

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Newcourt 2021-22



Introduction

Welcome to Newcourt! 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.

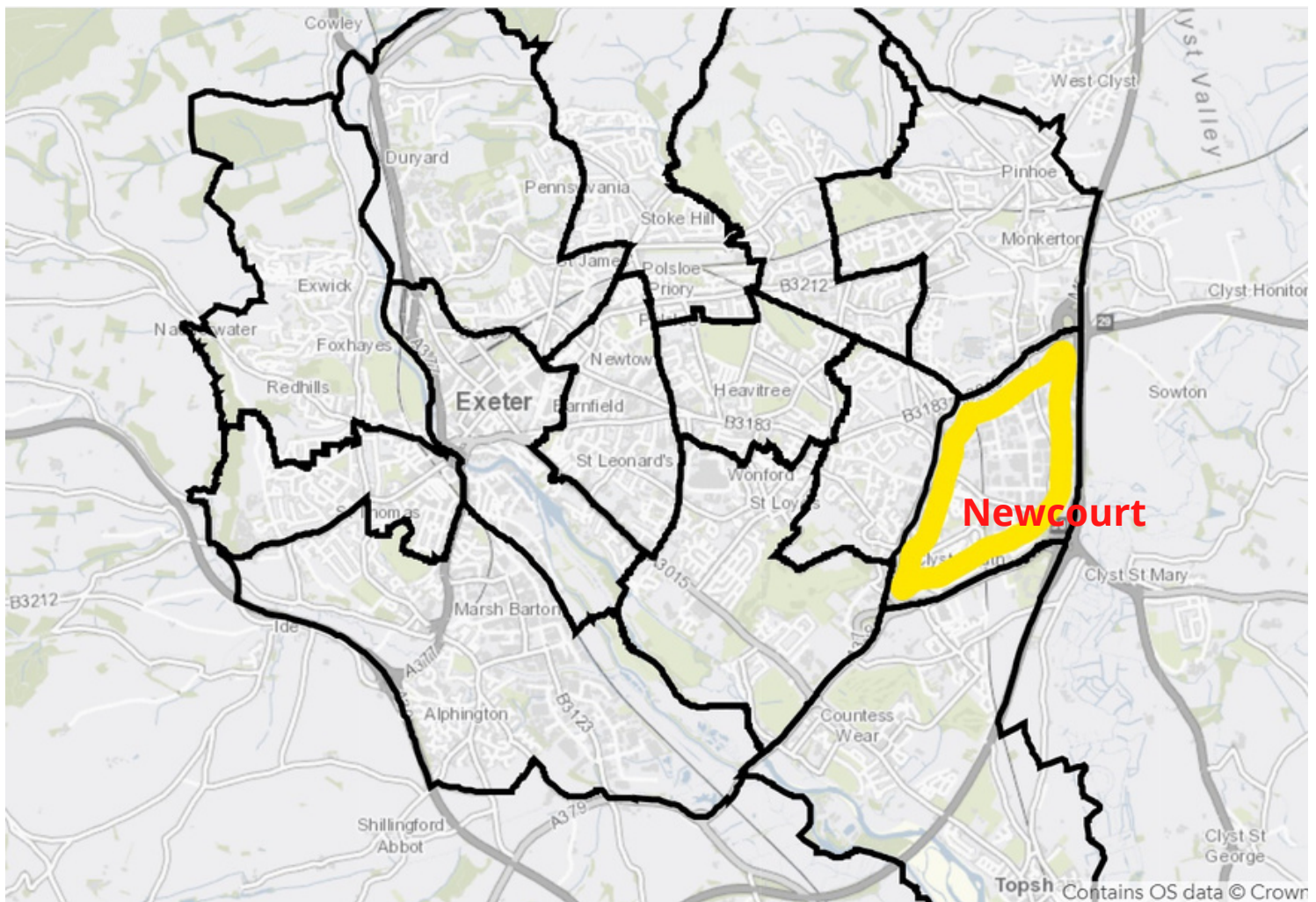


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Picture Of A Place

Newcourt is bordered by arterial roads: the A379 (Rydon Lane and Sandygate Lane) to the north, the M5 to the east, and Topsham Road to the south. It is part of Topsham ward under Exeter City Council, but is in the East Devon parliamentary constituency. Newcourt is a 'new' community, having been developed as a residential area over the past decade by a number of developers. Previously, the area was the site of the Naval Stores and Newcourt Hospital. Newcourt House is still owned by the NHS but is now used as offices. Additional non-residential development has included the Sandy Park rugby stadium and the IKEA store.



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Although there was some existing housing along Rydon Lane and Old Rydon Lane (large detached houses), the majority of housing in the area has been built over the last ten years and building continues today. The housing is mixed and ranges from one-bedroomed flats in a block to five-bedroomed detached properties in a gated community. Some property is owned by the housing association LiveWest and some by the YMCA but most is in private ownership, although the owners may have subsequently let the properties.

