

# Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

## Mincinglake & Whipton 2023-24



### Introduction

Welcome to Mincinglake and Whipton! 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 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 the important community focal points are; and 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). It aims to highlight community strengths and areas for growth. It also aims to provide an informed commentary on the health of community life.

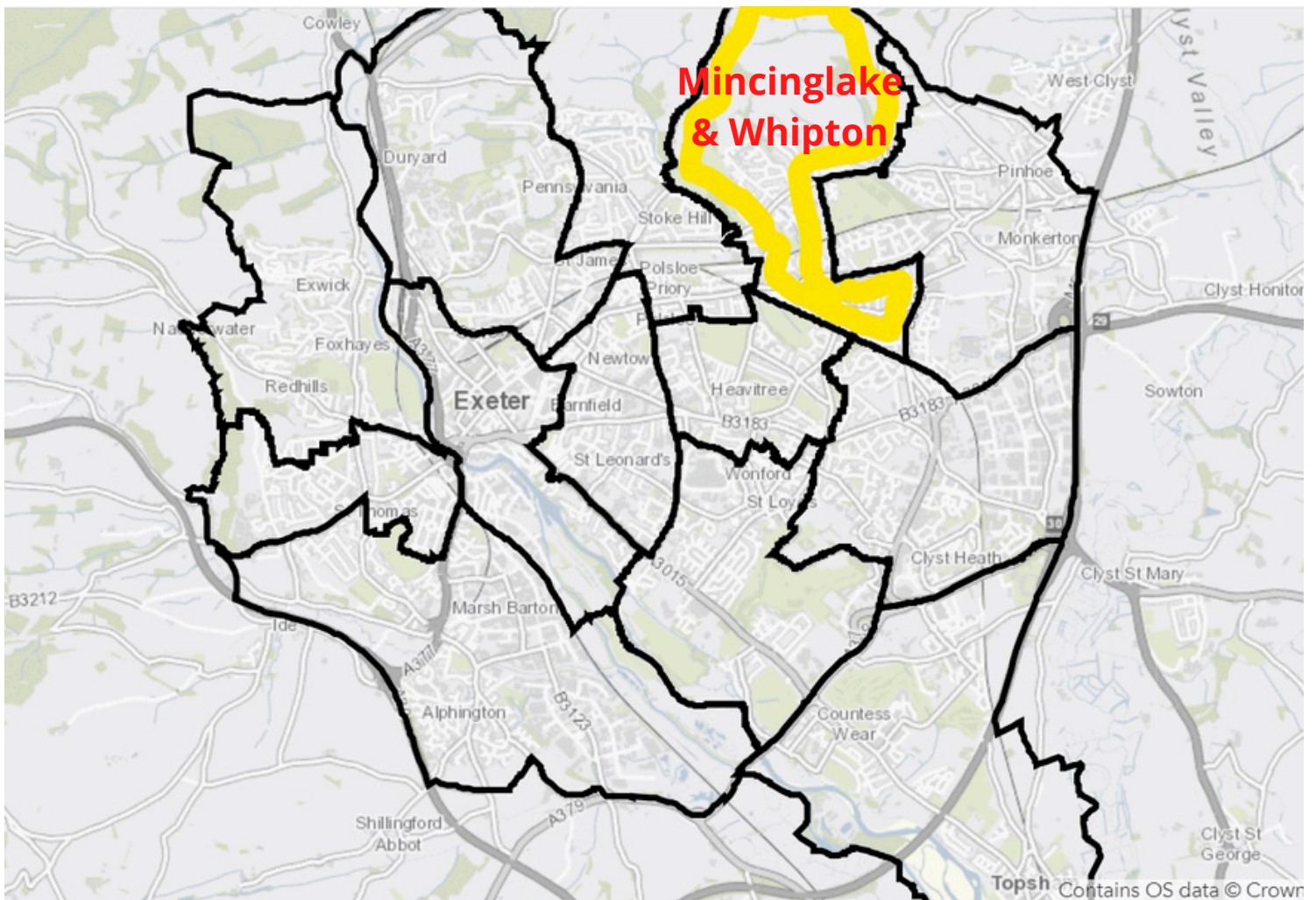


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### Picture Of A Place

The Mincinglake and Whipton ward boundaries are a peculiar shape and fragment the ward, cutting out many of the original assets. The western boundaries of the ward which take in Mincinglake Valley Park and run to Cheyneygate Lane on the eastern boundary hold true to residents' sense of place and identity. People who live in Summerway, Thackeray Road, Vaughan Road, Bodley Close and around Thornpark Rise tend to refer to themselves as living in Whipton rather than Pinhoe, St Loyes and Heavitree. Many residents have commented that 'my postcode is still a Whipton postcode, I've always lived in Whipton, why have they done that?' For this reason, the Community Builder for Mincinglake and Whipton has taken on the area of Summerway and Summerway park.



