

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

St David's East 2021-22



Introduction

Welcome to St David's East! This neighbourhood profile draws on the work of the Wellbeing Exeter Community Builder in St David's East, to bring you a community's eye view of the neighbourhood and what happens in it. You'll not find statistics here on demographics, health, education, etc. Please read this alongside the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) tool from Devon County Council, which provides a wealth of quantitative data.

Our focus here is on local knowledge: what is it like to live here; what informal community activity there is; where are the important community focal points; what's missing, or of concern to local residents.

This is a snapshot rather than a directory, so doesn't have exhaustive listings (although we've done our best to avoid errors and omissions). It aims to highlight community strengths, and its not-so-strengths, and to provide an informed commentary on the health of community life.



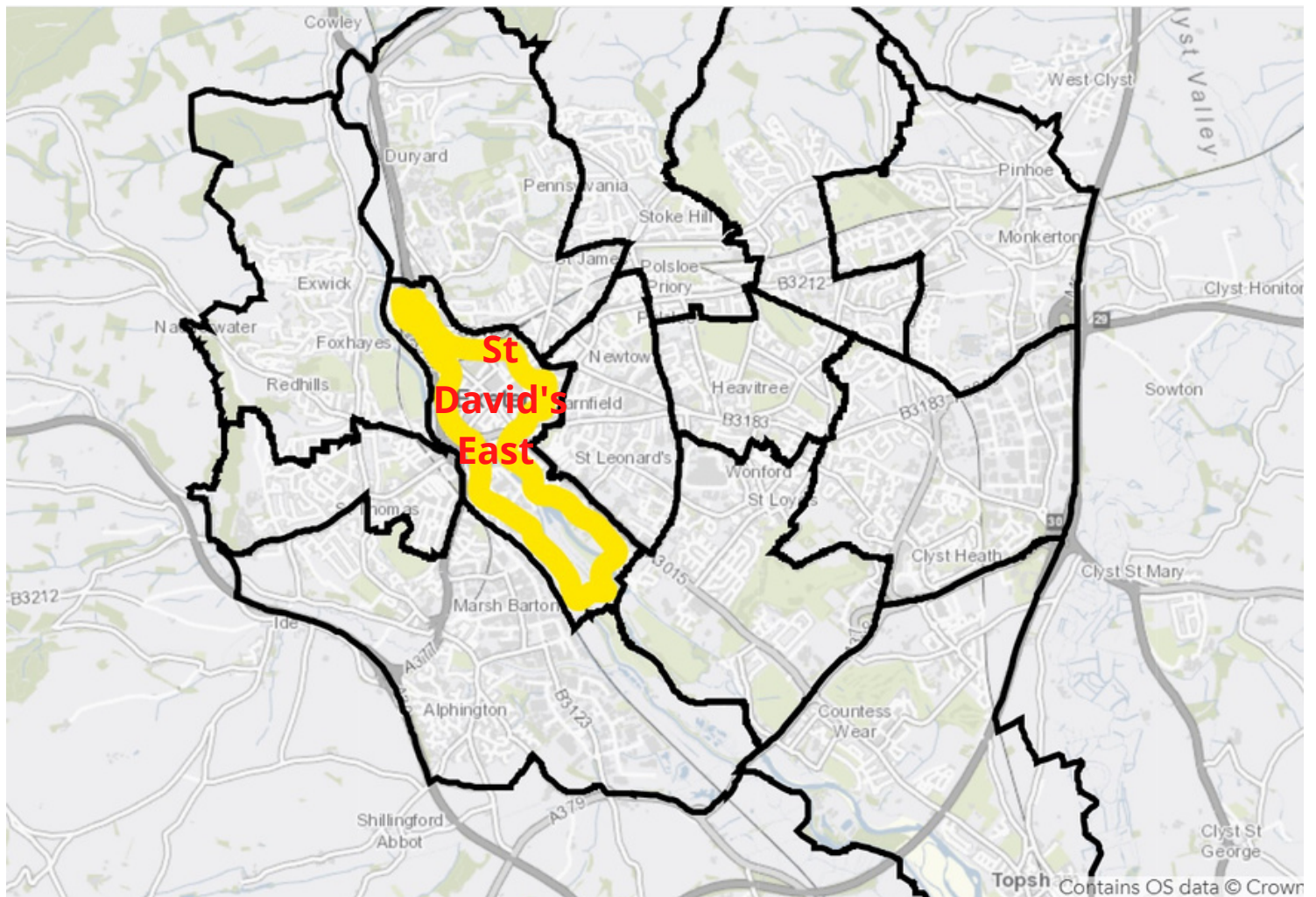
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Picture Of A Place

