



Neighbourhood Profiles: Newtown & St Leonards

Introduction

Welcome to Newtown & St Leonards! This neighbourhood profile draws on the work of the Wellbeing Exeter community builder in Newtown & St Leonards, 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 fantastic [JSNA Community Health and Wellbeing profiles](#), 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 is there; where are the important community focal points; 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 not-so-strengths, and to provide an informed commentary on the health of community life. We've included some brief case studies from the work of the community builder, to give a sense of what this work can involve and highlight the kind of community action going on in Newtown & St Leonards. We hope you find it useful.

Introductory note from the community builder

Prior to commencing my role as a community builder I considered that I knew the area fairly well, that I had a good idea of what was going on. On closer inspection however, there is so much more than I realised. From community groups, informal resident activities such as book groups and a choir and formal organisations there is something for everyone. The task is then disseminating this information to interested parties: I have spoken to a number of residents who comment 'there's nothing much going on round here'. What has been evident is how much people love the area, especially the convenience to the city centre; public transport; local shops; amenities and green spaces. Residents very much value being able to walk or cycle to their destination. Door knocking has helped me build a picture of an area and one street can be very different to the next. Even within blocks of flats, residents can have very different opinions as to how well connected they are to their neighbours.

Picture of a Place: Natural communities vs ward boundaries

Newtown and St Leonards may be one relatively small ward, but these two areas are very distinct communities, with Heavitree Road, an arterial route leading from the city centre towards the hospital and beyond, acting as the boundary between the two.

Newtown is a mixed, city-centre community. It is valued as a diverse, multicultural area, attracting a number of musicians and artists (there is even a Sikh temple in a house in Clifton Street). Although Newtown is classed as an area of deprivation this does not of course apply to all and there are many professionals residing there. People value the area's convenience to the city centre and local amenities, whilst retaining the community feel of a 'village in the city' – a safe and quiet place to live.

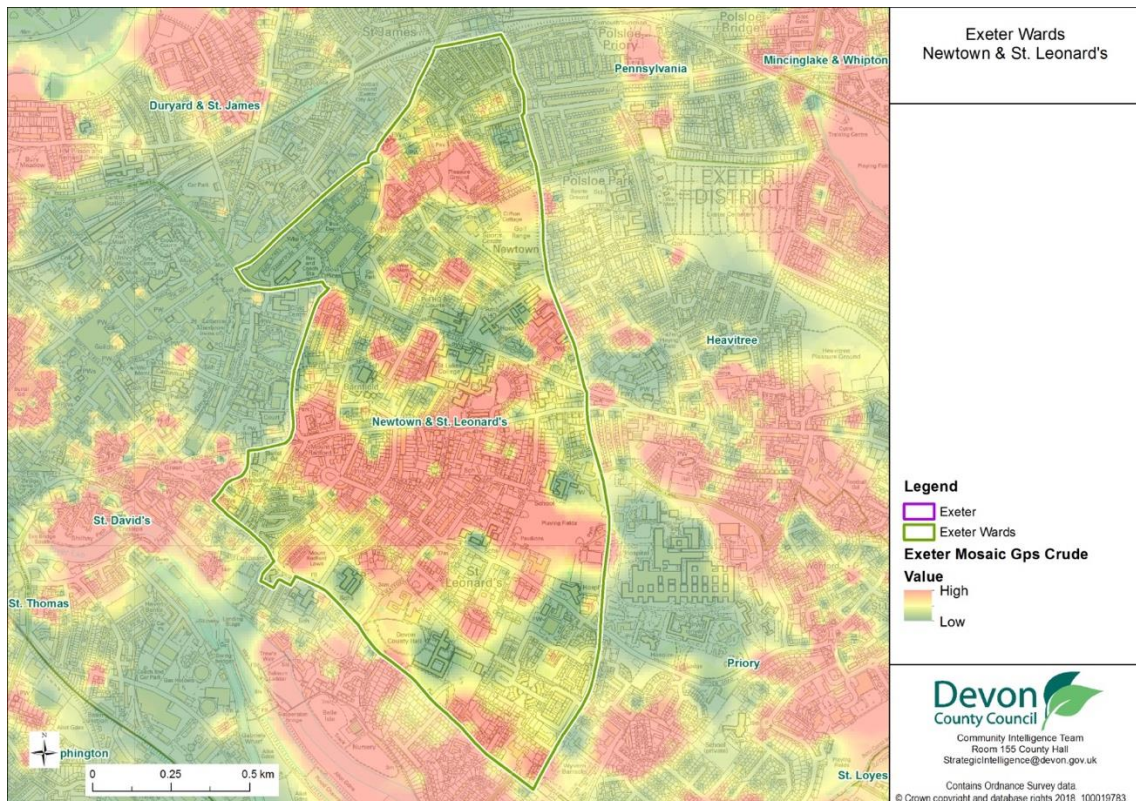
St Leonards is generally more affluent, but there is the same strong community feel, and often residents refer to it as 'the village'. Many non-residents work nearby, or come to St Leonards to shop or meet friends. The row of independent shops on Magdalen Road is a magnet for people from across the city.

