



## Neighbourhood Profiles: Pennsylvania

### Introduction

Welcome to Pennsylvania! This neighbourhood profile draws on the work of the Wellbeing Exeter community builder in the area, 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 Pennsylvania. We hope you find it useful.

I have lived in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood for over thirty years and have good local connections, I have always been active in the neighbourhood as a resident so the role of Community Builder was a natural fit for me. It has been exciting to discover the wealth of hidden assets in the area and see the important roles they play in the community.

### Picture of a Place: Natural communities vs ward boundaries

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 2 pre-schools, both well-subscribed and with good links to the wider community.

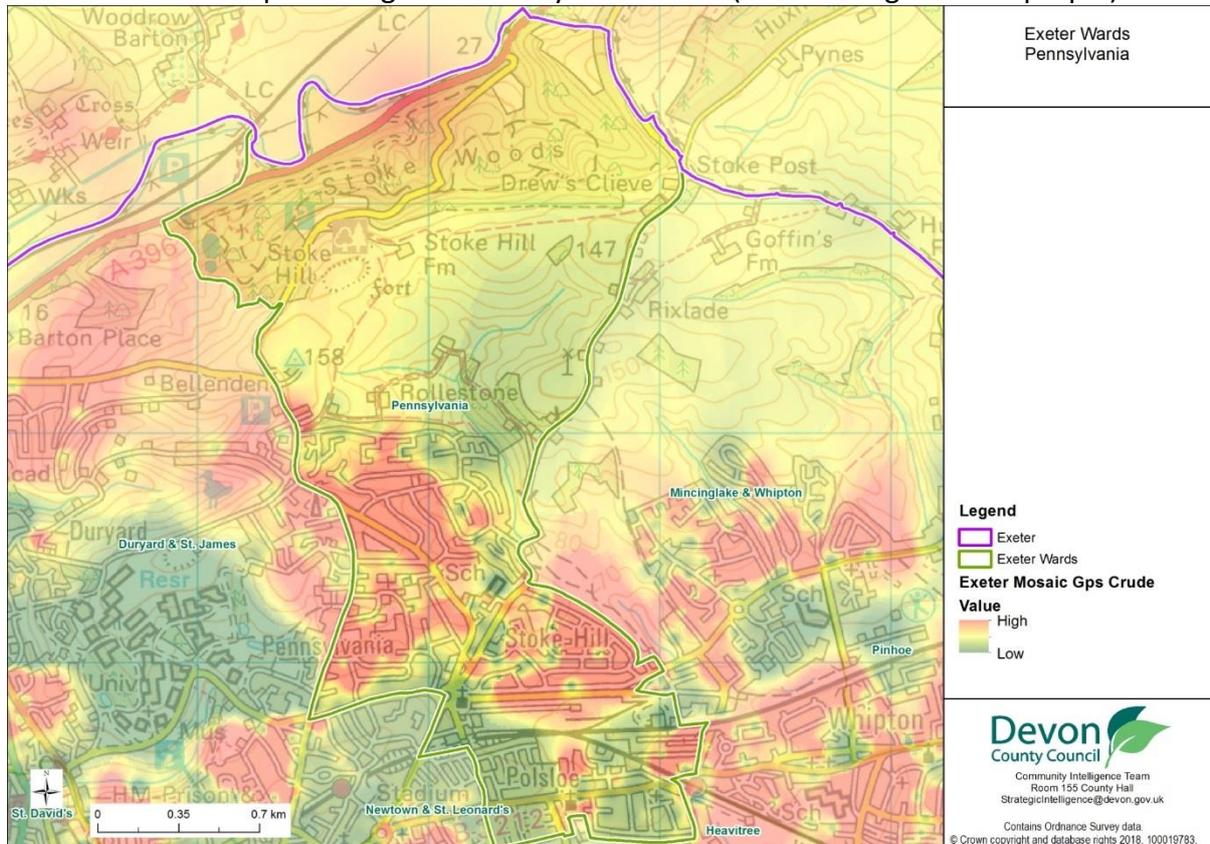
Until recently, most Builder activity has been concentrated in **Mount Pleasant & Polsloe**. Pinhoe Road is the main thoroughfare through the southern reaches of the neighbourhood, up to Polsloe Bridge railway station. There is a scattering of shops and takeaways along the road, and a couple of busy bars and cafes, but no firm centre. The railway line effectively divides the Polsloe community, clustered around Pinhoe Road, from Stoke Hill, as there are few crossing places. Polsloe & 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 Builder to reach working residents living in shared accommodation.

