

# Community Builder Neighbourhood Profile

## Heavitree 2023-24



### Introduction

Welcome to Heavitree! 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.



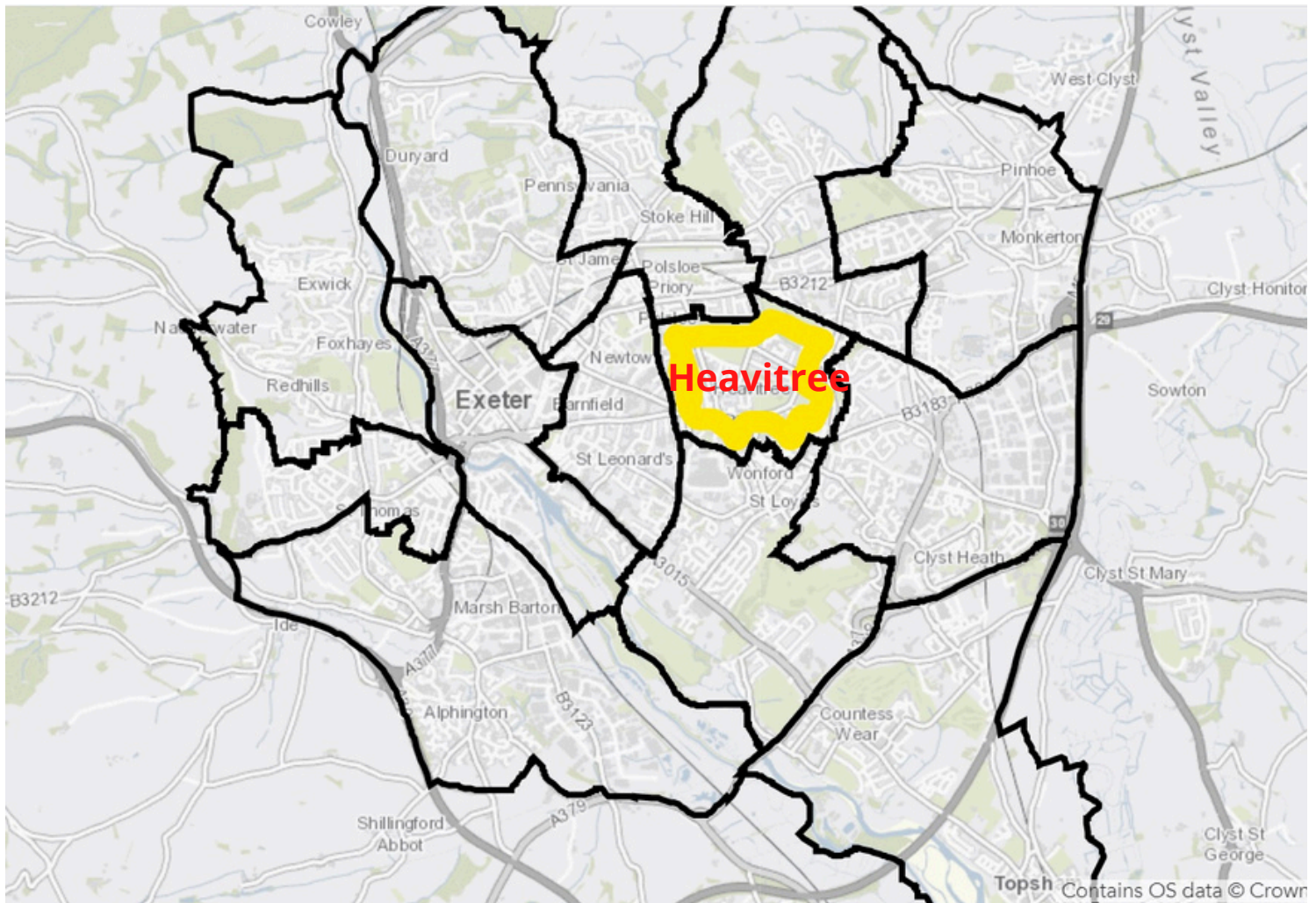
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### Picture Of A Place

Heavitree was a village separate from Exeter until 1913. Most of Heavitree ward lies between two major roads: Fore Street and Pinhoe Road, with other boundaries being Polsloe Road and parts of Sweetbrier Lane, Vaughan Road and the railway track. However, areas that are further away from the shops and Pleasure Ground identify less with Heavitree. For example from Hamlin Gardens the closest shops are on Pinhoe Road and the bus into the city centre takes you via Pinhoe Road rather than Heavitree Road. From the Vaughan Road area the Whipton Village shops are closer than the Heavitree shops though there is a bus route through Heavitree.

