

# Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile Cranbrook 2021-22



## Introduction

Welcome to Cranbrook! 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

Cranbrook is a new town in East Devon, on the outskirts of Exeter. The town is oblong in shape, and about two miles long from one end to the other, bordering the existing villages of Rockbeare, Whimble, Clyst Honiton and Broadclyst. Development began in 2011 and the town has grown to have 2600 households, but continues to be developed; the eventual plan is for Cranbrook to have 20,000 residents. The development of Cranbrook is divided into different phases. The first phase built includes a small shopping precinct with a Co-Op (currently the only supermarket in the town), an estate agent, a Chinese takeaway, a fish and chip shop, a pharmacy, a charity shop and the community-oriented Café @143. Within the precinct there is also Younghayes Centre which is owned by the Town Council. Next to the precinct there is a doctors' surgery. Within a later phase of the development, some distance from the precinct, is the pub Cranberry Farm.



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There are two schools in Cranbrook. The Education Campus is an all-through school catering for children from age 2 to 16 years of age. St Martins Church of England primary school has a preschool for children from the age of two. There are no nurseries in Cranbrook despite it having a large population of babies and toddlers. Both schools are rooted into the town, with active PTFAs, with initiatives to connect with the wider community (see below). Both schools have a higher than average proportion of children needing special educational needs support.

Despite its newness, and its location so close to Exeter, and near to the towns of Ottery St Mary and Honiton, Cranbrook is developing its own identity. Residents often refer to themselves as Cranberries, and tend to feel protective of the town. I often hear comments about how friendly and welcoming people are; people tend to greet each other, and often are happy to stop and talk. Recently a resident told me that she felt that there was a real sense amongst residents that they wanted Cranbrook to work well as a town.

This is reflected in the level of engagement with local community groups – I have identified more than 28 groups led or facilitated by Cranbrook residents. However, because of the young demographic of the town, with lots of working families with young children, it can be challenging for to find enough volunteers for community initiatives able to make a regular commitment of time. Added to this is the challenge of a scarcity of venue to hire for community activity. With the town only part-built and many public amenities yet to be completed, this has forced some groups to meet in neighbouring Rockbeare village.

The Cranbrook Community Association has both public liability insurance and a bank account that smaller community groups can access. The Association is looking for more members as it wishes to be representative of the whole community. Overall, the Association wishes to support actions that concern residents in Cranbrook.



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### Green Spaces

Cranbrook Country Park - one of the major assets in Cranbrook, covering the flood plain at the heart of the town. When asking residents what they like most about Cranbrook the country park is always a front runner. The park has become a focal point, where families, dog walkers, cyclists and runners meet and exercise.



The park has a brook (The Cranny) running through it and is a good space for children to play, with picnic benches and barbeque areas. At the back of the dog enclosure by the brook there is a hideaway where teenagers often gather. The park has two park rangers, one of them focusing on education and activities. In the past there have been volunteering opportunities as well as workshops such as apple pressing, lantern making and bird box-making. I have also helped facilitate litter picking here.

Cranbrook Parkrun has become a weekly popular event for adults and children, taking place over two mornings at the country park. The parkrun is affiliated to Cranbrook running club, which has a reputation for being welcoming, and has gone from strength to strength over the years. The club also engages with the local community through events.

The Stroller Group meets up once or twice a week in the country park. Between eight and 12 families attend regularly.

There are four play park areas situated at points within the existing housing developments, and two more yet to be developed. The largest one is by St Martin's school, and is often used by families after school. Parents from the Education Campus similarly often meet by a big climbing log in the Country Park. Sometimes there can be tension between younger families and teenage children using the play parks.



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There are limited spaces for teenage children to meet up, although a skate park is planned.

There are also sports pitches situated on the London Road on the Eastern side of Cranbrook which is used by Cranbrook FC United.

### 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.

Younghayes Centre - the building is the base of the Town Council, and hires out a hall and a kitchen, which is often booked up. Its kitchen was used during covid lockdowns by GrowEatDo to prepare healthy frozen meals which were delivered locally. The space is used by a variety of groups and organisations including: parent, baby and toddler groups, Scouts, Guides, Youth Genesis, Scrum Kids, Football Development, table tennis, bingo. Libraries Unlimited comes once a month to do a storytime there.



The space is often used for birthday parties at weekends. Occasionally it is used for fayres and the town council hosts an annual Christmas event where children can meet Father Christmas. There is also a computer suite, which residents can access on weekdays.



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EX5-Alive was established in April 2022 within the Cranbrook Education Campus and is a brand-new facility. The building will eventually accommodate further classrooms, as the town population grows, but in the meantime, the space is being made available to the wider community (including adults). This is especially valuable given the shortage of community space in Cranbrook, and has the potential to become an important resource. There are a variety of rooms available for them. The vision is that the space will deliver services from 'cradle to career'. Already Action for Children runs a baby group meet here, along with the school nurse and midwifery service. The existing council-employed community development worker will become the hub's manager. Working with the Reach initiative based in West London, it uses an inclusive and asset-based model. Future plans include a branch of Exeter Foodbank, a community fridge, further meeting space for smaller groups, and community and international cafes, as well as careers advice, financial literacy workshops, and a creche for parents attending those workshops.