Development continues in the area. Of note (as mentioned in the Countess Wear Profile) is Seabrook Orchard, a large 700 house development of which approximately 300 houses have been built. Currently the only access into this development is along Topsham Road, but when completed there will be two entrances nearer to Newcourt. Also Heritage Homes has built approximately 120 zero carbon homes along Old Rydon Lane that back onto Admiral Way and River Plate Road.

Residents of the broader area of the pizza slice often refer to where they live by the names given by the developers: Fairways, Greenacres or Seabrook Orchard, whereas those at the 'tip', near the station and community centre, would say they live in Newcourt, The Rydons, The Green or Holland Park, again after the names given by developers. Each of these communities appear to be developing their own "pocket community identity", an example being Seabrook Orchard, which is in the process of forming a residents' association.

The area has attracted older people who have moved from more rural areas and/or from older properties, looking for easy-to-maintain housing with good transport links or have chosen to move from more distant urban areas to be near their adult children who are starting families. There are also lots of younger people taking advantage of the relative affordability of property in the area, as well as good options for commuting. Most people have moved to Newcourt from the immediate area, so retain their existing social networks, at least to some extent, and for some time. There's a relatively high level of private rentals, which can result in higher levels of transience; the townhouses nearer the station are especially popular as shared houses.



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Newcourt has good transport links, with easy access to the nearby main roads and the motorway. Newcourt Station was opened in 2015, providing access to stations towards Exmouth and into the City Centre and Exeter St Davids for the mainline. The local bus service has also been expanded since IKEA opened. Transport links are often mentioned as a reason people like living in Newcourt. Parking can however be a problem, with poor road layout and inconsiderate parking in lower Newcourt, where roads are as yet unadopted by Devon County Council, meaning it can be difficult for people to get to their homes. In higher Newcourt there are occasionally issues with people parking to use the station and for rugby matches.

The road layout and inconsiderate parking on the corner of Omaha Drive and River Plate Road means it can be difficult for buses and even cars to pass and there can also be difficulties for pedestrians trying to cross to the park or station. A local resident who is a Highway Engineer designed a new layout with a roundabout at the centre and safe crossing space. Newcourt Community Association backed his ideas and produced a leaflet which went to every home in Newcourt encouraging them to sign an online petition to Devon County Council supporting the proposal. The petition was supported by over 500 residents and also the City and County Councillors. Double yellow lines have now been put on the bend and DCC are monitoring the situation. A great example of a community action!

Trinity Church of England Primary School opened in 2017. The school has taken a staggered approach in admitting children and each year takes on an additional year group. Children of Nursery Reception and up to year 5 can now attend Trinity. The school is incredibly community focused and is intentional about communicating with parents, being eco-friendly, welcoming new students, encouraging community volunteers and engaging children with the outdoors. They have many facilities outdoors, play equipment, courts, fields, allotments, beehives and shelters. They are open and encouraging to allowing the community to use the school facilities as a community asset.



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Apart from the Community Centre there were originally no other 'bumping spaces' for residents, but with the school now open and expanding, and a new shop there are more opportunities for this. This much-anticipated corner shop was opened on at Blakeslee Drive by One Stop in 2020. Other than this corner shop, just outside the area, residents can shop at either Tesco or in Aldi on Topsham Road. Although there is no doctor's surgery, the fact that most residents have moved into Newcourt from other local areas, and have presumably retained their registration with their previous GP, has meant this has not been mentioned by residents as a problem. However, The Community Builder has heard requests for a local family-friendly pub. There are cafes at St Bridget's Nursery, IKEA and in Countess Wear.

Green Spaces

While the environment in and around Newcourt is reasonably green, with plenty of open space, this is not currently publicly owned and it is a changing picture. The northern end of Newcourt is on the edge of Exeter with open views from across the railway line and motorway. A local resident looks after the gardens at Newcourt Station and has received Britain in Bloom recognition for his efforts. The golf course also means green and open space in the middle of the area, and both the course and the other facilities at the Golf and Country Club are used by several local residents.

There are some green spaces in the development at Sand Grove, Resolution Road and Hardy Close. There are also larger play parks at Vernon Crescent, Liberty Way and Somerville Crescent and pocket play parks at Hook Drive and Endeavour Avenue. These are at present well used but there are concerns about whether they will all continue to be maintained by the council when they are adopted. Although what is currently open space at Seabrook will be built on, there are plans to maintain a green corridor along the stream.

Community Allotments - there are a few allotment plots behind the community centre.



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During the pandemic local people wanted to start taking care of the small council-owned patches of green space, to develop more public food growing and sharing space. With support from the Community Builder, and those involved with the Newcourt community allotments, they decided to start a gardening group called GreenFingers that was focused on planting unused green patches around the local neighbourhood. In more well used places they have used planters, to allay concerns that the growing activity would prevent access for other purposes.

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.

