

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24



Introduction

Welcome to Duryard and St James! This neighbourhood profile draws on the work of the Wellbeing Exeter Community Builder 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 profile 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 is there; 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 may not have exhaustive listings (although we've done our best to avoid errors and omissions). The profile aims to highlight community strengths, and not-so-strengths, and to provide an informed commentary on the health of community life.



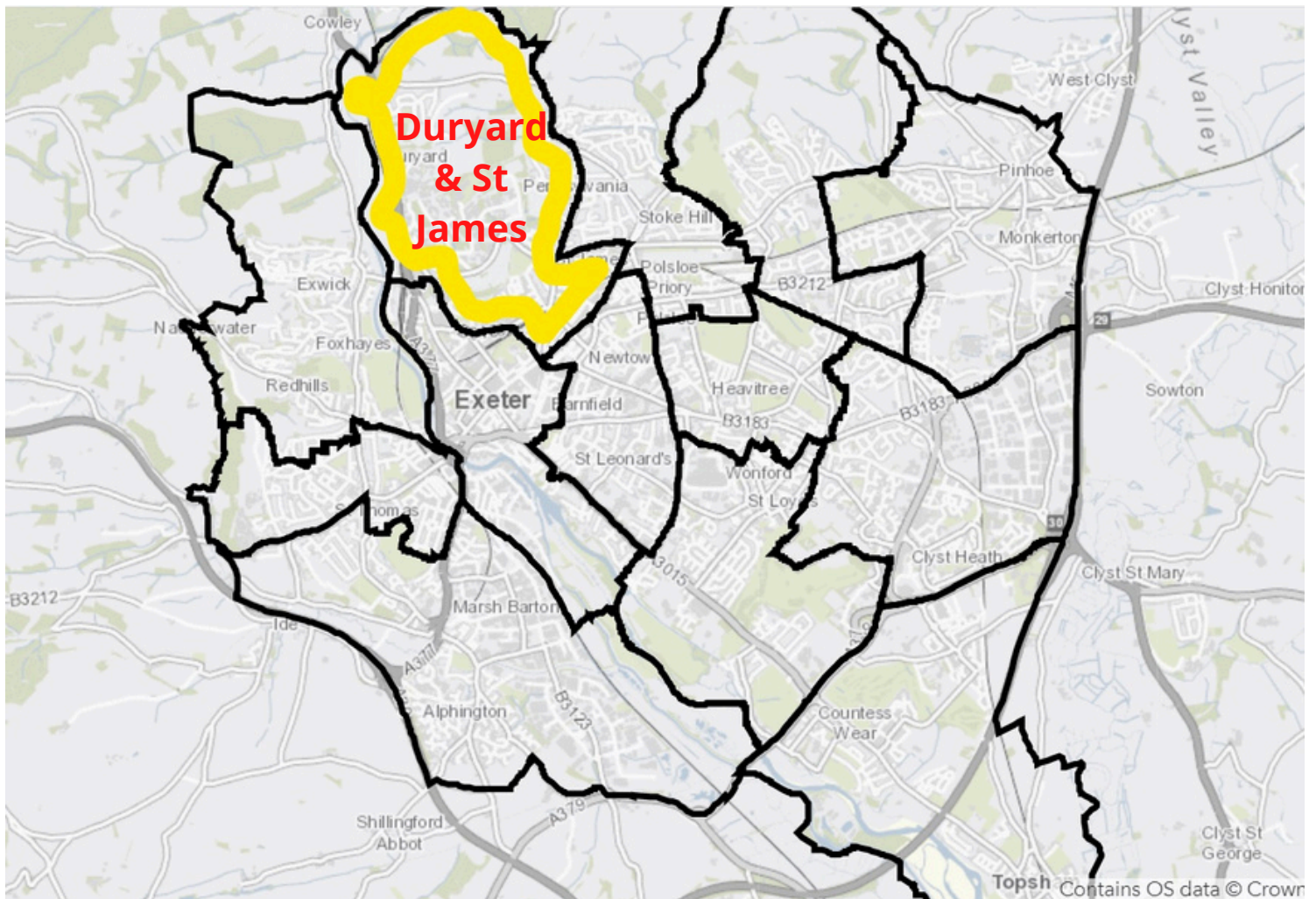
Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

Picture Of A Place

Duryard and St James is a ward that contains many distinct communities and cultural assets within its boundary. Part of the city centre, the University of Exeter's main campus and areas of mature housing on Exeter's rural fringe are all located in the ward.