St Martins School - The school has an active PTFA that holds regular events, such as bingo evenings, often open to the wider community. The school has also acquired an old bus, which is parked beside the school and can be used by community groups. A support group for caregivers with children with additional needs meet there on a regular basis. The school also hosts the welcoming Cranbrook Church, which holds a variety of services, several of which have a more community or child focus, including Café Church, Messy Church and a more forest school-themed Muddy Church.

Café @143 - The café owner Debbie is very welcoming and her aspiration is for the café to be in the centre of the Community. She is engaged with many community events and activities and the café has become one of the main community hubs. It is also the meeting place for a walking group as well as a craft group. Residents often talk about the café being a safe space; one resident has talked about how she had been feeling isolated through covid and had anxieties about meeting people, and how the café had helped her through this and now felt able to join different activities.



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With support from the Community Association and the community builder, Debbie has plans for a 'Pay it Forward' scheme in future.

Cranberry Farm pub - The pub is a meeting place for many groups, including the book club, the Philosophy club, Evening Craft group, Cranbrook Motorcycle Riders and Cranbrook Community Association, and it is a popular meeting place for an after-work drink.

There is a welcoming space indoors and good outside seating as well. The pub also hosts the popular Cranbrook Festival, which takes place in June. There is a stage where bands perform, as well as stalls selling things or providing activities. The festival committee is keen to welcome more active volunteers.



### What Else Is Happening?

Finn's Litter Pick - before covid this was a regular event led by a parent and her son Finn, which has restarted with the support of the Community Association and the Community Builder. This is a popular event which is well supported by the local community.

Walking Group takes place every Friday morning. It started with one resident questioning why there were no activities for the older generation. With the support of the community builder and the café owner the group is nearly one year old. This group has evolved through the year, from being an open group into a more closed friendship group, with a few dedicated members meeting up for a cuppa and a walk.



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Move More helps community groups and organisations with grants.

Exeter Nordic Walking is facilitating free learning sessions, and a monthly dad's group has also benefitted. The stroller group has also received a grant to provide more activities.



GrowEatDo has recently formed as a CIC, and is planning to set up public living room events through the summer in Cranbrook, where people can meet up over a cuppa for an informal chat. The first public living room was set up at the Cranbrook festival and was a great success.

Cranbrook Energy Info & Action Group - A new group has been set up recently in the response to the increased price in heating costs and the fact that Cranbrook residents are tied into a district heating system. It aims to be a collective voice for residents concerned with this and is supported by the Cranbrook Community Association.

The Councillors in Cranbrook help small groups and emerging initiatives by providing funding through their Town Council scheme. Recent grants awarded include Brownies, Parent & Toddler group, Cranbrook Festival, Patient Participatory Group, Guides, Grow Eat Do - to replenish community Planters, Cranbrook Youth Football Club, The Patient Participatory Group. The town council employs a community development worker, who works closely with the community builder.





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## Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

Social Media - One of the main means of communication is via Facebook. There are several Facebook groups focusing on Cranbrook (including the community builder's profile), which are used for sharing information and details of events. As Cranbrook grows in population, and the Facebook groups become busier, it is easier for information to get lost among the numerous posts. Instagram is often used amongst local businesses and there are some local groups using WhatsApp as a means of communication.

The Community Association has a website where they are happy to share information about groups and events, however there has been a limited uptake from groups. At present this is not a focus for the Association so limited action has been taken.

Community Builder Newsletter - With there being no generic newsletter in Cranbrook I try to share news within my newsletter. I also try to create a list of groups and activities every six months, which I share and which is posted on the Town Council's noticeboards.

Noticeboards - The town council has provided several noticeboards, including a large one inside the Younghayes Centre) with space for town council matters, information about the country park and information about events and groups.

School Newsletters - The two schools produce regular newsletters and they are supportive with sharing community information within them.



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

The planning permission for the long-awaited town centre, including a supermarket, a children's nursery, small shop units and a town square, has finally been approved and work is due to start imminently. But many of the issues raised by residents relate to inadequacies in the planning and design of the new town.

There remains a shortage of meeting space for community groups and activities, which is partially alleviated by the new Community Hub at the Education Campus. There is also a shortage of storage space for things like cycle trailers or walking poles, which is a hindrance to the development of community activities.

There are two youth clubs, but as the demographic of children living in the town ages, more attention will need to be given to provision for teenagers over time. Provision for young children remains inadequate, as the population grows.

There is some interest in providing information about activities that are 'friendly' for neurodiverse people, or in establishing activities specifically for this group.



In general, there is a dearth of arts, music and drama activity in Cranbrook.

There is no plan for a swimming pool within the town, and the nearest is in Exeter. The only nearby gym is a small private one two miles away. The main wish expressed by residents on listening events is for a swimming pool and a leisure centre.



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Accessibility for pedestrians and wheelchair users remains an issue, only partially rectified by developers, as inadequate pavement space has been allowed for. There have been calls for designated footpaths leading out of Cranbrook: it possible to walk around the country park, but not easy to go further afield. Several residents have noted that most of the amenities are within phase one of the development, which is quite a long walk from some of the more recent areas to be developed. This problem will be alleviated somewhat once the new town centre area is built, and when the community hub is fully functioning.



The only public toilets are in the town council building from 10-2 on weekdays. This again makes many events less accessible than they might be. But there is talk of a community garden, and an event space has been built in the country park.