Many residents mention the local amenities as one of the positives about living in Heavitree.



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Shops and other amenities including pubs, cafes, restaurants and fast-food outlets, as well as a Coop, Tesco Metro and a Post Office are clustered around Fore Street. The Daisy Cafe and Heavy Tree are both community-minded cafes and welcome all generations. There are some concerns that there are fewer shops than previously and that when something closes it is replaced with a charity shop or hairdresser. Many would like a green grocer locally. Plenty of people do all their everyday shopping locally, though for others, especially those with cars, or who work outside the area, local shops are more for top-ups. Some residents say there is a lack of short-term parking nearby. There have been comments about the friendly staff in shops and cafes and recognition that, though there is less variety of shops than there was, Heavitree is lucky to still have so many.

The [Heavitree Traders Association](#) was recently re-established, with the aims of increasing the profile of local shopping, strengthening the traders' voices and providing events for the community. They have been involved with the [Greening Heavitree](#) project, providing flower troughs, Christmas lights and a Christmas event. The Heavitree Traders Association have a Facebook page called [Stay Local at Heavitree Shops](#). They meet once a month. Mathew Rowbury is the chair. For example, the Devon Air Ambulance, The Thrifty Stylist and Daisy Café, among others, put on updates about their business.

Heavitree is well connected by public transport. There are a range of bus services along Heavitree Road and Polsloe Road plus a bus along South Lawn Terrace and Sweetbrier Lane, so it is easy to get to the city centre for work, education or leisure. Buses out of town run through the area to Sidmouth, Cranbrook and Cullompton. From Livery Dole (the name of the area where Polsloe Road and Barrack Road meet Heavitree Road) stop on Heavitree Road you can catch buses to Exmouth, Teignmouth and Plymouth. There are trains to the city centre and Exmouth and Paignton from Polsloe Bridge, and good access to the motorway from East Wonford Hill. There is easy bus access to several supermarkets.



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St Michael's Primary School and Ladysmith Infant and Junior Schools (separate but federated - the infant school has a nursery) are long-established. St Michael's has an active Parents Teachers & Friends Association and Ladysmith a CPTT (Children, Parents & Teachers Together).

Ellen Tinkham's Further Education College, which provides Year 9,10 and post-16 education for students with special needs, is based in Wayside Crescent. The school is looking to establish links with their immediate neighbours in Wayside Crescent and Georges Close and in Heavitree more generally. There is a variety of pre-school provision: a private nursery, Heavitree Community Pre-School which is run by a committee of parents and hosts various baby and toddler groups - in fact one every day of the week!

**ParkLife Heavitree** is a community group which recognises the importance of the **Heavitree Pleasure Ground** for connecting the Heavitree community. ParkLife has grown in a fairly short time and now has large numbers of volunteers involved in various ways. ParkLife organises events in Heavitree Pleasure Ground such as a Fun Day, Pumpkin Carving and Carol Singing. It also runs a senior social cafe helping older residents



get together, many of whom have been bereaved or are looking for a friendly social scene. The volunteer-run café takes place weekly and approximately 10-12 people usually attend and the community there also support one another outside of the café. There are lots of other activities going on at this hub and their Facebook group and noticeboard provides details about toddler groups and yoga activities etc.

ParkLife volunteers have also put an incredible amount of work into securing both the lease for an area of the Pleasure Ground and the necessary funds to build a new Community Hub on it, which opened in autumn 2021 (see below). As their website states: "Parks are a '3rd place' away from home and work where people can come together - we see Heavitree Park as a kind of community glue where people from all walks of life, all ages, races and religions can get to know each and support one another."