The ward of St David's extends from the mainline railway station in the west, across the Exe Bridges intersection and eastwards along the river, as well as reaching northwards into the city centre. Because of the road layout, the position of the river, and the type of development in this area, it does not make sense to consider this a single community. The western part of the ward, near the station and the Iron Bridge, forms a well-established community.

The Community Builder, however, is focused on more recently developed areas around Exe Bridges, and the lower reaches of Fore Street and South Street, moving down to the Quay and up to the canal basin.



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The area is characterised by housing complexes rather than traditional residential streets. Some of these are purpose-built student accommodation, but others are housing association properties, or supported accommodation for vulnerable groups such as homeless young people, older people, or those in recovery (some examples are Julian House, Gabriel House and Bethany House). Many of these buildings are three or four stories high, and often built around enclosed courtyards or green spaces only accessible to residents. This makes for a very distinctive pattern of local neighbourhood interaction, with a series of micro-communities existing side-by-side: in some complexes the courtyard format has helped foster community interaction, but in others levels of transience have meant this is more of a challenge. Working with residents of supported accommodation at Shilhay recently has revealed a desire to bring the community closer together, stay in touch and share information and opportunities to get together.

There are no schools in St David's East (there is primary school in the western part of the ward), and no leisure centres, although Riverside is just over the ward boundary in St Thomas. Perhaps as a result, residents do travel outside their immediate neighbourhood for everyday facilities, either west to St Thomas, or north into Newtown & St Leonard's.

The area is also home to the charity St Petrock's, which provides support and food for rough sleepers.

Many of the seven churches within this southern part of the city centre also provide support for homeless people. The Mint Methodist church and the South Street Baptist church offer a range of groups and activities as well as coffee mornings, though these are largely attended by the respective congregations rather than local residents more broadly. The dynamics of who does what and where is affected by the fact that this is firmly a city centre location.



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St David's East includes the area around the Quay, which has an array of shops, offices, restaurants and nightclubs, as well as outdoor activity facilities such as a climbing centre, bike hire and watersports equipment rental. Organised bike rides and walks run from here, as does the Riverside Park Run, which attracts over 500 runners weekly.



It is an area popular with visitors; prior to the pandemic, many local people said they did not regularly visit, despite it being on their doorstep, as it did not feel like 'their' space, especially in the summer when it attracts lots of tourists. The lockdown, with its restriction on how far people could travel from home, made the Quay area much quieter, and allowed many locals to reconnect with it, encouraging some to want to do more to improve its anti-social behaviour problems.

Green Spaces

Public green space in St David's East is confined to areas bordering the river.

Haven Banks Play Area has recently been upgraded and attracts families from across the city due to its proximity to the quay, leisure centre and shopping facilities.



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Belle Isle Park on the eastern river bank also has a play area.

Bromhams Farm Playing Field, on the opposite bank of the river, is fully reopened following the flood defence works, which has opened up the area for running and cycling groups such as the Exeter Marathon, Freemovement's Freewheelin' initiative and the Bike Bank's fortnightly cycling ride for people with depression and anxiety.

Trews Weir Allotments – three sites adjoining the river in the far east of the ward.

Community Hubs and What Happens In Them

Community hubs can be buildings, spaces, organisations, even people. They can be community-owned and run, council property, and commercial businesses. What they have in common is that they bring added value to the activities and energy associated with them by bringing people together in ways they might not otherwise do, being a focus for local expertise and connection, and facilitating the casual encounters that fuel fantastic community action.