While nominally a single ward, those living in the mainly terraced streets closer to the centre of Exeter would probably consider themselves to be residents of St James, while those living around the University campus and out toward the edge of Exeter would associate more as Duryarders.



Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

The part of the ward that lies within the city centre houses a mix of independent and chain shops and community spaces such as Exeter City Football Ground, St Sidwell's Community Centre and Exeter Central Mosque. While the services provided here will obviously be used by ward residents, the assets in the city centre also attract people from across Exeter and beyond.

Right in the middle of the ward is the main Streatham campus of the University of Exeter. The University attracts tens of thousands of students including large numbers from overseas. The students and staff are provided with numerous opportunities to join clubs and groups and access to a large number of leisure facilities on campus. The University's focus is not however entirely inward and in normal times there are many opportunities and facilities open to local residents.

Beyond the University on the suburban edge of Exeter, development is less dense and the houses are generally larger. House building in this part of the ward has tended to concentrate along the ridge bordering Pennsylvania or toward the valley bottom around West Garth Road and Wrefords Lane. There are few community spaces, although West Garth Road Park and the Barton Place Farm Shop have hosted events organised by local residents.

St Sidwell's Church of England Primary School and Nursery reflects the diversity of its inner-city catchment with around a third of children having English as an additional language. The school has an active PTA which organises regular social and fundraising events both for those connected directly to the school and the wider community. Avanti Hall School, previously a Steiner school, is an all-through school, based in the historic grounds of Thomas Hall on Cowley Bridge Road. The school has recently attracted new families to the area, and the historical tension between parents and residents over traffic and parking issues has lessened. The Community Builder has been working with the school to build relations with the community, including opening the school grounds and buildings for community use.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

There are a number of providers managing sheltered and supported housing schemes within the ward for a range of clients with differing housing needs. Several of these schemes (particularly those provided for the over 55s) have communal spaces and arrange activities for their residents. Some activities have potential to be accessible for non-residents. One suggestion is to invite students to share activities with the residents in York House.

The diversity of the area is emphasised further by the number of religious groups who have meeting places within the ward: The Pure Land Buddhist Centre, Sidwell Street Methodist Church, Exeter Central Mosque, Christian Science Exeter, Scientist and the Catholic Chaplaincy at the University of Exeter being just a sample. Exeter Mosque holds an annual open day for the whole community, inviting everyone to see the building from the inside and learn more about the culture and religion of Muslim people.

Green Spaces

The cultural diversity of the ward is paralleled by the number and variety of green spaces that Duryard and St James can offer. There are several community garden projects that allow residents to hone their horticultural skills in a shared space.

St Sidwell's Community Centre manages two sites. One area is the grounds around the community centre (volunteers meet twice a week for either gardening training or gardening. They also helped turn the Exeter Mosque's garden into a community garden. The other area is St James vegetable gardens by St James railway station, which they manage directly now as Network Rail has allowed more information groups to take on the license with them.

The Community Rainbow Garden on Sidwell Street is run by the Methodist Church and provides a friendly atmosphere and quiet space. There is a free Monday afternoon club for the whole community.

The University has its own community garden at the top of the campus, where students, staff and local residents are all welcome to lend a hand.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

A number of residents' associations take an interest in the care and management of their local green spaces, influencing their development and volunteering to tidy and improve them. Examples of green spaces with active resident involvement include:

Devonshire Place Community Orchard - residents, led by the Devonshire Place Residents' Association, have worked hard to transform this orchard over the last ten years by restoring the paths and hedges, installing new play equipment and benches and planting over 30 fruit trees. The Orchard is a hub for the neighbourhood. There is a regular Sunday gardening group, and BBQs in the summer. During the lockdown it allowed residents to meet for coffee in the fresh air. The residents' association runs social and seasonal events which bring people together. The Community Builder is working to include some of the students who live nearby, to help build positive relationships with other residents.

