

# Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile Wonford & Priory 2023-24



## Introduction

Welcome to Wonford! 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 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). It aims to highlight community strengths and areas for growth. It also aims to provide an informed commentary on the health of community life.

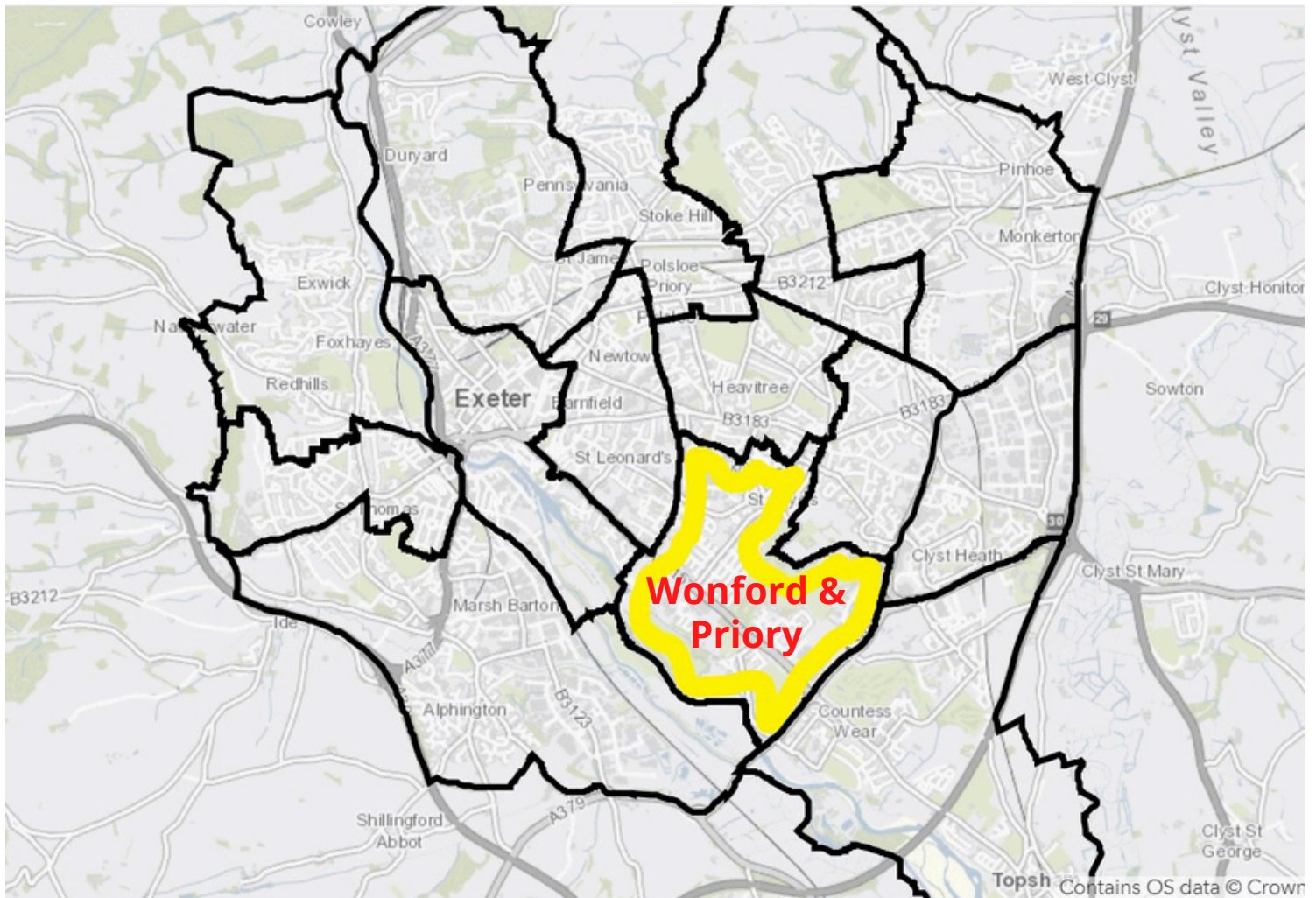


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### Picture Of A Place

Wonford is in Priory Ward, which includes the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital site, and the area around Burnthouse Lane, which is considered the focus of Wonford's identity (and is home to the doctors' surgery, Wynstream primary school, community centre, supermarkets, pharmacy, post office and sports centre), but also extends to the other side of Topsham Road as far as the river, which is quite a different demographic. Those streets to the west of Burnthouse Lane are named after poets, and those to the east after trees, hence local reference to Poets and Trees as geographic areas! Housing is largely an inter-war estate of brick-built houses, replacing a city-centre slum, and designed with a Garden City ethos, and including a pub, school, churches and shops, and a recreation ground. A new development of one and two-bedroom flats to help families and young people get on the mortgage ladder was built in 2018 on Burnthouse Lane.