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The northern area, known as Mincinglake or Beacon Heath, has left many residents feeling out on a limb with no real community hub. The area is hilly, and the design of the estate is very self-contained, with only a small row of shops at one end on Beacon Lane, including a Co-op, hairdressers and fish and chip shop. There are buses that serve the estate but it's a long way up or down the hill on foot especially if you are elderly, have a disability or have a number of children in tow. In the past year there have been some changes made to the frequency of the F1 bus service which have negatively affected some residents.

The area has a close-knit informal network of friends, family, and neighbours who look out for each other, and a powerful sense of community. These informal networks are vital for fostering a sense of belonging and security among residents. However, there are also issues with anti social behavior.

Free or low-cost space for community activity has been hard to find but this is starting to change with the resurrection of the [Whipton Community Association](#) and the new development at St Boniface Church. The Community Builder supported the evolution of the new Community Association, but now little no support is needed and the Association has gone from strength to strength. Much work has been done to update the hall, heating system and kitchen facilities. Meet with Mummies coffee morning has been popular as well as children and family events. They have a number of regular user groups and hire out the hall for parties. The number of residents involved in the Association has also grown over the past few years.

Whipton Village has many more shops, two pubs, a cafe, hairdressers, barbers, vets, takeaways and a doctor's surgery. New landlords have taken over what used to be the Full Moon pub. It had been closed in 2020 due to a number of anti-social incidents. The pub is now called The Star Inn and serves as a family-friendly community orientated pub. They have supported the new Whipton Defibrillator group and the new defibrillator is located on the outside of the pub for use by the community. Owners Sharon and Mike also allowed St Boniface Church to run a "church in the pub" whilst the church building was undergoing major structural work.



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There are two junior schools, two infant schools and three nurseries in the ward. Whipton Barton Infants, Juniors and Oasis Nursery make up the Whipton Barton Federation. Willowbrook School has infants and juniors, the Spring Nursery serves families in Beacon Heath and Little Ones childcare off Pinhoe Road is used by many families in Whipton. Stoke Hill infants and junior schools border Mincinglake Road and are attended by children from both Stoke Hill and Beacon Heath. St James is the largest secondary school in the area and serves Beacon Heath and Whipton as well as attracting large numbers of students from Exwick. St Luke's just over the border in Pinhoe is attended by a number of Whipton residents.

There are five churches within or bordering the ward. The Beacon Heath church has a slightly larger but aging congregation, although in recent years it has had an upturn in attendance due to a number of new families moving into the area. ISCA church has a growing younger and largely family-orientated following. They use St James School as their place of worship. They have offices on the Pinhoe Trading Estate and at the Beacon Centre. St Boniface Church has undergone major renovation work and has a new reverend and community support workers. They have transformed the space, working closely with Whipton Barton School and a number of community groups for residents living in Lloyds Crescent, Hillyfields, Brookway and surrounds. Their next project will concentrate on establishing a youth club. The majority of community groups in the area are run in church-owned buildings by people from the church, many of whom live outside the ward but are active in the area due to the church links.

ISCA Church work closely with Willowbrook and St James School, offering homework clubs and wellbeing councillors/youth support workers. Whipton Chapel, who have the smallest congregation in the area, also run a longstanding youth club. They offer a free minibus pick up and drop off for local families. Despite all of the churches offering youth clubs or activities, residents believe there is a lack of youth provision in the area, and some teenagers or families are put off the clubs due to their church connection. Isca Church run a thriving parent and toddler group at the Beacon Centre, with a strong team of volunteers.

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There are many vulnerable individuals with complex needs in the ward. This can make it more difficult for some individuals to lead or attend community groups and activities. Many residents have become accustomed to agencies and charities providing services for them. In addition to this the pandemic has caused a higher level of anxiety in these individuals and reduced the number of people who feel comfortable engaging in public spaces. The Community Builder has set up listening posts outside the shops in Whipton village, Beacon Lane and in the local green spaces as well as knocked on many doors to understand resident needs and wants in the area.