Newtown Primary School is described by parents as having a village feel. St Leonards Primary School is much larger school and equally valued. Both schools have active PTAs with regular events including those where the community are welcome to attend. St Leonards Preschool is temporarily moving to Palace Gate whilst development takes place on the old Royal Academy for Deaf Education site. Newtown Preschool has taken on the organising of the children's tent for the 2019 Respect Festival in Belmont Park. There are also a number of private nurseries and independent schools in the area. The independent schools engage with the local community such as visiting local nursing homes.

There are a number of sheltered and supported housing complexes, managed by a number of organisations including Guinness Trust, Exeter Homes Trust, Westward Housing, Exeter City Council and Cornerstone. Some residents within sheltered accommodation complexes comment that they do not know their neighbours as well as they'd like to. Some of the older people's accommodation have communal rooms that aren't used to their full potential. At Eaton House, residents are raising funds for outdoor furniture to encourage residents to come outside and interact.

Churches in the area include St Leonards Church and St Matthews Church in Newtown (both Church of England). Other churches include Belmont Chapel and Christ Church in Newtown, Jehovah's Witness Hall and Church of the Latter-Day Saints in St Leonards, as well as 'free' churches which meet at school halls etc. Some of the churches provide community space and a number of groups for both church-goers and the wider community and this is further discussed below.

Here is a heat map showing relative levels of frailty in the neighbourhood (red indicates a higher risk of frailty). Newtown & St Leonards ward is outlined in green. As can be seen, there is a relatively high risk of frailty in the centre of the ward, especially just south of Heavitree Road.



Green/public spaces

An Exeter City Council physical activity consultation was carried out by 'Wildzones' in October 2018 in the Newtown area. Passions ran high during the public consultation meeting owing to the potential loss of the Clifton Hill Sports Centre, green space, ski slope and driving range.

Belmont Park

The park is a very important asset in Newtown, it is one of the main parks in the city, and really ought to be considered a community hub. It has two play areas including a fenced-off green space for children to play safely; table tennis table; small basketball court; outdoor exercise equipment and a graffiti wall (which can be used for ball games). The park is used by people from all walks of life and people can be seen walking dogs; playing football and other sports; playing instruments; having a picnic and just relaxing. Ethnic minority and religious groups regularly meet up for picnics. There are raised beds next to the hut where people can plant herbs, and there is a sensory garden. Trees are often used to support exercise equipment, slack lines and a rope swing, the latter, which was most likely put up by a park user, has proved to be very popular.