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Millbrook retirement village is another new development, which is a self-contained community of owner-occupiers and private renters, on the far side of Topsham Road. The newly finished Edwards Court complex welcomes social housing tenants as residents to free up larger properties. It also caters for those with extra care needs.

The boundary between Wonford and Heavitree is especially complex, with social considerations coming into play. A certain distance along Rifford Road, and people like to describe themselves as in Heavitree or St Loyes. Although there is a certain degree of snobbery in this (previously Burnthouse Lane has suffered with a poor reputation in the wider city, despite being much-loved by residents), many long-term residents are proud to say they are 'Laners' as locals are known, after Burnthouse Lane, the central thoroughfare through Wonford. Generations of families, born and subsequently housed in Wonford would not want to live anywhere else. The area has changed over the last three decades due to the Right To Buy policy, as this meant that some of the residents that had lived in their houses for years could buy them with a substantial discount. This slowly changed the area as people sold their houses and moved away and the area became more diverse.

Historically, the area was considered at elevated risk of frailty. The areas bordering and to the east of Burnthouse Lane ranked as the more deprived - in the 20% most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles nationally. The position in ranking has slowly decreased over the years. However, due to austerity and covid, Wonford still remains within the index. Though, because of these indicators, funding for community projects is often more successful in this ward of Exeter. This has led to a frequent sense from residents that they are 'fed up' of external agencies parachuting into the community, not listening to what really matters to the residents. This was felt by residents of the TVRS funding used to develop a road system in the trees area based on a Holland community play system, but that made accessing ambulances and fire engines difficult!

The strong history of community organisers and now Community Builders in the area, working from the ground up, is an important counterbalance to this. Plus Exeter Community Initiatives and Wellbeing Exeter acknowledged this by having Community Builders that had local knowledge and lived in the area.



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Unlike some other areas in the city, community life in Wonford is no longer strongly centred around churches. The Anglican Church of St Pauls, built on Burnthouse Lane to serve the newly built estate after the War, was subjected to arson, fell into disrepair and was demolished in 2010. The Heavitree parish decided against rebuilding and instead wanted to reach out to the whole area by employing a youth worker and running an outreach programme, WASP (Wonford and St Pauls), for families with children aged 5-13. This was based out of the Old Post Office building on Wonford Street, but closed in April 2022. The Wonford Methodist Church is now the only church in the immediate area (the small Baptist Chapel on Wonford Street is now used as an office). The space is used for community group meetings and activity such as Girls Brigade and a Parent and Toddler group. More central to community life here is the Community and Learning Centre and Phoenix Suite.

There are examples from the Community Builder of a close-knit informal network of friends, family and neighbours locally, who look out for each other, with families cooking additional meals for older neighbours who live alone, helping with household and garden tasks, etc. There is a strong sense of community among the 'Laners'. They are known for their welcoming and cooperative spirit, pulling together in an emergency or when tragedy strikes, including during the covid pandemic. In one example, following a house fire five days before Christmas, food and gifts were spontaneously collected and given to the family. When a local person dies, often the whole community will attend the funeral, and support expenses for those struggling. A resident said she has lived in different parts of Exeter but keeps coming back to Wonford because it has "such a great community spirit".

### Green Spaces

Most of Wonford's outdoor facilities are in the extensive interconnected green space on the eastern boundary, including Wonford Playing Fields and Ludwell Valley Park, which runs the length of Burnthouse Lane and up and across Pynes Hill, and is managed by the [Devon Wildlife Trust](#).

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Much of the valley is pastureland, grazed by cattle in the summer, with significant areas of scrubland and wildflower meadows. Locals call one area Roly Poly Hill (it's great to roll down in warm weather or for sledging when it snows!). The stream running through the park is known as the Panny – soldiers from the adjacent barracks would bring down the horses to water them, and the soldiers would wash out their pans. Recently local people unveiled a blue plaque on the previous home of Ivy Johns, a local councillor who had campaigned to preserve the valley park.