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Heavitree Community Association closed around four years ago. The association had been struggling to recruit younger volunteers. The Community Association recognised that younger volunteers were tending to get involved with Parklife (see below) and that Parklife was putting on much of what the Community Association had previously been doing as regards community events. To mark the end of the Community Association a tree was planted in Heavitree Pleasure Ground and the remaining funds given to Friends of Heavitree Health Centre.

Churches in Heavitree include St Michael's Parish Church (which incorporates the Chapel of St Clare), the Blessed Sacrament RC Church (which draws a congregation from across the city), Heavitree United Reformed Church (which shares a minister with Pinhoe), Heavitree Independent Evangelical Church and City Community Church (which meets at St Michael's School).

Much local housing is terraced houses but there are also some 1930s semi-detached properties. There are some larger older houses, particularly along and off Polsloe Road. There is also more recent social housing, both flats and houses, dating from the 1960s at Hamlin Gardens, North Lawn Court, Sweetbrier Lane and either side of Vaughan Road. Some of the terraced houses closer to Mount Pleasant are let to students. There is also an Exeter University accommodation campus comprising blocks of shared flats at Livery Dole.

Heavitree is home to lots of professional couples and young families, often working at the University, hospital or Met Office (one resident described her area of Heavitree as 'meto ghetto!'). Much of the older population own their own homes, or are in private retirement apartments (Mowbray, Maltings, Pegasus, Meyer Court) or council-owned developments (Bodley Close, Hamlin Gardens and Southlands) and in nursing homes (Jack Simpson, Highland Borders and Southlands).

Hamlin Gardens older people's accommodation was originally warden controlled. Some of the older residents in their 70s and 80s moved there because of this and don't feel that the pendant system is as good/safe. The City Council recently lowered the minimum age for people to move into older persons' accommodation; several residents in their late 50s and 60s who moved in more recently are still working.

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With the help of the Community Builder, local councillors and residents, the three council-owned residential homes for older people in Heavitree have developed Facebook groups and a greater sense of community. Bodley Close, for example, has set up a Facebook group and successfully put on weekly activities for their community in their communal social room. These activities include bingo, seated exercise, crafts – all of which they organise themselves. They also took some responsibility for their green space and some residents have tended small gardens.

Southlands Community has similarly set up a Facebook group and they managed to organise a BBQ in the summer on Friday afternoons. With the help of the local councillor and residents, they managed to get a small community hut built in their green space which acts as a small space for getting together.

Hamlyn Gardens have a community room and meet for a monthly cups of tea and cake, usually on a Monday or Tuesday afternoon. Residents from Carlyon Close also come to Hamlyn Gardens for the tea group and it is well attended. Notices are put up to remind people. There was also an art group that ran once a month and pictures have been put up in the glass display units. This used to be run by Leigh, who also managed to run the tea group, before passing it onto residents to organise. The residents are also proud of some of their gardens out the back that are tended with ornaments, lights and plants, These communities now are much more aware of one another in the residential homes and are better able support one another.

New jobs were also created by the council in 2023 called Resident Involvement Workers. James and Vanessa effectively support council residents to get involved in their communities and they put on activities that run across community rooms in residential homes across all of Exeter, including the residential homes in Heavitree. Activities such as Golden Oldies, RAMM museum visits, and home or fire safety days, are such examples. Neighbourhood concerns, as well as damage or repairs, can also be reported to them, particularly if residents are unable to use the council website.

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The Exeter's Active Streets Heavitree and Whipton Trials Scheme traffic experiment was introduced in August 2023. It became a hugely divisive issue in the community and entailed a nine month trial installing Low Traffic Networks closing off through roads within Heavitree to prevent excess rat run traffic, increase pedestrian and cycling use of streets, and increase pedestrian safety. Following the nine month trial, those opposed to the trial deemed it to have significantly and negatively impacted the lives of disabled people, those with health issues and even pupils and a local special school who were said to have been subjected to 'additional distress and pain'. In a council meeting on 3 June 2024 the decision was made to scrap the scheme. A Devon County Council consultation on the efficacy of the scheme found that 80% of Heavitree residents were opposed to the scheme, while supporters of the scheme questioned the validity of the data and of its collection. Some of the road blocks near the local schools in Heavitree remained in place till the end of the summer term for safety reasons, while the remainder of the LTNs were removed. The remaining LTNs were removed by the end of July 2024.