Dog faeces, litter, drug taking and anti-social behaviour, the latter particularly in the sensory garden, are seen as issues. A few people have commented on the lack of lighting. Lack of toilet facilities is often raised but the issues they bring is also acknowledged. Tree felling upsets many residents, and the reasons for it need to be well communicated. Some would like to see somewhere to buy refreshments after school. Others have mentioned the Play Rangers that used to work in the park and how they would love to see them return.

The Newtown Community Association manages Belmont Park Hut, with a new building opening in June 2019 (see 'Community Hubs' below). Friends of Belmont Park has carried out a consultation and is currently liaising with suppliers of play equipment.

The Respect Festival is a popular annual event. A 'You Are welcome' picnic organised by a local resident in response to Brexit (friends were feeling unwelcome) has been held twice and attracted people from Exeter and beyond. Other events have included The Newtown Community Association 30th Anniversary and the 10 mile Community Feast held in partnership with Transition Exeter, Shillingford Organics, Exeter Pound, Love Local Food and Exeter Cookery School. This included a set of 3 plays and a bring and share community lunch. June Tunes was a collaboration between the school and Newtown Community Association Choir. Devon Development Education ran Food Glorious Food in the area in spring 2017 and worked with the school, the social café and the pre-school to make food and plant herbs.

The **Freemovement** session runs every Tuesday and Thursday evening, it is a free, volunteer-led, exercise group for all ages and abilities and held all year round.

Belmont Bowling Green is adjacent to the Park and as well as regular bowls offers a weekly group for people with disabilities.

Merry Go Round Toy library shares a building with the **Exeter Scrapstore** within the park. The Toy library offers a low-cost toy loaning service for families with babies to children in their early teens. The Scrapstore provides new art and craft materials and reclaimed and recycled materials for craft, educational and play purposes. Both the library and the Scrapstore are used by local residents and those further afield.

Clifton Hill Green Space

Behind the recently closed Clifton Hill Sports Centre is an 8-acre green space twice the size of Belmont Park. This is well-used by residents for dog-walking, exercise, and connecting with nature. The recent decision to sell the Clifton Hill site for housing development has resulted in residents coming together to try to fight these plans. There is concern too about the lack of leisure facilities, following the closure of Clifton Hill Sports Centre. Some residents and centre users feel that there was a lack of public consultation around this. Whilst there are other facilities across the city, often people like to use local facilities or can't afford the bus fare, especially if they also have children to pay for.

Bull Meadow Park

This has over the past few years seen the installation of new play equipment, led by local residents. Residents also held a planting session and installed a nature trail. The play equipment includes an area of wooden play equipment and a zip slide. The park has picnic benches and an area for playing ball games and other activities. A gymnastics centre is located within the park, attracting people from Exeter and beyond. There are also external groups using the centre including martial arts and a dance group. A part of the park has

been for some time (as at April 2019) fenced off due to a damaged drainage system. A campaign group has formed, objecting to plans for a slice of the park to be taken for a turning circle for a new alms-houses development. The Exeter Dissenters Graveyard Trust look after a small graveyard next to the park.

Mount Radford Lawn was part of the Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education and used by local schools. Developers are interested in building houses on the land. The St Leonards Neighbourhood Association and local residents are looking to retain the land for community use.

Spreading the word: how do people connect?

Both Newtown and St Leonards community associations have websites and produce newsletters, the NCA has a social media presence. The SLNA has a noticeboard on Magdalen Road and produces a newsletter that is distributed by over 50 volunteers to over 3,000 households on a bi-monthly basis. The NCA produces a digital newsletter with a circulation of 150+ which is emailed out monthly. The SLNA has a page on its website with a list of local groups and activities, provided by the community builder, as well as a virtual noticeboard.

There is a lack of noticeboards but there are currently three being installed in the area: two in Newtown and one in St Leonards. Local park groups, St Leonards Surgery and Exeter Housing Services among others regularly share posts. St Leonards Primary School, Newtown Primary School, St Leonards Preschool and Newtown Community Preschool have newsletters and Facebook Pages. There is capacity to display posters in some of the supported housing complexes in the area as well as the local GP Surgeries. The Community Builder uses social media to connect with residents and finds this an effective way to share information. Writing articles for the St Leonards Newsletter has also proved fruitful for connecting with people.