These areas are very well used by dog walkers, families and those who enjoy exploring different areas of Exeter.

Residents have said they would use the parks more if there was more seating and lights for the evenings and better paths leading into the parks. Some of this has been addressed, however evening lighting is still an issue.

Sue Bulled, a previous resident of Burnthouse Lane, became a Community Organiser in 2012 when the [Wonford Community & Learning Centre](#) joined a Conservative Big Society initiative to host Community Organisers who would listen to and connect residents. This worked well in Wonford as Sue was raised in the Wonford area, and therefore knew residents, the area's history and the project enabled her to listen to them and support them in making more things happen. One of the activities to come out of her listenings was Family Play Days which supported families through the school holidays to come together in Ludwell Valley and take part in and providing activities for the children. The playdays ran over 2-3 years and saw parents working together to provide and support the activities with songs being made about the Panny and Roly Poly hill, and a community picnic taking place in the cherry orchard.

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Over the years there have been activities targeted at families through the summer from City Council Play Rangers, Community Organiser's play days to **Freemovement** in 2022 running summer family events in the park. This has provided a sturdy base for the Community Builder.

**Ludwell Life** is a community group formed in 2016 aiming to protect and improve the social and environmental value of Ludwell Valley Park. Recent projects include native tree planting and a community orchard, alongside work to maintain and improve wildlife habitats whilst opposing a planning application for siting of a golf driving range in the park. Ludwell Life have also created several short walks, complete with directions and maps, to help people make use of the park. They publish a newsletter every two months.

**South West Military Fitness** run a weekly boot camp session from Wyvern Barracks, on the edge of the park.

The former Northbrook Golf Course, adjacent to Ludwell Valley Park, was recently designated as a green space, extending this 'green corridor' substantially and creating an amazing **Northbrook Park Nature Reserve** maintained by Devon Wildlife Trust.

A new 'pocket park' has evolved next to Wonford Green Surgery, with the help of **Wonford Planters**. They consulted with doctors and residents to come up with a plan for the pocket park. Then, with Community Builder support, sought funding from the South West Water Neighbourhood Fund and National Lottery Awards. This overgrown space was transformed into a peaceful oasis and planted with herbs and fruit trees for the use of local residents.



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This active gardening group, established in around 2014 with the support of the Community Organiser Sue Bulled, has been central to outdoor life in Wonford and to celebrating the history of the area. The Planters have taken on a growing number of raised beds in the area, beginning after residents expressed concern about not being able to see the bus coming along Burnthouse Lane due to overgrown bushes.

Elsewhere they have facilitated residents taking care of neglected corners of the neighbourhood, and supported school gardening projects. The group has gone from strength to strength, winning Britain in Bloom awards for its work. They have a lot of support from local businesses and residents who donate plants and have supported people from other areas with advice on starting their own gardening groups. They are on the lookout for volunteers.

There is also an apple tree dedicated to Mary Carpenter, a nineteenth-century Exeter resident who dedicated her life to educational and social reform. Two newer plaques in the park commemorate much loved and missed local residents, and a collaboration with CoCreate has resulted in event days and workshops with the primary school to produce bug hotels for the park and for elsewhere.

There is a children's play area at Chestnut Avenue. This park is well used due to its location within Ludwell Valley and provides a social space for families to meet. Residents had expressed a desire to make improvements, and through ongoing conversations with the council, an old wooden play structure has been replaced by a new one. There is also an older children's play area near the woods which was designed with help from the children of Wynstream School to blend in with the valley behind.

Dickens Drive has multi-age play equipment. Wyvern Park, at the top of Well Oak Park estate (locally known as Mushroom), also has multi-age play equipment including a MUGA and plenty of green space for picnics, shielded from the road by bushes.



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### 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.

Wonford Community & Sports Centres are currently separate buildings and institutions (along with the Phoenix Suite, which is leased to WCLC by Devon County Council in 2014). However, there have been consultations and design plans for the buildings to be joined to work as a central community hub to support health and wellbeing.



This will also help to develop their potential as community assets and will give residents a community building with multi-faceted opportunities for support, activities, events and community conversations.