More recently the Builder has been exploring and listening in the **Stoke Hill** area. 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.

Up in **Pennsylvania**, this 1970s estate covers a wide area. Residents are a mixture of retirees and families. Owing to the suburban layout, there are few opportunities for local people to connect with each other. The local shop has closed, and the only 'bumping spots' are public green spaces.

Here is the heat map showing risk of frailty in the ward (outlines in green and purple):



It can be seen that there are clear areas with higher risk of frailty north of the railway line in Stoke Hill, and in other parts of Pennsylvania (where the age profile is generally higher).

## **Green/public spaces**

**Priory Road Park:** Polsloe Community Association has a close link with this 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 is underused by most of the community 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. Freemoovement also hold exercise sessions here, and there is a couch to 5k group, and a popular Tai Chi group.

**Mincinglake Park,** outside the ward boundary, but is used by local people, mostly for dog walking, rather than by families. Recently the builder has spoken to many locals in Stoke Hill who are keen to take more ownership and are eager to help improve it as an asset. The park will be managed by Devon Wildlife Trust from May 2019.

There are a number of **small play areas** in residential streets, including: Chaucer Grove, Anne's Close, Great Hill View, and Sylvania Drive, none of which are currently earmarked for possible closure under the council's plans. Informal listening conversations have been held in the summer months in some of these areas, using pop-up games to attract parents and children after school, as a way to open up conversations and enable and encourage people to step forward with their ideas.

**Allotments:** There are several allotment sites in the ward. Allotments runs 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. The association is well run and has a useful webpage.

## **Spreading the word: how do people connect?**

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

*Friends of Mount Pleasant Health Centre* also produces a newsletter with regular community news updates. The patient participation group also includes Community Builder news on its newsletter.

*Stoke Hill School* also less frequently informs parents electronically of community events and invites the builder to use the school community noticeboard.

The Polsloe Community Facebook page has over 300 members, describing itself as “Bridging the gap in the community”. It also has a website. Stoke Hill School also has a FB page, as does St Katherine's Priory.

There are several noticeboards: - one in Pinhoe Road, one installed by residents in Priory Road park. Sylvania Environmental Community group have just 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.

### **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. The churches play a big role in connecting the older generation in this area, though it must be noted that the congregation comes from far and wide and is not predominantly within the ward.

*Pinhoe Road Baptist Church:* The church hall hosts a coffee morning, toddlers' group, singing group, dance and fitness classes, plus more specifically church-oriented activities such as Messy Church and Christian Endeavour. The PRBC is has good links with the Polsloe Community Association (which meets here) and is very supportive of wider community activities- eg summer fairs, community carol singing.

*St James' Church:* Similarly, they host brownies, rainbows, guides, cubs and scouts, a luncheon club, which feeds between 30 and 40 older people each Tuesday, coffee morning and dance class, Singing for the Brain and Slimming World as well as a very popular Messy Church, a monthly Christian book group, and a Fellowship social group on alternate Thursdays. Regular fayres are held. The church provides excellent opportunities for the older residents to connect and plays an important role in the area.

*Sylvania Community Hall (Sylvan Hut):* Home to the Sylvania Play and 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: 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.

