025, an independent report prepared for Exeter City Council’s internal audit was published. It raised significant concerns about the governance of CIL, including the neighbourhood portion. The Trust wrote to the Council seeking constructive engagement on these issues.

Despite several further attempts, we have not yet received a direct response beyond an initial acknowledgement. However, our ward councillors and the deputy chair of the Audit and Governance Committee have been consistently supportive, pressing for a meeting with officers including the CEO. A statement has now been provided by the CEO, via councillors, indicating that this online survey is the Council’s chosen route for engagement at this stage.

While this is not the level of dialogue we had hoped for, it is still important that the Council hears from residents. Completing the survey — and making clear that nCIL should be directed to neighbourhood priorities, including those in the Neighbourhood Plan, not Council priorities — will strengthen the case for proper engagement.

What to expect from the survey

The survey is anonymous. You will only be asked whether you are responding as an individual, a group, or a councillor, and for the first three characters of your postcode.

Most questions require you to select a position on a scale of agreement using tick boxes. Each question also includes an optional free-text box. These free-text boxes are the only place where you can express expectations about engagement with the Trust and the need for nCIL to support Neighbourhood Plan priorities.

A practical note: the full range of tick-box options is not visible at first glance. To select “definitely disagree”, you may need to use the slider bar beneath each row.

What the survey covers

You will be asked how strongly you agree or disagree that nCIL should continue to fund:

- Ward Grants
- City Grants
- Wellbeing Exeter

You will also be asked to rate the importance of various broad priorities such as:

- Addressing inequalities
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Supporting communities to work together
- Encouraging volunteering
- Improving where we live
- Promoting arts, culture, and digital inclusion

And you will be asked about priorities for Wellbeing Exeter's role, including:

- Neighbourhood decision-making
- Community capacity development
- Prevention
- Local wellbeing systems

Many of these aims may appear positive in principle. However, before selecting your level of agreement, it is worth considering whether these broad activities are a) legally compliant and b) the most appropriate use of nCIL — particularly when they may divert funding away from larger, transformative neighbourhood projects designed to address the impacts of development.

What is the scale of money involved?

According to Council reports, Exeter received £34.06 million in CIL between 2015/16 and March 2025. The neighbourhood portion of this — required by law — would exceed £5.1 million. In the year ending March 2025 alone, the Council recorded £495,222.46 as nCIL expenditure.

The Council states that, following the 2019 survey, nCIL has been allocated to Community Grants and Wellbeing Exeter. Ward Grants (up to £350 per councillor from a £3,000 ward budget) and City Grants (up to £2,500 from a £50,000 pot) form part of this.

However, in 2019 the Council indicated that Ward Grants would be funded from the New Homes Bonus, which has remained available until 2025/26. On that basis, it appears that approximately £445,222.46 of nCIL in 2024/25 was allocated to Wellbeing Exeter.

What the survey is really asking

The Council is seeking views on whether it should continue allocating nCIL in the same way beyond 2026/27. The brief contextual information provided does not fully explain the legal framework governing nCIL.

Before responding, it is important to understand what Government Guidance says about the neighbourhood portion of CIL — particularly in areas like St James with a made Neighbourhood Plan.

The survey webpage links to [Government Guidance on the Community Infrastructure Levy](#) (see “Spending the levy”, especially paragraphs 145–146). [Guidance on Neighbourhood Planning](#) is also relevant, especially paragraph 003 under “What are the benefits to a community of developing a neighbourhood plan or Order?”.

Key points from Government Guidance

- The neighbourhood portion of CIL **must** be used “to support the development of the relevant area” by funding infrastructure or addressing the demands development places on that area.
- Where there is no parish or town council (as in Exeter), the charging authority **must engage with the communities** where development has taken place and **agree with them** how best to spend the neighbourhood funding.
- Crucially, this engagement should occur **at the neighbourhood level**.
- The use of neighbourhood funds should **match priorities expressed by local communities**, including those set out in a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Where a Neighbourhood Plan exists, the Council and the community **should consider how the neighbourhood portion can deliver the infrastructure identified in the plan**.
- Communities that develop a Neighbourhood Plan and secure support at referendum benefit from **25% of CIL receipts** arising from development in their area.

Your response will help ensure that neighbourhood funding in all wards is used as intended: to support the priorities of the community where development has taken place.

By responding clearly and knowledgeably, we can help secure the neighbourhood funding that St James is entitled to — and ensure it is spent where it will have the most transformative impact on our neighbourhood.