Trinity Church is very active in the Clyst Heath and Newcourt areas. The Church doesn't have its own building but uses Clyst Heath School, Trinity School and Newcourt Community Centre for services. Church members run both the Babies and Toddlers and the Dads and Toddlers groups at the Community Centre, both of which include Christian content.

Newcourt Community Association - initially many of them were members of Trinity Church but this is now more mixed. The Association runs the newly built Newcourt Community Centre and puts on community events every 3-4 months. There has been, for example, a summer party, Halloween event, and a Christmas fair, as well as a monthly litter pick. The Community Builder has supported the introduction of two new events: a 'Great Get Together' and a 'Feel Good Festival' focusing on wellbeing.



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Newcourt Community Centre - as is often the case, the new housing was first built without many amenities. The community centre was completed five years ago and is now owned by Exeter City Council and run by Newcourt Community Association. The space can be hired for private events, with preferential rates for local people. Community groups can use the space for events for free, subject to approval. The majority of regular bookings at the community centre are commercial and statutory organisations and during the day it is often used for training/meetings. In the evenings and at weekends there are a variety of exercise classes and martial arts, and children's activities such as drama and street dance. There is also a Family Focus session run by health visitors, a toddlers session and monthly Dads & Toddlers Group. Recently, with Community Builder support, a Bumps & Babies has been set up. The community centre also has a small read-and-return library, a magazine swap and small allotments which residents can apply for.

The Coffee Club was originally based at Countess Wear 100 Club but has now moved up to Newcourt Community Centre. This group provides a much-needed social activity for the over-55s. They hold a raffle, knit and natter and share cake and drinks. They also regularly plan outings and trips to have lunch or go to the theatre. The group chair, who also was the person who established the group, has recently handed over the reins to a new coffee club chairperson. Members are mostly from Countess Wear and Newcourt though others who have moved away still travel to attend the group.

The YMCA have accommodation in the area and used to run a Job Club at Newcourt Community Centre. When the funding for the Job Club ended they wanted to retain a presence in the area so have set up Cafe Thursday at the community centre - this is a community cafe open to all run by YMCA staff and volunteers which also provides an opportunity for their Newcourt residents to volunteer. The Community Builder attends regularly, using the cafe as unofficial 'office hours' - people can find her there.

Newcourt Running Group runs every Monday evening from the community centre and runs an annual Couch to 5k group.



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Community Arts Newcourt was set up by a member of the community association. As well as running a monthly arts drop-in at the community centre, there are pebble painting sessions open to all in the school holidays. Any money made by CAN is used to subsidise the street dance sessions for local residents.

The School is community-minded and the PTA (known as Friends of Trinity School) is very active. It wants to include the whole community rather than just the school community, with for example film nights and a summer fete held on a Saturday. Newcourt Netball meets at the school.

What Else Is Happening?

Residents have started a little library that is also very popular and well used. This came from two local children wanting to set up a book exchange for neighbours around them. Local families donated so many books that the original family bought a bigger and more sturdy wood cupboard.

Residents have recently started a food sharing/reduced waste scheme called The LYN box and it has proven very popular in the local area. In the future there might need to be more dedicated space for other sharing schemes like cycle sheds, community fridges, community food cupboards, more space to grow community shared food.

Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

There are notice boards outside the Community Centre, in Liberty Way Play Park and Resolution Way, to which the Newcourt Community Association has keys, but there are none in lower Newcourt.

Newcourt News is published by Newcourt Community Association from a combination of advertising revenue and funding (recently from IKEA). It is delivered to 1600 homes two or three times a year. There is also a previous member of Newcourt Community Association who sends out an email every 1-2 weeks with upcoming events and details of groups. There are over 700 on this mailing list.



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There are various Facebook pages - Newcourt Community (closed group 1.2k members), Newcourt Activities & Events (closed group 176 members) and Seabrook (closed group 203 members). These are most widely, though not exclusively, used by younger residents. People find them useful for information and advice.

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

Many people cite good transport links as a big advantage of living in Newcourt. The downside of this is that most people travel outside of Newcourt to work, and for people working outside of the area there is perhaps less time to connect. There isn't a lot of access to cycling and the cycle paths continue to need improvement, better markers and better signage to encourage more and safe use.

There are limited spaces for older children and teenagers to hang out safely in their area. This results in ASB from younger people being bored. More development and thought to helping and encouraging young people/families/young adults to safely have places to hang out in the outdoors.

There are no local retail spaces, restaurants or pubs, which ultimately affects how self-sufficient and local this neighbourhood can be. There is also very little space for publicly visible local economy. Though there is a strong home-based economy, it is hard for new and less connected residents to get to know and access the business right around them. A social media business page for local home-run business to advertise and make themselves known has recently been established.

The housing association Live West supports community activity in Newcourt, including funding a resident to trial a toddler group for children with allergies, supported by the Community Builder, and supporting the YMCA to run family sessions with free food at Cafe Thursday over the summer holidays. It is excellent to have their support in building the community.

Newcourt is a new and still-growing area and community feeling will take time to develop though many people already describe it as friendly and a great place to live.