Food poverty and child welfare are a concern in certain areas of the ward. Whipton Barton, Willowbrook School and St James provide breakfasts to all students. This includes bagels or cereals donated by the large supermarkets during term time to ensure all children eat before starting the school day. The [Beacon Community Centre](#) host family fun days during the school holidays offering families a hot meal and a craft activity.



This is a way of addressing holiday hunger for families who rely on free school meals to feed their children. Local residents have created an informed network to distribute waste food through WhatsApp.

Many parents locally suffer from poor mental health or social and domestic problems which can affect child welfare. There is an above average number of young carers at both primary schools due to these issues. Whipton Barton School used to have a dedicated family support worker who spent a lot of time out in the community supporting families. Unfortunately, this service has been cut due to a lack of funding. All the community playgroups and baby weighing services run by Whipton Children's Centre have been cut, as has Sure Start provision, which is likely to exacerbate issues further. A midwifery service operates at the Beacon Centre. It is hoped that the centre will be able to grow the services available to families and now provide more opportunities for baby and toddler groups.

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There is an abundance of sheltered and council-owned accommodation in the area, but Rennes House is the only building with a community room, and it is not open to the general public. This can make socialising and getting the community together on a hyper-local scale more difficult across the ward. Rennes House is due to be demolished in 2024 and the new Vaughan Road development is underway. The committee is planning a repair project - residents have come together to make this happen with the support of the Community Builder.

### Green Spaces

**Mincinglake Valley Park** - Devon Wildlife Trust took over the management from Exeter Council in 2019. It is by far the largest green space in the ward and is used by both the Beacon Heath and Stoke Hill communities. The area is used by dog walkers, families, cyclists and walking groups and is part of the Exeter Green Circle walking route. The only structure in the park is the Sylvania Hut, This was closed in the summer of 2024.



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Many long-standing residents remember the adventure playground in the park and reminisce about how great it was for the children and how much of a shame there is nothing like that now. The pathways leading to the park from the Beacon Heath housing estate can sometimes be overgrown, which can deter residents from using the space. Bollards and stiles have been put in place to stop motorbikes/vehicles getting into the site and to deter anti-social behaviour, but this has also restricted access for residents with disabilities and parents with cycle trailers who would like to use the park more regularly.

Green groups and interest in local greenspace have increased in the area since 2019. Friends of Mincinglake Park have taken over the maintenance of the Mincinglake Valley orchard from the Wildlife Trust/Council. With the support of the Community Builder the group have held apple festivals, wassails, regular maintenance sessions, tree adoption days and juicing events. They acquired a large community apple press and equipment with grant funding from Devon County Council which can be hired out to other groups. The latest wassail in January 2025 attracted 80 residents who enjoyed music, a bonfire, bless the trees and some cider.

[The Friends of Eastern Fields](#) runs a monthly litter pick and a Facebook group has been set up by a resident interested in meeting other dog walkers called Dog Walkers of Eastern and Exhibition Fields.

Off the back of Friends of Mincinglake, [The Exeter Greenspace Group](#) has been set up to try and bring all the green groups together, share resources, events and to gather information about how people use the local green spaces. The driver behind this has been the proposed housing developments on the green space in the area. Residents in Mile Lane, Celia Crescent and Iolanthe Drive set up a 'save the Bus Stop Fields' Facebook group in 2020 as it became apparent that more of the fields around them were to be developed. The group were successful in stopping development on one of the sites, but have recently lost an appeal to protect other surrounding green space despite their best efforts.



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The Mile Lane Club, a project of the Beacon Heath Squilometer, have been successful in running walks with Dave in the surrounding green space accessed from Mile Lane. They have also put on Christmas events, Halloween events and crafts that have been well attended by residents. The squilometer project is run by residents for residents and adapts to the ideas of the community. The next project will concentrate on the Beacon Heath shops area.

The privately-owned fields that back on to Pendragon Road, Celia Close and Pinwood Meadow Drive are used just as much by residents for walking as the valley park. Residents living close to Pinwood Park, a green space at the top of Pinwood Meadow Drive, started a dog walking group and a walking group called Pinwood Walkers. There is a history of community activity in the park, with stories of residents having cream teas, BBQs and playing sports games on the green space surrounding the park. A resident bought a sit-on lawn mower to keep the grass down when the council reduced its cutting regime so the community could continue to enjoy the space.

There is a small group of residents in Thackeray Road who have been planting trees and improving the green space around their homes with the help of the Community Builder and Devon Wildlife Trust.

Bettysmead Playing Fields are used by dog walkers, families and a number of different football teams as there are changing facilities onsite.

