

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2021-22



Introduction

Welcome to Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania! 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.



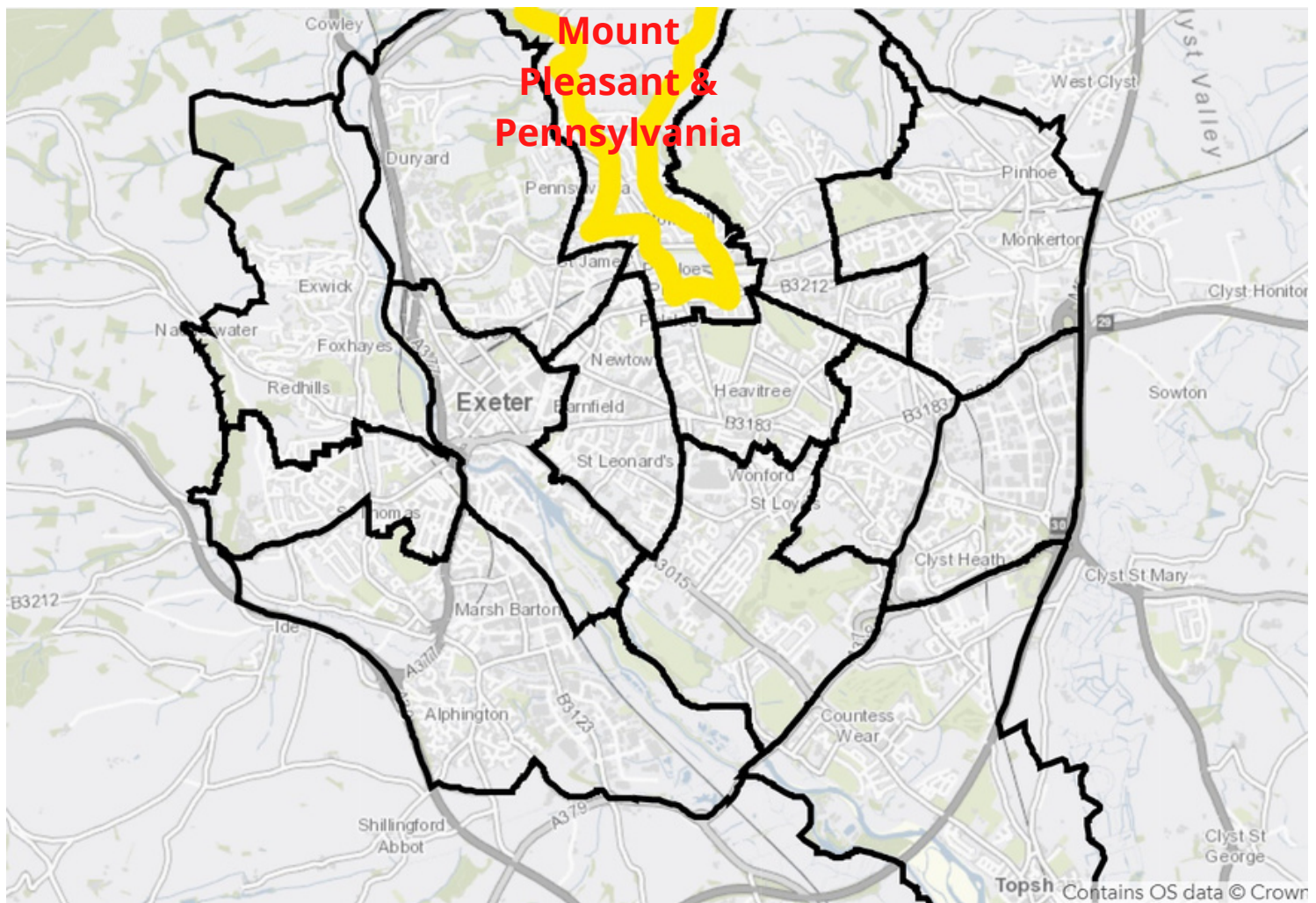
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Picture Of A Place

Pennsylvania ward extends north as far as the city limits, and contains three distinct communities: Mount Pleasant & Polsloe, Stoke Hill and Pennsylvania. The area is home to a nursery and infant school, and a related junior school, both in Stoke Hill, with an active PTA. There are two pre-schools, both well-subscribed and with good links to the wider community.

Pinhoe Road is the main thoroughfare through the southern reaches of Mount Pleasant & Polsloe, up to Polsloe Bridge railway station. There is a scattering of shops and takeaways along the road, and a couple of busy bars and cafes, but no firm centre.



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The railway line effectively divides the Polsloe community, clustered around Pinhoe Road, from Stoke Hill, as there are few crossing places. Polsloe and Mount Pleasant has a very transient population, with a large proportion of students and sharers, and fewer families and older people (the new development at Greyfriars, to the east of Priory Road Park, with its population of mainly small working families, is an exception).