St David's East is a fragmented area, criss-crossed with large roads and the river. Several of the housing complexes include communal rooms, but there is no public community centre (Exeter Community Centre on St David's Hill is in the west of the ward). The principal community spaces are therefore church-based, or situated within housing developments.

St Leonard's Church on Topsham Road, strictly speaking not in Newtown & St Leonard's but in St David's. The church runs a wide range of groups for different age-groups.

South Street Baptist Church hosts a community café. The café is run in partnership with Langdon Hospital Dawlish, providing volunteering opportunities for men recovering from mental ill-health.



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The Mint Methodist Church on Fore Street has, in non-pandemic times, a wide variety of community-focused groups including a knitting group, a theatre-goers' group, walking group, coffee morning, craft group, film club, and a toddler group. The Mint is also a Food Bank location.



Salvation Army – the community hall hosts a community lunch on Sundays, monthly coffee mornings, a parent and toddler group on Monday and Wednesday mornings.

Shilhay housing development has a community room that historically was used exclusively for sheltered housing residents, but Exeter City Council is now keen for all local residents to have use of it. Residents have several plans for its use in an inclusive way. The resident-led *Shilhay Action Group* has been very active, encouraging the Council to repair lighting and guttering, and are now in the process of addressing parking issues.

What Else Is Happening?

Headway Devon, a charity supporting those with acquired brain injury and their families, runs the XCentre on the Quay. The space is rented out as a training venue, aimed at a commercial market, but a carers' drop-in is also based there, one morning a month.



Exeter Foyer has a building with accommodation for 36 young people, along with access to a wide range of support services, with drop-in advice and job-search sessions.



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Ride On is a social enterprise based on the Quay. Wednesdays are Bring your own Bike days, when the workshop can be used by riders to service their own bikes. Freemoovement run regular free group cycle rides from here, under their Freewheelin' banner.

Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

The St David's Neighbourhood Partnership produces a newsletter every few months, delivered to 1000 households, and also available online. This does tend to focus on the western end of the ward.

There are no community associations in the eastern area of St David's, and therefore no newsletters focusing on the area. Cornerstone social housing has a quarterly newsletter for its residents.



The Community Builder is working with Shilhay residents to produce and distribute a newsletter there. Shilhay has a particularly active WhatsApp group, and residents have successfully requested the installation of a noticeboard.

The Mint church and the South Street Methodist church have noticeboards but there are no other boards around South Street, Fore Street and Exe Bridges. A Community Builder listening event with residents of a Cornerstone social housing complex behind Smythen Street has resulted in the housing association agreeing to site noticeboards in the communal green spaces.

Most of the advertising of groups and events around the Quay is done through social media, or through the shops and cafes as there are no public notice boards. The shops are very good at carrying leaflets and are very supportive of any activities happening locally.



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Where Are The Gaps and Concerns? What Potential For The Future?

Residents say they love living close to the river, but there are concerns about anti-social behaviour in the Quay area. Drug dealing is a concern for several residents, partly as a result of the proximity of nightclubs and pubs to sheltered housing.

A growing sense of identity, and an increasing interest in looking outwards, has been noticeable in St David's East since the beginning of the pandemic. The Community Builder is working with several groups of residents who are interested in forming community associations in their neighbourhood, either to support local connection and social cohesion, or to make their voices heard regarding new developments or local issues. The coming together of community support activity during the lockdowns has also prompted renewed connections between the east and west ends of the ward. It is too early to say how these developments will play out, but they are very interesting changes, with a lot of potential to affect community life.

Recent developments of student accommodation in the west of the ward have caused consternation locally, with a feeling that their perspective has not been considered by University of Exeter authorities, and some unhappiness about student behaviour. Similar worries have been expressed with regard to the planned redevelopment of the Harlequins shopping centre.

Shilhay residents say there is insufficient disabled parking, and there is competition for on-street parking with visitors to the area.