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.

Both Newtown and St Leonards have Community Associations. The main remit of the **Newtown Community Association (NCA)** is to provide a community centre for the use of local people. It manages a small building in Belmont Park (Belmont Hut), with a new community centre, adjacent to the existing one, due to be completed in spring 2019. It can be rented at a low cost and is very well used, activities include Woodcraft Folk, Yoga, choir, Pilates, Tango, and cultural groups, including the Newtown Roots Band. The NCA holds an annual Winter Warmer social event and has a number of groups under its umbrella including twice weekly Qigong, a monthly social café and a weekly choir.

The St Leonards Neighbourhood Association (SLNA) runs a highly popular Christmas Fair on Magdalen Road which is attended by people across Exeter and beyond. It has also recently

been working with the St Leonards Primary School organising intergenerational events. Currently, it is working with Exeter City Futures and Exeter and Devon County Council in conjunction with the Exeter Festival to plan a three-day car-free event on Magdalen Road.

Belmont Chapel runs a wide range of groups and activities for people of all ages, many, but not all with a faith-based theme. There are groups for pre-school children, a memory café, older people's social group, a Solihull parenting course, English as an additional language classes, and an 'information café' with creche for women from across the world.

St Leonards Church holds weekly toddler groups with a separate dads' group. There are also children's ballet classes held here, after school on a Monday.

St Leonards School: Exeter Junior Orchestra meets here on a Saturday, drawing children from across the city and beyond. A couch to 5k, open to all, runs from the school gates.

St Matthews Church Hall – The hall is well used by dance groups and classes including Scottish dancing, Breton dancing and ballroom. There is also a Pilates group and a Guide Company that use the hall.

St Sidwell Community Centre, whilst just outside the area is well used by residents within the ward. It has a range of external groups using its facilities as well as having its own events and workshops such as bread making, preserving and a community garden.

The Coaver Club based in St Leonards, within the Devon County Council grounds is open to nearby residents and employees of DCC, it has a number of sports and social activities.

Local pubs The Clifton Inn and The Globe in Newtown and The Mount Radford in St Leonards host music events, quizzes and sports teams. All three pubs serve food.

What else is happening?

Being so close to town and a relatively small city easily accessible by public transport, many people go into town and enjoy what is on offer there. However, there are many things happening within the ward:

Sport and fitness facilities/groups include:

- Pyramids Swimming and Leisure Centre – swimming pools and a gym. External groups include water polo, scuba diving and Exeter swimming club. It will eventually be replaced by the new development at St Sidwell's Point.
- Exeter Ski Club (Clifton Hill) – offers skiing for all ages and abilities including a group for people with disabilities, again this is likely to close with the new development.
- Clifton Hill Golf Driving Range – this is likely to close with the new development.
- Local groups include badminton, volleyball and korfbal. They meet at local venues including school halls.
- St Lukes Sports Centre (at the School of Education) offers timetabled classes, a gym and a swimming pool which are all open to the public. The sports hall can be hired by the public off peak.

- Victoria Park Tennis and Bridge Club.
- Exeter Gymnastic Club is in Bull Meadow Park, and offers classes and training from pre-school to adults.
- Exeter School: ISCA hockey and Exeter Company of Archers meet here.
- Maynard School: A Zumba group meets here.
- Magdalen Court School: A martial arts group 'Krav Maga' meets here.

Sheltered/Older People's Housing

There are resident-led activities including coffee mornings, quizzes, cards, Tai Chi and bingo. Exeter University students run term-time activities at Eaton House. ECC properties have regular sing-alongs with the Goldies organisation and occasional visits from the museum and other organisations. There are nursing homes in the area that have taken part in the St Leonards Intergenerational Event and one of the homes is keen for outside groups to come in and use its space and welcome its residents to join in; currently it hosts a U3A French group. Faraday House is involving residents in the development of its outdoor space.