Owing to its proximity to the University, there is a large student population in the area, less in the large purpose-built accommodation blocks found elsewhere, and more students renting in the streets of large terraced houses. This is the cause of some dismay for some residents, who find the student population is not well integrated in general into community life. However, the university works hard to maintain good links with the community, and there have been some recent examples of students and residents working closely together. There are also many Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) housing single workers, whose residents are at a higher risk of frailty, but who might be transient and therefore poorly linked with their community. It is notably difficult and challenging for the Community Builder to reach working residents living in shared accommodation.

More recently the Community Builder has been exploring and listening in the Stoke Hill area. Stoke Hill was built in the 1950s as council housing. Many residents have lived here for over forty years, with the associated strong family networks, but more recently newer families have moved into the area. There is a large cluster of high-rise flats in the Wynford Road area, some of which are now privately owned, though some remain in council ownership.

Pennsylvania 'proper' is a more affluent area, with 1970s detached houses that are spaced out, right on the edge of the city, and very much geared to car travel. The demographic tends towards retired people and families. Those working families tend to have both parents in work, which means people are time-poor, and one-off opportunities to volunteer are more likely to have a good response, rather than long-term commitments.



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Owing to the suburban layout, until recently there are few opportunities for local people to connect with each other. Partly as a result of this, and partly as a result of the generally more affluent nature of the residents, people are used to travelling some distance to join in activities, which may be organised to a community of interest rather than one of place. The newly opened community-led stores and cafe has changed this and has become the new community hub for the area.

The community grew more connected as a result of the response to the pandemic. The main Pennsylvania Community Support Group responded quickly, and brought existing groups together, as well as linking with similar groups across the city. It has gone on not only to respond to residents' immediate needs but to expand to offer extra services to residents. There was excellent support from volunteers, who are keen to remain active within their community.

Green Spaces

Priory Road Park - Polsloe Community Association has a close link with this park, which is tucked away between the area of older terraced houses in Mount Pleasant, and a newer estate. Although Priory Park is a pleasant green space and a natural focal point, it has been overlooked due to its tucked away location, lack of amenities and facilities. The park is owned by the developer Persimmon, and includes a children's play area. A group of volunteers, supported by the Community Builder, and including diverse groups such as the police cadets and university students, have been active in clearing scrub, planting trees and wildflowers, building a noticeboard, litter picks, and a wide range of community events such as carol singing and archery. Freemoovement also hold exercise sessions here, and there is a couch to 5k group, and a popular Tai Chi group. The newly elected association committee is keen to continue these links to the green space, as well as continuing to work closely with Pinhoe Road Baptist Church.



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Mincinglake Valley Park is outside the ward boundary, but is used by local people, mostly for dog walking, rather than by families. Recently the Community Builder has spoken to many locals in Stoke Hill who are keen to take more ownership and are eager to help improve it as an asset. The park has been managed by Devon Wildlife Trust since May 2019. It has recently improved access, and now is better used by neighbours both from Pennsylvania and the neighbouring wards, especially since the pandemic lockdowns.

Small Play Areas - there are a number of small play areas in residential streets including Chaucer Grove, Anne's Close, Great Hill View, and Sylvania Drive. Prior to lockdown, Anne Close was unloved and underused, but enhanced connections to the playspace has resulted in more families using it after school and it has sprung alive. There is a desire to host pop up events here: recent workshops with a mobile music facilitator attracted a large number of local families. A new group, Friends of Anne Close & Marypole Road Parks, has been formed, which is keen to improve the green space locally, as a means for bringing the community together.

Allotments - there are several allotment sites in the ward. Allotments run the length of the south side of Prince Charles Road and there are two sites in Stoke Hill, at Marypole Road and Mincinglake Road. There is an established Allotment Association that regularly organises working parties and social events for its members. The association is well run and has a useful webpage. Exeter Communities Together's Growing Project holds a weekly work session at the allotments - members of the local community are invited to join in. Sylvania Community Stores have recently obtained an allotment for Community Members to support.

The alleyways running behind the Victorian terraces in the Mount Pleasant area have also become space where activity happens - residents bringing unloved spaces to life with informal play sessions and parties and creative solutions to the lack of a community space. Street parties in the Pamela Road and Tarbet Road area reflect a long-held local tradition in Mount Pleasant.



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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.

Pennsylvania does not have a dedicated community centre, although there are several active community associations in the area. There is however a range of other venues. Priory Park should perhaps also be considered a community hub, as it has been a powerful focus of much community-based activity over the past two years.

Pinhoe Road Baptist Church has recently had a makeover and the entrance foyer is much more welcoming. The church plans to have café style coffee morning and is keen to explore how to reach the wider community. It runs a very successful toddler and parents group, and hosts a singing group, dance and fitness classes, plus more specifically church-oriented activities such as Messy Church and Christian Endeavour. The PRBC is has good links with the Polsloe Community Association (which meets here) and is very supportive of wider community activities- eg summer fairs, community carol singing.

St James' Church hosts brownies, rainbows, guides, cubs and scouts, a luncheon club, which feeds between 30 and 40 older people each Tuesday, coffee morning and dance class, Singing for the Brain and Slimming World as well as a very popular Messy Church, a monthly Christian book group, and a Fellowship social group on alternate Thursdays. Regular fayres are held. The church provides excellent opportunities for the older residents to connect and plays an important role in the area, though the congregation comes from far and wide and is not predominantly from within the ward.