Hamlin Lane Playing Fields/JLC just over the border into Heavitree are regularly used by Whipton residents. The park is used by dog walkers and families and is a popular place to take children to use the cycle training area.





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There are a number of small parks dotted around the ward, some used more than others. Pendragon Road MUGA & Play Park ('top park') is popular, as is the park off Lloyd's Crescent in the southern part of the ward. Similarly, Exhibition Fields are now part of Pinhoe ward but are used a lot by residents from Mincinglake and Whipton. It has a good-sized play park and picnic benches and there are stories of residents holding community picnics here.

### 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 connections, and facilitating the casual encounters that fuel fantastic community action.

**The Beacon Community Centre** is funded by ISCA Church Community Enterprises. It took over the running of the building after the Knight Club Youth Centre closed down. ISCA was keen to create a community space that would not be seen by the community as church-orientated, as it is felt that the religious association puts residents off attending. The space is used by St James' School, autism groups and The Rotary Club. Beacon Centre volunteers run the Meet & Remember Group, which is very well attended by older residents in the area with dementia or memory issues along with carers. They run a very well attended toddler group on Thursdays. Members of ISCA Church, along with youth workers from the YMCA, run two youth clubs. A community cafe runs every Friday morning alongside the Exeter Food Bank and Toy Library. Midwifery services also run in the centre to support local families. A walking group takes place every second Wednesday of the month around the local area.

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**St Katherine's Priory** is run by the Stoke Hill Community Association, despite being formally in Mincinglake and Whipton ward. The building is used regularly by a range of groups, including a very well-attended model railway club, engineers club, whist group and craft group. The engineers have built a model railway in the grounds and offer rides to families and children on a monthly basis.



Whipton Community Association Hall is rented by a number of community groups including a women's acappella choir, an art group, dieting group, exercise groups and martial arts. The hall can also be hired out for private events. A new chair has been appointed to the Community Association with the help of the Community Builder and has been working hard to start a new community cafe, meet with mummies coffee morning, community events including craft fairs, Halloween and Christmas trails, Christmas events such as Santa's grotto.

Beacon Heath Church hosts a weekly Age UK social group, coffee morning, ladies light lunch, community brunch group and craft group in the church hall. The hall is available to the community to hire. An international food celebration took place in the winter of 2023 to celebrate different cultures and bring communities together. **Foodcycle** runs a popular free weekly meal at Beacon Heath Church, made from surplus waste, attended by a wide range of community members.

Holy Trinity & St Boniface Churches (part of the same parish) hosts weekly toddler groups, after school café and Sunday family service with bring and share lunch.

ISCA Bowling Centre attracts older people from across Exeter and further afield. A number of groups and events such as quizzes and board games groups, lunch and walking groups use the café and sports facilities.

**The Star Inn Pub** holds a weekly community coffee morning, live music events as well as darts and pool teams.

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### What Else Is Happening?

The skate park at [Exeter Arena](#), on the boundary of Beacon Heath and Pinhoe, opened in summer 2018. It is well used by children and young adults in the area. It is largely seen as a positive thing for the youth in the area but some residents have raised concerns over anti-social behaviour.

[Devon Yeoman Pub](#) hosts quiz and music nights as well as a football, pool and darts teams. The local Age UK swimming group has a roast dinner every Wednesday in the back room after swimming.

Isca Swimming Pool is a great pool which is in danger of closing due to rising costs.

The Knit & Natter Ladies is a network of women who met via the old wool shop in Whipton (now closed). Many of the women, who meet weekly at the Beacon Centre or the Snug café, are pivotal in supporting and running community groups or events in the area. They share/pass information across ward boundaries and teach the community knitting skills in the community café and at the wellbeing group.

[Whipton Chapel](#) runs a weekly community coffee morning, toddler group and youth club. The space is not available for public hire.

The Labour Club in Whipton village has a whist group and is mainly attended by the elderly population in the area. The Whipton and Pinhoe Labour Club on Vaughan Road, now located just over the border in Heavitree, is also used by the older generation but hosts music and karaoke nights and is trying to build up a skittles team.

St James Walking Football is a walking football group that is attended by a variety of residents from Mincinglake and Whipton. The low impact activity is great for people who want to get physically active and don't want to participate in really strenuous exercise. It takes place every Friday from 8-9pm at St James Sports Hall.

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### Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

Word of mouth is the main method for spreading the news about community events. Many residents, especially the elderly, do not use social media. Many people say they don't know what's happening locally and do not appear to know about community buildings, groups and events happening in close proximity to where they live. The majority of people in the ward believe the Whipton Community Hall is still an active church.