Other

- Patient Participation Groups are held at Barnfield Hill Surgery and St Leonards Surgery. The groups regularly hold talks and events for the wider community. Barnfield Hill Surgery has a patient garden and encourages patients to get involved.
- Community Builder Community Engagement Events have included a Halloween party, quiz session, potluck meal, social café and baby and toddler singalong.
- Star Gazing – Following events in Heavitree and Digby, the university astrophysics team offered to bring this event to another area. CB Mount Pleasant and CB Newtown and St Leonards helped coordinate the event. Over 150 people attended.
- There are two choirs, one run by the NCA and the other a Rock Choir which uses the Maynard School Hall.
- A folk music club meets on the last Friday of the month at Victoria Park Tennis Club.
- A samba drumming band called Street Heat meets at St Leonards School. They have players in their teens to their sixties and have performed at local events and in carnivals such as Notting Hill, Nice and Berlin.

Resident-led action

- **Codrington Street** residents, initially connected by the community builder, in collaboration with the city council and Devon Wildlife Trust have come together to plant window boxes and scatter wildflower seeds in the Triangle Car Park. They plan to widen activities including the teaching of traditional skills such as hedge laying.
- A resident of **Clifton Cottages** would like to 'reclaim' their alleyway. They, and their neighbours, are concerned about antisocial behaviour and believe that revitalising their alleyway with plants and a compost bin will help alleviate this. They have contacted the city councillor for a grant and to establish the permission needed.
- A resident of **Wellingtonia Park** responded to an article the community builder had written, in the St Leonards newsletter. The community builder accompanied the

resident door knocking. Twelve months on and residents continue to meet at tea parties, barbecues and more.

- A resident suggested having a monthly social lunch at the **Buckerell Lodge**, which will be held on the third Tuesday of each month.
- Sandford Walk Residents Group – the County Council has agreed to let residents decide how they would like the green space to be used.

Councillors' Support

Councillors seem to be well regarded in the area. It is considered that over time the relationship between the councillors and the community builder, and the understanding of each other's roles has developed. Councillors have attended the Newtown Social Café which has been a good place to catch up with local news. Devon County Councillor Su Aves has for a long time been an active Newtown resident and has been helpful in making connections. City Council grants have benefited local residents, St Leonards pre-school, the scrapstore, and an inclusive community event have also been beneficiaries recently.

Where are the gaps and concerns? What potential for the future?

In Newtown, residents' main concerns are litter; drugs, drinking and the increasingly transient nature of the area through rentals and student blocks. Some people feel overwhelmed by the number of students in the area, feeling that students are favoured by the council. Some residents have suggested that many vulnerable people with addiction issues are being housed in the area, making it more difficult to build a strong community.

In St Leonards, particularly streets nearer to the city centre, some residents share the concerns of Newtown residents with regard to litter; students and drug taking. St Leonards residents very often cite the lack of a community hall as a concern for the area with the recent sell of the Roberts Road hall seen as a real loss to the community. The potential loss of green space has caused much controversy.

The main desire, apart from to secure the area's much-valued green space, is to improve information flows. Often this is to do with using existing space, facilities and enthusiasm more efficiently, to everyone's benefit. With the ward being situated so close to the city centre there are already a lot of activities to get involved with and some clubs and groups struggle to attract enough members and/or volunteers. Given the number of people who claim they do not know enough about what is happening locally, we need to consider how key local organisations and city-wide organisations can assist in sharing details of clubs and organisations and increase awareness of local opportunities for volunteering. For example, several of the supported housing establishments are keen for local groups to come in and use their space for free, which can help keep overheads down for organisations and a new potential source of members, and provide opportunities for residents to experience new activities.