### Green Spaces

**Heavitree Pleasure Ground** is well used by dog walkers and by families. There are tennis courts, basketball courts, a new pump track, paddling pools and a play park. There's also a dog-free area. Several national initiatives take place in the Pleasure Ground - Junior Park Run, Tennis for Free for adults and children and Park Yoga on a Sunday morning. Heavitree Bowling Club is located here.

**ParkLife Heavitree** is based in the pleasure ground and serves the community from there. We have described the work of the hub under the section on community hubs.

The **Friends of Heavitree Pleasure Ground** is a gardening group that was set up by a volunteer gardener, Christopher Griffin, and together with support from the local council ward grants and Community Builder, they set up a voluntary group of gardeners to improve the appearance and planting of the park. They meet on a Saturday morning.

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Heavitree & Wonford Running Group was set up by local residents in partnership with Parklife who pay for the training of run leaders and any surplus income from participants then goes back to Parklife. The Group usually runs two Couch to 5k sessions every year and last year set up an evening walking group over the summer. During the pandemic, group members volunteered to Heavitree Running group have helped the local surgery with marshals for the mass vaccination programme.

There is also a daytime walking group set up by a local resident with support from the Community Builder which has now been 'adopted' by Westbank Walking for Health. They meet Monday mornings at 10am at the basketball court at Heavitree Pleasure Ground. There is now an opportunity for local residents to join a walk around the Pleasure Grounds on Monday and Thursday lunchtimes at 1pm.

Hamlin Lane Playing Field is currently less well-used. Many local residents still call it the JLC which dates back to when the Juvenile Liaison Committee used it in the 1950s. There is a small play park at one end and a road layout for use of bikes at the other, the humps used for scooters and BMX have seen better days. The fields are used by Stoke Hill Junior Football Club who lease the changing rooms too.

There are no houses looking out onto Hamlin Lane Playing Field with the stream on one side and the railway on the other which means there is less sense of ownership than at Heavitree Pleasure Ground, although it was used more heavily during lockdown. Residents living nearby have made suggestions of putting a pedestrian bridge across the stream to make access easier from Hamlin Gardens and creating a family picnic area next to the stream. Other ideas include extending the path from the allotment gates to the play park, creating a nature trail and holding low-key events.

There have been some complaints about anti-social behaviour in this area, which influences who chooses to use it. Greening Heavitree held a plant give-away at Hamlin Lane; residents who attended had several ideas for local improvements, including exercise classes for mums with their children, forest school, gardening opportunities, walking group, benches to sit on around the cycle area, and cycle events for kids.



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Wingfield Park Stadium is a privately owned football stadium and all-weather practice pitch, the home pitch for Heavitree YFC. It shares a site with the Heavitree Social Club.

**Higher Cemetery** is a large green space which was designed by the Veitch Family. One resident commented on how important it was to her as 'a quiet space for walking, sitting and thinking'. It has a Friends Group, who promote the use of the cemetery as public space, offering regular talks and tours related to local history or the cemetery. They have also developed a Tree Trail walk.



There are three allotment sites in the ward: **Whipton Lane Allotments** are owned and run by a voluntary committee, whereas the **allotments** at Sweetbrier Lane and Hamlin Lane are run by Exeter City Council.

**Greening Heavitree** gardening group was established with support from the Community Builder during the pandemic. Its first project involved supporting the council with the planting and upkeep of planters used to close off streets to increase social distancing, with materials supplied by Devon County Council. Subsequent work has focused on Hamlin Lane Fields, and the surrounding residential area, with funding from **Active Devon**.

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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.