The Beacon Centre is slightly better known but more so because of its history as the Knight Club which was once the biggest youth club in Exeter. Many residents still do not know what happens there and many people are also unaware of St Katherine's Priory. St Katherine's Priory has however grown in profile and popularity during the pandemic due to the weekly community run larder and the large outdoor space which has allowed people to interact in a socially distanced manner. This is something the other community venues lack.

There was an increase in social media use during the pandemic with the creation of new Facebook groups which allowed people to communicate and share news. The Spotted Beacon Heath Facebook page has the largest number of followers - 3,900. Posts are geared towards reporting lost pets and objects, crime in the local area and humorous signs or notices rather than community events or groups. Whipton Community group is the second largest group with 1,200 followers.

Most other Facebook groups in the area have roughly 700 followers. This includes The Beacon Heath News page set up by ISCA church with the intention that the community would take ownership of it. The Beacon Community Centre, St Katherine's Priory, Friends of Summerway, Whipton Hall and Community Association, Beacon Heath Together and most of the churches and schools have Facebook pages. Events are seldom shared between the different groups or pages. The Community Builder shares information between the pages for this reason.



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There are very few functioning notice boards in the area and they are rarely updated. There are boards outside most of the churches and the Beacon Centre. There are boards outside of the Co-op in Beacon Heath and Londis in Whipton although they have no protective covering as they have been vandalised and posters are quickly removed or pulled down. The removal of posters in the area is an issue. The Community Builder has been working with Friends of Mincinglake Park, Friends of Summerway and the Whipton Community Association to secure funding for three new boards for Mincinglake Valley, Summerway Park and in Whipton Village. Two of these boards have now been put into place. There is also a new noticeboard in Widgery Road.

The Beacon Heath & Whipton Newsletter that was started in 2019 with the help of the Community Builder has come to an end in 2021. Copies were delivered to all areas of the ward but there was not enough financial support to keep the magazine running and not enough interest from local residents to support the project long term.

The Community Builder has historically written an email newsletter to share events and updates with residents in the area and has a Facebook page. It is another method of communication the Community Builder uses to reach individuals who may not use social media. Although feedback from the newsletters is low, other organisations have fed back that people have heard about groups, workshops and events from the Community Builder.

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

As is echoed across most of Exeter, many believe there is a lack of provision locally for teenagers. During the Covid pandemic there was a spike in antisocial behaviour across the ward. It caused a lot of tension between residents and the local youth who had been damaging community buildings, pulling down newly planted trees, smashing glass bottles in the green spaces and setting fires in parks and to bins.

Residents in Beacon Heath would like to see more opportunities for yoga and tai chi that are accessible for people who live up the top of the hill.

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There are no community spaces on the housing estate so activities would need to be run outdoors in green spaces. Before the pandemic the Community Builder spoke to the local children who were interested in activities such as football being run in Lancelot Park. The Community Builder was able to arrange this with Exeter City Football Club but only two sessions happened before lockdown. The sessions have now been moved to the Beacon Centre. There is an opportunity for more organisations to engage with the residents in this area if they are willing to offer activities closer to people's homes.

The building of new houses on the green space in Mincinglake is a concern and there is increasing awareness of food poverty in the area.

The PTA struggles to engage parents at Willowbrook and there is no PTA at Whipton Barton School. Volunteers can be hard to come by in the area which can be difficult when starting new groups or when trying to grow Associations. There are a handful of "super connectors" in the area who start up and manage many of the Facebook pages, groups and events. There is, however, a limit to the number of projects or Facebook pages one individual can realistically manage and this can sometimes lead to people becoming disheartened at the amount of effort they put in and the lack of community support or engagement they sometimes experience.

Recent popular litterpicks have been well attended. It is notable that families looking for local activities to get involved with, stuff that's hyper local and on their doorstep, helps foster a sense of place and strength a sense of pride. Quotes heard in the community include: "We are stronger together", "It takes a village", "I know I can knock on my neighbours door and they will help" and "The church is the glue that sticks us together" help reflect the essence of Beacon Heath.

Many community champions have stepped up to join in with local litterpicks, forming a WhatsApp group and this is proving to be a good platform to grow ideas. There are plans for a little free library and some Spring celebrations, alongside an art mural and wildflower planting. There's been some strong collaborative work with supportive local Councillors, It is hoped that this community cohesion will grow and spread.