Queen's Crescent Garden is the triangle of land bounded by York Road, Longbrook Street and Queen's Crescent. Its position in close proximity to important community facilities such as St Sidwell's CofE Primary School, Exeter Mosque, the Spiritualist Church and the shops in Well Street, adds to its potential as a community green space where community events can take place. It is a significant part of the Neighbourhood Plan's vision for this whole area as the Community Hub, forming the much-needed heart of the community that will strengthen St James' image and identity as a vibrant and diverse community. The regeneration of a community such as St James requires changed perceptions, and an increase in the confidence of people to invest in the area, whether by converting HMOs back to private family homes, thus redressing issues of balance, or by setting up businesses. As a visually prominent green space, the appearance of Queen's Crescent Garden has the potential to significantly affect perceptions for better or worse. Therefore, the sad decline of Queen's Crescent Garden with no apparent owner, crumbling walls, accumulations of rubbish and frequent use for antisocial activity, had long been a source of concern and regret. Valiant efforts had been made by Exeter Community Initiative's Harvest Project and the University, both staff and students' Guild, to combat the decline, but a more radical transformation was deemed necessary.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

Bury Meadow Park has green space for picnics and play equipment, and hosts a gardening group on weekends; singing and yoga groups also use it. It is a popular space for students from Exeter College to have their lunch break. The Community Builder holds regular walk and talk sessions around the park with local residents, and supports an annual picnic which celebrates cultures and diversity in the community.

Powderham Crescent Central Garden is a community garden in which residents get together to look after occasionally and enjoy socialising in. Powderham Crescent Residents Association runs some community gardening and events here.

Horseguards Park has play equipment and a big green area for sitting and walking. With the support of the Community Builder, local residents distributed a questionnaire to the surrounding community and discussed the comments with the council. Suggestions included: the need for new equipment, improved drainage, a seating area, and community growing area. A plan to take this forward has been developed with the council. Behind the play area there is the valley which connects it to the university. Residents and the university engagement team got together to plan to connect the students to the community through various activities and events which benefit the students' studies and connects them to the space and the community where they live.

West Garth Road Park contains play equipment and space for games or dog walking, and has been used by [Freemovement](#), with residents training as leaders. Residents here have also been consulting on what improvements the community would like to see.

With the support of the Community Builder, a small wildflower planting event was undertaken by a resident in 2021. With the help of the council and support from the Community Builder, the park now has a path which is great for scooters and little bikes and also helps wheelchair users to access the park and enjoy it. The council installed tree climbers and improved the ground, so residents came together and put football goals and other games for different age groups to enjoy.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

For the past 3 years this park has been used by the community to get together, celebrate seasons and fundraise for the [West Garth Area Residents Association](#), which was formed with support from the Community Builder. There have been talks and applications for funds to start an orchard or planting space in the park where people can regularly get together and plant together.

Danes Castle is a Historic England Scheduled Monument consisting of the remains of a 12th century ringwork that now provides another green space for residents, though some have concerns about anti-social behaviour here.

Exeter University campus has large areas of landscaped open space that many locals enjoy informally as places to walk or run. The campus is also the venue for a weekly walking group, one of several held under the Walking for Health banner in the city. On the campus fringes Lower Hoopern Valley, Grassway Wood and Belvidere Meadows are all slightly wilder spaces that provide further opportunities for walking, running and relaxing in more natural surroundings.

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.

Given that part of the ward is located within the centre of Exeter it is recognised that residents of Duryard and St James will take advantage of the many commercial premises to spend their leisure time shopping, eating, drinking and meeting friends. Likewise, those studying or working at the University and residents from the broader community will make use of the facilities provided on campus for similar purposes. These businesses are an important part of the social fabric of the ward and the wider city but the focus here will be on those places regularly organising or hosting community groups and events.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

Sidwell Street Methodist Church runs men's and women's fellowship groups for those of faith but also a number of secular activities including a badminton club, a monthly craft group and the aforementioned Rainbow Garden. They also host the 1st Exeter Company of the Boys Brigade.

St Sidwell's Community Centre occupies part of a former church and manages a number of rooms within the building and the grounds on behalf of the community. The community centre itself runs a Community Café staffed mainly by volunteers as well as a number of regular groups such as a work club, a food preserving group and a monthly repair café.



