

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24



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.



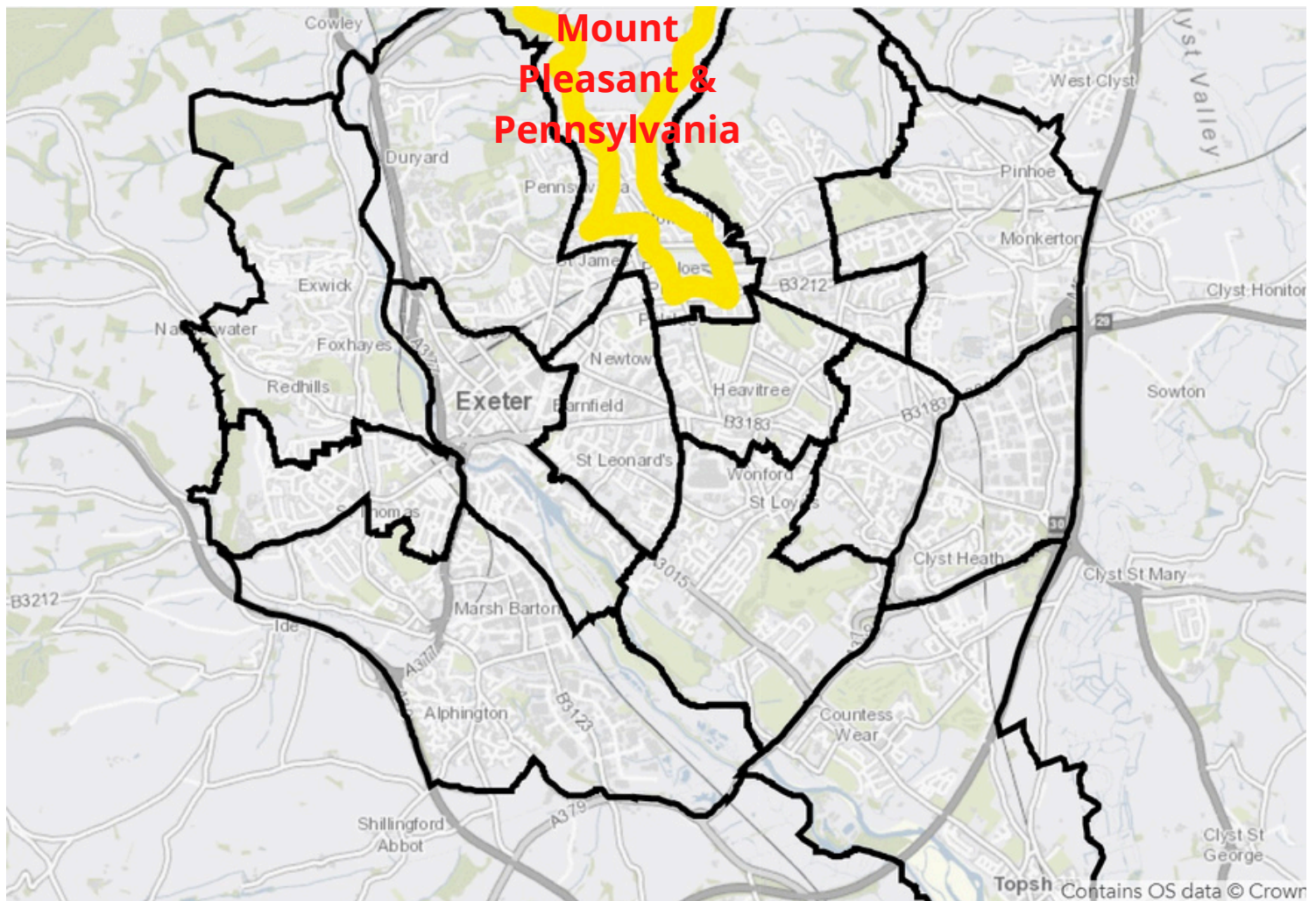
Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

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.



Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

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.

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.

There is a new development on the old railway grounds and by the Morrisons roundabout, currently being developed.

Pennsylvania 'proper' is a more affluent area, with 1970s detached houses that are spaced along 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.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

Owing to the suburban layout, 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

Polsloe Community Association has a close link with Priory Road 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. The association committee is keen to continue these links to the green space, as well as continuing to work closely with Pinhoe Road Baptist Church. Regular events include a bake off, wassailing, litter picks and park care days.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24



Mount Pleasant Makeover is part of an ongoing neighbourhood improvement project. The aim is to green up the front gardens and add street art to brighten up the area. The project has helped to create a sense of community cohesion and improve the area. It is a great example of collaborative work with the local community association, residents, university students and the community builder.