These plans would deliver the enhanced sports provision residents wanted, as well as additional dedicated community space. Unfortunately, the pandemic and budget cuts placed such a strain on the council's finances that the plans have had to be scaled back. The refurbishment plan for the leisure and community centres, however, looks likely to go ahead with a glass atrium replacing the existing Phoenix suite. This will link the two buildings together, as well as creating a visual connection with the valley park beyond and bringing the two elements together in a much more cohesive and community-focused way. At the time of writing, work is ongoing on this development and associated consultation and communication.



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Activities at the centre include netball, pilates, line dancing, tea dances, walking football, walking netball, badminton, pickleball, korfball and wheelchair basketball. There is also a gym and various exercise classes, along with a bookable astro pitch. The osteoporosis exercise group is more specialist and attracts people from across the city. Other options currently include bingo and community coffee mornings.

The sports centre staff have been very responsive to requests from residents for specific activities, and connections with community events are growing. There are great links between the Community Physical Activity Organiser, [Live & Move](#) and the Leisure Centre which have supported work across the community such as the [Inclusive Exeter](#) badminton tournaments, [This Girl Can](#) project and, most recently, pickleball sessions.



Some of the previous [Wonford Community & Learning Centre](#) trustees had been in place for thirty years so, after such long amazing service to the community, felt that it was time to step down. A new committee of trustees took over in the summer of 2023. This has led to some changes in staff and ways of working but the Community Centre is slowly becoming a thriving community hub with the trustees really embracing and looking at ways to address the community's needs.

The Community Centre hosts a café every Wednesday and Thursday morning and these host their community larder, which is open to everyone. The Centre collects surplus food from Lidl in the week and this is made available to residents throughout the week for collection. The Centre has just linked to Wynstream School PTA through the Community Builder in order to make parents aware of the larder, and for a member to be able to share out the surplus between the buildings. A PTA member, with support from the Community Builder, is also setting up a SEN Parents/Carer coffee group, who will meet regularly within the Thursday coffee morning. The Centre had previously run one in the Phoenix Suite, which was successful.

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St Paul's Green, the site of the former church, was used previously by Heavitree parish to hold informal services and events. Residents had hoped to see something on this site, such as a community hub with a workshop/café where residents could be taught basic skills to help with getting a job. However, ownership of the lease remains contested between the parish and the council. There was a similar situation at the Old Post Office, also linked with the church, that was used for the delivery of the WASP Project. Most recently the building has been rented out as Lullaby Lane, a pre-loved babies and children's clothes and equipment shop, aimed at helping struggling families.

### What Else Is Happening?

The new Head of Wynstream School, Elise Redman, reached out to the community post-Covid, starting with cake sales and a summer fair and this has led to activity family events, Exeter Chiefs BBQ and the school choir singing at Sandy Park. She also restarted a PTA, which is made up of parents from around the area, and has since gone from strength to strength running events and a pre-loved uniform rail maintained in the school. They are now linking with the wider community to provide families with information and support.

The school also engaged residents to volunteer to read to children and for some residents to come in during lunchtime and teach children to knit. This continues and has been a great support for their pupils.

Isca High School has recently filled a post for a Community Engagement Officer, who is keen to build links between the school and the community. She is also looking to restart a parent participation PTA and Parent Voice Forum.

Following a series of staff changes, Wonford Green Surgery had set up a patients' participation group with the support of the previous Community Builder. Unfortunately, this has faltered, so it will now be supported by the new Community Builder. The Surgery staff have embraced being part of 'The Lane' and are supporting a variety of community initiatives such as the Wonford Community Voices social photography project.

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The Dolphin on Burnthouse Lane is a St Austell pub and has a community pot for local causes, as well as contributing staff time to work on community projects and hosting popular community events on significant days, such as the Jubilee.

Exeter Children's Centre has been run by Action for Children since April 2018. They now work with families with children up to the age of nineteen and work within the community rather than the centre so attend events and groups.

**Action For Children** will be handing the Chestnut Centre back to Devon County Council in 2025 as part of DCC's Family Hub and taking in-house the early years services.

Amersham Court is a sheltered housing complex for older residents and families with disabled members. It has a common room, which hosts a coffee morning and other events run by and for residents, as well as a seated exercise class open to non-residents.

Amersham Court also hosts the **Krafty Kafe** group. This came about following Community Builder conversations with a local resident wanting to do something to combat social isolation. The Community Builder supported her to access a grant from a Devon County Council councillor. Some members used to attend the now defunct Together Let's Communicate (TLC) mental health recovery NHS group.