The new **community hub** in Heavitree Pleasure Ground was completed in October 2021. The hub now has a friendly café and rooms for hire that will host community groups. The hub is keen to be used as a community centre and will provide an important and friendly focus for many residents in Heavitree and for facilitating the creation, or sustaining, of local community work.

St Michael's Church - Benjamin Rabjohns was appointed vicar in November 2021. The church hall is used by Rangers (Heavitree Guides meet at St Matthew's Church Hall in Newtown). The Rifford Room within the Church is used for Church groups and by secular groups. Tuesday Fellowship, Crochet Group, Handbell Ringers, Tea@3, Messy Church and St Michael's Toddler Group are among the activities. It has a noticeboard outside the church to keep residents updated. There are activities such as a breakfast club and they have fundraising days as well. There is a very impressive children's and adult library called **Heavitree Friendly Library** which runs on the first and third Friday of the month and serves tea and cakes. There are also reading sessions there. They also have a group of volunteers that tend the cemetery together with the work of the local council.

Following the closure of the library in Heavitree, local residents worked together to open Heavitree Friendly Library, open on the first and third Fridays of every month in St Michael's Church. the library has a good selection of quality children's books and attracts parents with young children and older residents who enjoy a chat and a cup of tea. There is no charge to join or to borrow and no fines, plus refreshments and cakes available. There is also a story time for pre-school children.

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There is also a Friends of Heavitree Church Group, who look after the lower church yard with regular work parties. The upper part is maintained by Exeter City Council.

The Heavitree URC (United Reform Church) has a drop-in café for residents or visitors from 10.30am-12.30pm every Friday morning. All are welcome. Currently at Heavitree URC they have Brownies, Friends & Neighbours and Heavitree Ladies. [Heavitree Local History Society](#) are now booked in for their monthly evening meeting. Tai Chi have yet to start up again due to the pandemic. The Annex is let and occupied by the privately run Exeter Drama School.

The URC run a weekly Refresh Café every Friday. This is a café that is very inclusive and welcomes people from a range of backgrounds. Tea and toasties are by donation and are free to those who cannot afford to donate anything. Refresh Café and have gone on to run a successful food bank on the first and last Friday of each month. Attendance started about 15 people but during the cost of living crisis up to 40-50 people can attend the food bank. The food bank used to run on a food waste model, which effectively means that it recycled food that was being given away or was running out of date. However, owing to excess demand for food and less food being given away during the cost of living crisis, this model began to struggle as there was insufficient food waste in the system. With the help of the Community Builder, local councillor and Co-Op Champion, the food bank has been able apply for funds to pay to buy essential food items. It is not clear in the longer term how sustainable this approach will be, but the food bank is an important part of URCs commitment to the local community and an important resource.

The [Blessed Sacrament Church](#) has the St Richard Reynolds Centre which is used for the Parent & Toddler Group. They also run the Thursday Lunch Club for elderly parishioners and local people who are often alone - this provides a great meeting place for them. This used to run fortnightly but, post-COVID, they have just been restarted and are only meeting monthly. The Catholic Church runs a number of groups for the community such as the Dementia or Memory Cafe and they have a lunch club as well in their community room. The church has a diverse congregation and serves much of Exeter, so it is very well attended. They produce a newsletter for their congregation.

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They have a sewing group who meet of an evening in the centre and they make all sorts of items. During the first lockdown they made bags for hospital staff to take their scrubs and face masks home in. At other times, they made decorations for sale at an Advent Fayre and also made clothes to go to an orphanage in Uganda. They have run a repair cafe too. The centre is well used in normal times for parish events, meetings, fundraisers, coffee after mass and informative events. The church also has a weekly newsletter which highlights events.

The **2nd Exeter Scouts** is very active, with three Beavers Colonies, two Cub Packs and Scout Troops meeting at the Scout Hut on South Lawn Terrace, which they own. The Hut is also available to rent during the day and when Scouts are not there at weekends, and is used for some exercise classes. The Scouts host a little free library at the hut.