*St Katherine's Priory:* Run by Stoke Hill Community Association (although it is just outside Pennsylvania ward), who have a community café here on Fridays between 10 and 3. Woodchips (Woodcraft Folk group for the under-sixes) meet here, also whist drive, yoga, aerobics, model railway club, chat and craft group, Kenpo karate, and Russian martial arts. The Polsloe Community Association is running a collaborative project with the Stoke Hill Community Association starting in April 2019. The SHCA are keen to look at ways to invite the community to use the space more. Local residents have recently run after-school craft

drop ins which has proved a good way to introduce newcomers to the space. SCHA have offered hire space for free to new community groups.

*Toronto House*: a supported housing building on Prince Charles Road, has a community room which welcomes external groups in which residents might be interested. Meeting here currently are: a craft and chat group, Tai Chi, Women's Institute, and a church group.

### **What else is happening?**

- *Stoke Hill runners* – 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 a 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. The Health Centre also has an active PPG group keen to play a more active role, and it hosts a monthly guided relaxation group.
- *St Mark's Church* – has a coffee morning, and a Sunday brunch. Occasional free film screenings for adults and children.
- *Alley Play*. Informal meet ups for parents, making use of the alleys running behind many streets in the area.
- *Polsloe and Priory Conservative Social Club*: snooker, darts, skittles, bingo. Function rooms for hire.
- *AGEUK East Exe Day Care Centre (Sycamores)*: open to older people through referral or paying self-referral.
- *Women on the Run*: 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*- Day Care centre for folk with learning disabilities.
- *SECP Sylvania Environmental Community Project*. Linked to SHCA, this group was formed by residents in Upper Pennsylvania in 2012, to support maintenance of an area of unadopted land. They organise working parties and are very keen to connect and build links in the community.
- *Pop Up History* - This is an informal group that meets to chat about heritage and local history.

### **Councillors' Support**

Councillors are always very supportive and keen to support local ideas and help residents turn these ideas into action. The PCA has acted as an umbrella for many project and events, several of which were initially funded as one-off events, but subsequently developed into more sustainable projects. Some examples:

- A grant enabled residents to green-up a neglected spot on **Pinhoe Road**.
- **Wildflower bed** – residents have sown seeds over two years to create a wildflower strip. Now local people have dug new paths themselves and sowed more seeds.

- **Summer Community Engagement Project.** This was a two-day project aiming to engage and connect the wider community. The student warden team worked closely with local residents to create raised wooden planters for community use.
- **Community Campout.** A local resident led an initiative for a family community campout at St Katherine's Priory. It enabled the community to connect with nature, share skills and passions and make friends in their own neighbourhood. Volunteers took roles of camp chief, first aider, chef and campfire entertainment. It offered local community groups a chance to showcase their activities and get involved with and connect with the camp. The grant enabled the cost to be kept low so it was open to all, especially those with no camping experience.
- **Connecting Polsloe.** Another ward grant supported a series of pop-up activities in Priory Park aimed at community wellbeing and cohesion. The sessions, including yoga, Tai Chi, and singing provided an opportunity for the local community to get to know each other and integrate with the student population. In this densely populated, multi occupancy area, people live in close proximity but rarely interact. The activities brought people together and improved wellbeing, providing a platform for connection to be made. Tai Chi has continued to meet on a weekly basis and has proved increasingly popular.

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

Several residents have noted the lack of a child-friendly café in the area. Thoughts about how to address this are slowly building momentum.

There remains a lack of opportunities for students and long-term resident to connect, but links with the university are developing.

Polsloe Community Association is keen to build a community hub in Priory Road Park, as part of its aim to continue to engage with and strengthen local networks and improve life for local residents.

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, with Devon Wildlife Trust recently having taken over management. Community groups hope to have open conversations to share ideas, such as trails, cycle tracks, and improved signage and picnic benches. There is great potential here, with strong community backing and it is hoped that these ideas can be progressed.

**The Stoke Hill Community Association** is working with others to improve connections with and between residents in different parts of the area. There is also interest in forming a community action group in Stoke Hill to improve the wider environment, taking ownership of some of the green spaces. There is even talk of a community voices forum for Stoke Hill, to ensure all local perspectives are heard.