Mincinglake Valley Park is outside the ward boundary, but is used by local people, mostly for dog walking, rather than by families. Many locals in Stoke Hill 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.



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. 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 and is keen to improve the green space locally for the community.

There are several allotment sites in the ward, running 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. Exeter Communities Together's Growing Project holds a weekly work session at the allotments and members of the local community are invited to join in. Sylvania Community Stores have recently obtained an allotment for community members to support.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

The alleyways running behind the Victorian terraces in the Mount Pleasant area have been brought back 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.

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 has good links with the Polsloe Community Association (which meets here) and is very supportive of wider community activities, e.g. summer fairs, community carol singing.

St James' Church hosts brownies, rainbows, guides, cubs and scouts, a Tuesday luncheon club, coffee morning, dance class, Singing for the Brain, Slimming World, Messy Church, a monthly Christian book group, a Fellowship social group on alternate Thursdays and regular fayres. The church provides excellent opportunities for older residents to connect and plays an important role in the area, though the congregation is not predominantly from within the ward.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

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

Sylvania Community Hall (Sylvania Hut) is 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 for an 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. Unfortunately, the hut has recently shut. A repair project is planned with residents coming together at the early stages of the project.

St Katherine's Priory is 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 along with 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. The monthly Sunday Engineers train days has proved popular.

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 watercolour sessions. A regular painting group, established with the help of the Community Builder, is now self-sustaining and has been running for over 5 years.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

Sylvania Community Stories & Café is run as a community benefit society owned by its shareholders and members and run by a small management committee. The stores had previously been closed but, with help from the Community Builder in setting up the community benefit society, saw the stores re-opened in July 2021.



It has established itself as a community hub, with substantial volunteer support and now employs members of staff and has expanded to provide hot lunches. A Post Office service is provided in the store on Thursdays and there are a wide range of groups and activities taking place there, including a book group, Scrabble club, arts, crafts, knit and natter group and an inclusive community choir. A pre-school group meets for songs, stories and art activities whilst also enjoying the indoor playroom and outdoor secret garden. Half term art and craft activities are particularly popular.

What Else Is Happening?

Pennsylvania mini orchard was supported by the Community Builder and Exeter City Council. The local community planted a selection of fruit trees.

Stoke Hill Runners run 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.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

[Polsloe & Priory Conservative Social Club](#) offers snooker, darts, skittles, bingo and function rooms for hire.

Age UK East Exe Day Care Centre (Sycamores) now also houses the headquarters of [Age UK Exeter](#). It offers limited services for older people.

[Women on the Run](#) is 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](#) is a 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. This has now become a regular monthly event. Nearby St Annes Road have also started playstreets.

[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.



There are now two little free libraries in the area - [Stoke Hill Little Free Library](#) on Stoke Hill and [Mincinglake Road Tiny Library](#) on Mincinglake Road. Both were started with the help of the Community Builder and are supported with ward grants. They have proved very popular, particularly with families.



Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

Spreading The Word: How Do People Connect?

St James' Church Parish Magazine is produced quarterly and invites the Community Builder and members of the community to contribute. It is delivered to all households within the parish.

Friends of Mount Pleasant Health Centre and the Patient Participation Group both produce newsletters with regular community news updates and contributions from the Community Builder.

Stoke Hill School 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 increased in usage during lockdown and continue to play a big role in how people connect. The Polsloe Community Facebook group has over 800 members, describing itself as "Bridging the gap in the community" and has a website. Pennsylvania Community, Stoke Hill School and St Katherine's Priory all have Facebook pages.

There are several noticeboards in the area - one in Pinhoe Road, one installed by residents in Priory Road park. Sylvania Environmental Community group have 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 is a lack of opportunities for students and long-term residents 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. There is also potential for Sylvania Stores to develop.

Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

Mount Pleasant & Pennsylvania 2023-24

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. Community groups hope to have open conversations to share ideas, such as trails, cycle tracks, and improved signage and picnic benches.

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. It has quickly become embedded as the new community hub and is at the heart the neighbourhood.



The recent interest in playstreets locally is growing and could be taken up in other parts of the ward.