Their cookery school leads a number of themed sessions each month. Other organisations are welcomed to use the centre as a venue for regular or one-off meetings. Offerings from other groups include Olive Tree English lessons for speakers of other languages, an afternoon of activities for the over 40s, martial arts classes and Sing and Sign for parents and their babies and toddlers. **Hikmat Devon** also host a variety of activities at St Sidwell's for black and minority ethnic communities from across the county.

Exeter City Community Trust, located at Exeter City's football ground, organise a number of regular group activities generally themed around sport but not all requiring physical activity. More active offerings include Man vs Fat and walking football, and a weekly table tennis club. For those who'd rather talk sport than take part there is the men's sporting memories group. The Exeter chapter of Andy's Man Club, a nationwide organisation aimed at getting men to talk about their mental health in order to reduce the number of suicides in men under 45, also meets weekly at the football ground. The Community Builder supports the weekly community café, running occasional craft sessions, and is looking into other ways the community can use space at St James' Park.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

CoLab Exeter comprises a multi-agency wellbeing hub looking to provide positive outcomes for the community around homelessness, addiction and the associated inequalities. CoLab hosts a number of projects including Wellbeing Exeter, Resilient Women and First Step that can help residents (including those with particular vulnerabilities) to engage meaningfully with their communities. The **Clock Tower Surgery** shares the building with CoLab and provides medical services to the homeless and vulnerably housed.

What Else Is Happening?

There is bowls at **Exonia Bowls** as well as meditation at Pure Land Buddhist Centre. There are choirs and singing groups at Exeter University, St Sidwell's Community centre and Sidwell Street Methodist Church. Squash is available at **Devon & Exeter Squash & Racketball Club** and there is a wide variety of performing arts such as opera, dance and theatre at the **Northcott Theatre** on the Exeter University campus.



Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

[Devonshire Place Residents' Association](#) and [Bury Meadow Residents' Association](#) both promote themselves through their own websites, Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups, as well as noticeboards.

The [Exeter St James Forum](#) (a group representing all the residents' associations in St James) has its own website and produces and delivers a twice-yearly newsletter within the St James area.

Thornton Hill and West Avenue Residents' Association communicates through leafleting and a WhatsApp group, with discussions about having a Facebook page and a noticeboard in the near future.

[Powderham Crescent Residents' Association](#) also has a Facebook page and a noticeboard.

The Community Builder supported Duryard residents to set up [West Garth Area Residents' Association](#). They connect by WhatsApp group, Facebook page and leafleting. They are talking about putting a noticeboard up soon.

Residents in some streets have set up informal Facebook pages for community purposes, and the pandemic led to a large number of local WhatsApp groups as well.

The larger community centres also tend to promote themselves online through their own websites and via social media. Exeter City Community Trust, Sidwell Street Methodist Church and St Sidwell's Community Centre all have their own websites. St Sidwell's Community Centre also has a noticeboard in its entrance hall that mainly provides information about what is happening at the centre but also has some space for other local groups to place flyers. Sidwell Street Methodist Church produces a monthly magazine for its parishioners.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Duryard & St James 2023-24

Both St Sidwell's CofE School and Avanti Hall School have their own websites that keep parents, staff and students up to date with what is happening at the schools. While not necessarily intended for local residents these websites also carry information about events that are open to the wider community such as fairs and fundraisers.

While mainly aimed at students and staff, the University of Exeter's website is also a useful resource for residents who want to make use of its facilities. The home page is not explicit about community engagement but many of the department pages refer more directly to residents (for example, the language school promotes its evening classes, the sports faculty makes it clear that their facilities are available to the general public and the events pages carry information about public lectures, exhibitions and performances).

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

Residents in West Garth Road, Wrefords Lane and Woodley Lane are keen to find ways to connect better with their neighbours. The Community Builder is trying slowly to encourage them to form a resident association in the future, and will carry on working alongside them and encouraging them to connect in different ways such as wildflower planting, trails and free library.

Some residents in St James expressed the need for a walking group to keep healthy. The Community Builder is doing walk and talk with some residents and will keep encouraging them to find someone from their neighbourhood to walk and talk with.

Some residents in St James are unhappy about the litter problem, and want to set up a litter picking group. The Community Builder is in touch with the homelessness partnership based in CoLab to discuss this issue.