Others are outpatients from the Russell Clinic (based in nearby Wonford House, HQ of **Devon Partnership Trust**, providing mental health services), wanting to begin to re-integrate into community life. Their participation has been facilitated by Wellbeing Exeter following an awareness-raising event at Central Library. The Kafe has begun its own fundraising to support new activities and has collaborated with artists such as the **Double Elephant Print Workshop** to run funded workshops for residents.

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[Heavitree & Wonford Running Group](#) run a Couch to 5K, Return To Running and a 5K group. There is also a walking for health group coordinated by [Westbank](#) that runs on a Wednesday morning.

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

There is a less active community social media presence in Wonford than in many other areas of the city. Many Wonford residents have said that they don't know what is going on in their area. Lots of people do not access social media. The [This Is Wonford](#) website has a linked [Facebook](#) page of the same name and provides a channel for information around activities in the community centre, although it does share information from the Community Builder and the sports centre.

There is also an active [Burnthouse Lane Facebook](#) page, and the admin are good at approving links for community information, events, and support quickly.

Wonford Planters has an active [Facebook](#) page and Jenny Mitchelmore, who runs it, is really good at sharing their information and events.

There are no community noticeboards in the area, except the one at the community centre which is used to promote the centre's events. The Community Builder has been in conversation about noticeboards in Wonford, as it is one of the key ways to spread the word of what is happening and keep residents informed. There are plans for noticeboards to be installed shortly, both outside the community centre, and potentially in the pocket park, with support from Wonford Planters.

[Wonford Community Organisations & Groups](#) (COGS) was established by residents and managed by Helen Moore, an active resident with links to Wonford Community Centre and Wonford Methodist Church, to help allocate grant funding. Now the group provides a means of sharing information between local organisations. This group has become more active and is a great way for residents, groups, organisations and stakeholders to share information and connect with others. This group meets every couple of months and, if unable to attend, has a lively email correspondence, which is useful for keeping up to date and in touch.



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

There is not a great deal for older children and teenagers to do in Wonford, especially those who are not sporty or who cannot travel, with a number of past activities no longer running. The [Army Cadet Corps](#) on Dryden Road is an exception. Exeter Police Cadets started in Isca School but is now held at police HQ.

[Exeter City Community Trust](#) run Premier League Kicks, free football and sports coaching, on a Friday evening on the astroturf pitch behind the Leisure Centre. There are separate sessions for primary years 4-6 and secondary years 7-11 students.



There have been some issues of anti-social behavior with youth, residents and stakeholders talking about the lack of youth activities. So going into 2025, this is planned as a COG's discussion. This will hopefully lead to more collaborative working between residents, stakeholders, and agencies to see what is happening and what could be done.

Previously people would have liked to see a skate park but now no longer do. People have said that the BMX track: "Isn't any good for skateboards and not many children use it anyway".

Some young people said previously they would like a teen shelter in the park, so they have some place to hang out not just on the streets. This has been a consistent theme through the years but not necessarily in the park, but a safe space in which to be.

In 2014, the Kicks Youth Group ran in partnership between Exeter City Community Trust and Wonford Community Centre with staffing from both. It was based in the Phoenix Suite and delivered two groups, an early group for years 5-7 and a later one for years 8-9. Unfortunately, it stopped due to lack of staffing.

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It was anticipated that the loss of consistent free food provision in the area could become a significant problem considering the cost-of-living crisis. This has been missed by those residents that used it, so the Community Centre trustees are looking to apply for funding to be able to restart this. They have also, with the support of the previous and present Community Builder, set up and run a Community Larder, which is available throughout the week.

There has been a strong focus on making the most of the potential of Wonford Playing Fields and Ludwell Valley Park for the benefit of residents and to attract those from further afield. The Community Builder, Live & Move and the CPAO were a central part of this, helping the community host summer events including cycling festivals. More recently the Exeter City Council Housing team have hosted summer activity days using the Community Centre and playing fields.

[Exeter Communities Together](#) chose Wonford as the location for a diversity festival, and [Inclusive Exeter](#) hosted a launch party here for its 2023 summer programme of walks and badminton.

This repositioning of Ludwell Valley and Wonford as destinations for other city residents has helped rehabilitate the area's reputation, encouraged diversity and shown other Exeter folk what a strong welcoming community Wonford is.