**Heavitree Health Centre** houses both the Heavitree and South Lawn Medical Practices. There is also a combined **Friends of Heavitree Health Centre**, which employs a coordinator and has a small shop and office. The Centre's Roseland Room is used for Knit & Natter, a BYO Craft & Board Game Group set up with Community Builder support, as well as the Connections Coffee Morning. During Covid these groups were all placed on hold, but have subsequently reopened. The surgery has also been running a small food bank.



**The Baby Room** used to run in Heavitree but has now moved to Paris Street in the city centre. It is a space developed on a not-for-profit basis following the closure of the local children's centre. It provides a venue for cloth nappy and baby sling businesses and for classes such as Baby Massage. There are Nappuccino sessions for babies and parents and exercise classes.

There are a number of groups for parents of babies and toddlers to join. **Ladysmith Toddler Group** runs during the term every Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9.30am-11am.



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Another toddler group takes place on a Friday morning in the community hall at [St Marks Church](#) on Pinhoe Road and is called [Joeys Baby & Toddler Group](#). Heavitree Park Life also run a toddler group on Friday mornings and has to be booked through Eventbrite, with links and a timetable of events on the ParkLife website.

### What Else Is Happening?

[The Heavitree Strummers](#) ukulele band meet at St Katherine's Priory on Tuesday evenings.

[Heavitree Sounds](#), a community-focussed choir, meets at Ladysmith Junior School on Tuesday evenings.

[Heavitree Social Club](#), [Whipton Labour Club](#) and [Heavitree Conservative Club](#) provide facilities for members, and also hold events that are open to all. They also have rooms available to hire.

Residents have mentioned the heritage and architecture of Heavitree as one of the reasons they like living here and several residents give their time to groups which promote, preserve or celebrate this. [Heavitree Local History Society](#) organises four history talks and a local history walk each year and also annual Beating the Bounds of Heavitree Parish. They also produce leaflets and booklets on Heavitree history. Last year they worked with a resident and the Community Builder to arrange a coffee morning for long term residents to discuss memories and share photos of Heavitree's past. Meetings are held quarterly at Heavitree United Reformed Church.

[Heavitree Squilometre](#) is a place-based, community-commissioned arts and heritage group. Residents vote for areas/topics in Heavitree that they would like to investigate or celebrate and the winning one becomes the next Squilometre Project. A pod of interested residents is formed and they decide on the form the project will take. Insurance and governance is provided by Interwoven Productions CIC. In late 2021, Ladysmith Road was a current focus.

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

Noticeboards - there are noticeboards outside the Co-op, the Health Centre and in the Pleasure Ground, all of which are locked. There are also noticeboards inside the Co-op and in both health centres. Some cafes and shops will put up posters/flyers.

Facebook - [Heavitree Community Network](#) is a well-used Facebook group. [Heavitree Free Circle](#) is a widely used Facebook group. This is a closed group for Heavitree residents only with 1.6k members (June 2020). One resident commented that using Heavitree Freecycle to find a home for her unwanted items and to obtain items from others has made her feel really linked to the community. Lockdown prompted a plethora of new street-scale WhatsApp and Facebook groups, and 'adapted' Neighbourhood Watch groups.

Publications - some residents, particularly older people, say that they don't always know what is happening and feel that things are only advertised on Facebook, which they don't use. The monthly parish magazine, Our Heavitree, contains wider community news as well as parish news. Heavitree News was a commercial publication which was produced quarterly but is no longer published. The Community Builder produces a quarterly newsletter.

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

Most people seem very positive about living in Heavitree and comment on the range and standard of amenities. People feel there is a good bus service and that there are activities for different ages. Many residents talk about the community spirit in Heavitree generally and specifically around the schools, Heavitree Fore Street shops and Heavitree Pleasure Ground, but this is not felt by those that are further away from these. There is some disconnect between older long-term residents and the newer young professionals/families. The Community Cafe and Hub provide a venue for all ages to connect. There are concerns about the amount of traffic and resulting pollution on Heavitree Road and also concerns about the levels of traffic outside both the schools especially at drop off and pick up times. Parking can be an issue particularly on the terraced streets.