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St Marks Church - a well-attended church, drawing its congregation from all over the city. They regularly host coffee mornings and film nights, event on occasion a breakfast meetup. The hall is well used by local guides and brownies.

Sylvania Community Hall (Sylvan Hut) - home to the Sylvania Play & Community Facility Association, a charity which runs and maintains the hut in Mincinglake Park as a venue for community activity, especially opportunities for children. Very busy with bookings: art group, yoga, Zumba, playgroup, pilates, dance, Woodcraft Folk, homebirthing courses, Kumon maths tutoring, homeschooling groups, Tai Chi, baby sensory classes, and craft sessions. A regular play day is organised in August which is open to everyone, and is attended largely by people from Pennsylvania ward.

St Katherine's Priory run by Stoke Hill Community Association which has been established for 40 years (although it is just outside Pennsylvania ward). Woodchips (Woodcraft Folk group for the under-sixes) meet here, also whist drive, yoga, aerobics, model railway club, chat and craft group, Kenpo karate, and Russian martial arts. St Katharine's Priory came into its own during the pandemic, hosting a community larder, and the Hot Food Project, cooking hot meals from food donations for families in need, which subsequently expanded to South Street Baptist Church, Belmont Chapel and also the Beacon Centre. It has also become an increasingly valued social space, especially its outside space. A popular community café is held here on Fridays, and an informal history group.

Toronto House, a supported housing building on Prince Charles Road, continues to act in a low-key way as a useful additional community space. Prior to lockdown, it was used for tai chi, crafts mornings and watercolours sessions.

Sylvania Community Stories & Café is run as a community benefit society, opened in 2021 with support from the Community Builder, this is fast establishing as a community hub, with substantial volunteer support. A toddler group meets here, as well as arts, crafts and games groups, and inclusive coffee mornings.



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What Else Is Happening?

Stoke Hill Runners - a couch to 5k session departing from Stoke Hill Primary School gates. With the Community Builder's support, there are now two groups running weekly.

Mount Pleasant Health Centre has an increasingly outward-looking Friends of Mount Pleasant group, which runs a team of volunteer drivers, as well as raising funds for the surgery. The Friends support free knitting and craft groups which meet on alternate Wednesdays and make items to be sold as part of fundraising efforts. Plant sales and fetes are also planned. The Health Centre also has an active PPG group keen to play a more active role, and it hosts a monthly guided relaxation group.

Polsloe & Priory Conservative Social Club - snooker, darts, skittles, bingo. Function rooms for hire.

AGE UK East Exe Day Care Centre (Sycamores) now also houses the headquarters of Age UK Exeter. Limited services for older people are offered here.

Women on the Run - one of several groups in the city, this one has several ability levels, and meets in Morrison's car park on Prince Charles Road on Thursday evenings.

Gateway Centre - day care centre for folk with learning disabilities.

Lower Kings Avenue has trialled playstreets - closing off the street on a regular monthly date to enable traffic-free play.

Rosebarn Friends is an informal group communicating through social media interested in organising events around the Rosebarn Lane area, and in exploring the possibility of using the school playing fields for community activity.

Little Free Library box located on Stoke Hill.



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Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

St James' Church Parish Magazine – produced quarterly and invites the Community Builder to submit regular articles. It is delivered to all households within the parish and invites members of the community to contribute. Friends of Mount Pleasant Health Centre also produces a newsletter with regular community news updates. The patient participation group also includes Community Builder news in its newsletter. Stoke Hill School also less frequently informs parents electronically of community events and invites the Builder to use the school community noticeboard. Sylvania Community Stores has a regular newsletter that is hand-delivered to the Sylvania Estate.

Whatsapp, Facebook, Messenger, Next Door etc have had increased usage during lockdown and continue to play a big role in how people connect. The Polsloe Community Facebook page has over 300 members, describing itself as “Bridging the gap in the community”. It also has a website. Pennsylvania Community, Stoke Hill School and St Katherine's Priory all have Facebook pages.

Noticeboards - there are several in the area, one in Pinhoe Road, one installed by residents in Priory Road park. Sylvania Environmental Community group have just secured funding for a noticeboard in Pennsylvania, and St Katherine's Priory also plans to install one in newly acquired green space adjacent to Morrisons. There are also several church noticeboards.

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

There remains a lack of opportunities for students and long-term resident to connect, but links with the university are developing. The new student community wardens are enthusiastic and keen to connect with the Polsloe Community who welcome their input and ideas for projects to work on collaboratively.



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There is an interest in developing more opportunities to increase community fitness, through making better use of local assets. One possible site is Mincinglake Valley Park, with Devon Wildlife Trust recently having taken over management. Community groups hope to have open conversations to share ideas, such as trails, cycle tracks, and improved signage and picnic benches. There is great potential here, with strong community backing.

Sylvania Community Stores & Café has a great deal of momentum and goodwill behind it, with plenty of potential for the development of new and existing groups under its umbrella. The recent interest in play streets locally is also of interest, and could be taken up in other parts of the ward.

