



Neighbourhood Profiles: St Davids East

Introduction

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

My role as a Community Builder is to listen to residents, find out how they feel about where they live and discover what ideas and passions they have to make their community a better place. I help connect people that have shared interests, and support community groups and activities. I also share information with residents about activities and groups. The majority of the residents that I have met are really supportive of my role and are community minded even if not active within it.

I am not a resident in St. Davids East however I have visited over the years running and cycling, as well as to visit the many cafes, bars and restaurants. Getting to know the area and residents beyond the obvious tourist spots such as the Quay has been great. I have met some really interesting people, such as an amazing photographer sharing her passion for gulls through photographs in her housing association's newsletters or the gentleman that puts cushions out on a wall opposite his home so that people can stop and chat with him.

Picture of a Place: Natural communities vs ward boundaries

The ward of St Davids extends from the mainline railway station in the west, across the Exe Bridges intersection and eastwards along the river, as well as reaching northwards into the city centre. Because of the road layout, the position of the river, and the type of development in this area, it does not make sense to consider this a single community. The western part of the ward, near the station and the Iron Bridge, forms a well-established

community. The community builder however is focused on more recently developed areas around Exe Bridges, and the lower reaches of Fore Street and South Street, moving down to the Quay and up to the canal basin.

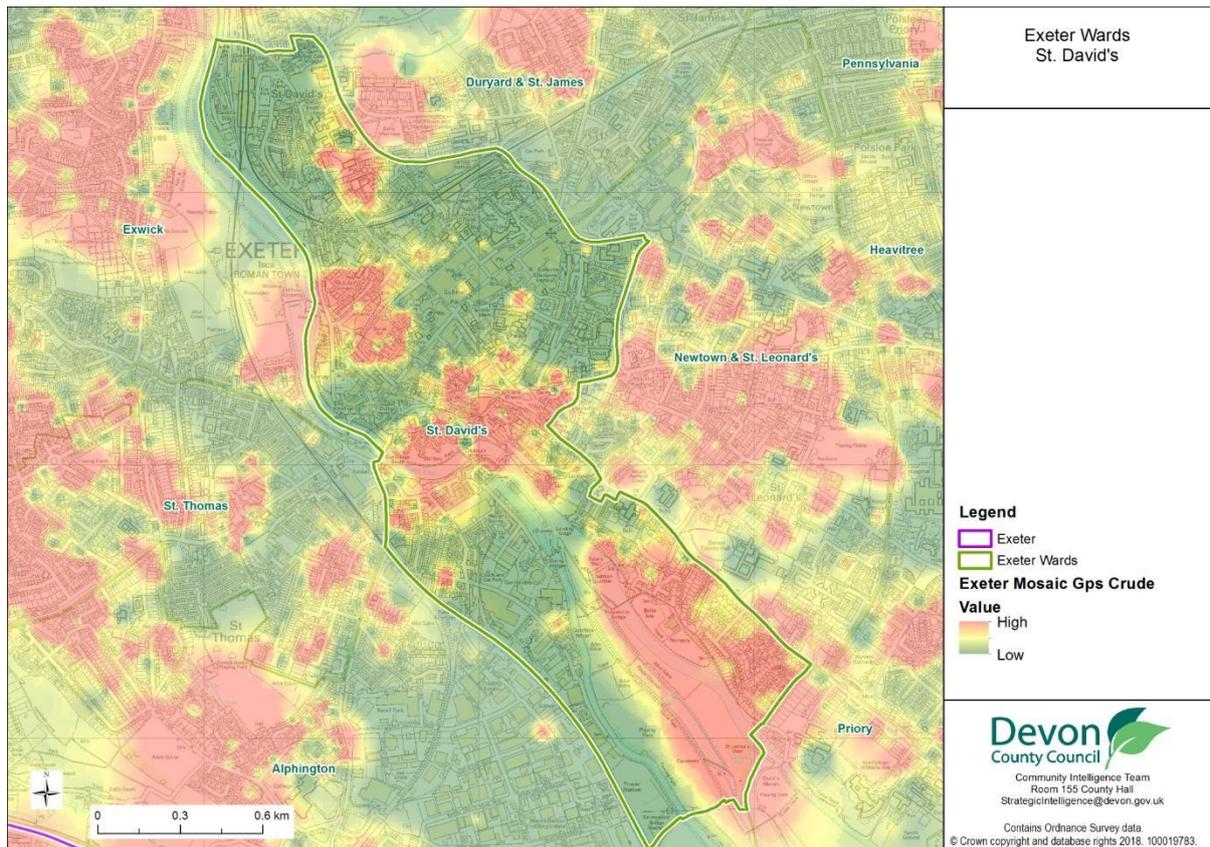
The area is characterised by housing complexes rather than traditional residential streets. Some of these are purpose-built student accommodation, but others are housing association properties, or supported accommodation for vulnerable groups such as homeless young people, older people, or those in recovery (some examples are Julian House, Gabriel House and Bethany House). Many of these buildings are three or four stories high, and often built around enclosed courtyards or green spaces only accessible to residents. This makes for a very distinctive pattern of local neighbourhood interaction, with a series of micro-communities existing side-by-side: in some complexes the courtyard format has helped foster community interaction, but in others levels of transience have meant this is more of a challenge. Working with residents of supported accommodation at Shilhay recently has revealed a desire to bring the community closer together, stay in touch and share information and opportunities to get together.

There are no schools in St Davids East (there is primary school in the western part of the ward), and no leisure centres, although Riverside is just over the ward boundary in St Thomas. Perhaps as a result, residents do travel outside their immediate neighbourhood for everyday facilities, either west to St Thomas, or north into Newtown & St Leonards.

The area is also home to the charity St. Petrock's which provides support and food for rough sleepers. Many of the seven churches within this southern part of the city centre also provide support for homeless people. The Mint Methodist church and the South Street Baptist church offer a range of groups and activities as well as coffee mornings though these are largely attended by the respective congregations rather than local residents more broadly. The dynamics of who does what and where is affected by the fact that this is firmly a city centre location.

St Davids East includes the area around the Quay, which has an array of shops, offices, restaurants and nightclubs, as well as outdoor activity facilities such as a climbing centre, bike hire and watersports equipment rental. Organised bike rides and walks run from here, as does the Riverside Park Run, which attracts over 500 runners weekly. It is an area popular with visitors, and many local people do not regularly visit, despite it being on their doorstep, as they say it does not feel like 'their' space, especially in the summer when it attracts lots of tourists, and in particular during the recent flood defence works which have made access difficult. Residents do however love living close to the river, and value the wonderful views.

Here is a heat map showing relative levels of frailty in the neighbourhood (red indicates a higher risk of frailty). St Davids ward is outlined in green. As can be seen, the western part of the ward has considerably lower risks of frailty than the areas around Exe Bridges and reaching into the City Centre. The contrast is quite striking.



Green/public spaces

Public green space in St Davids East is confined to areas bordering the river.

Haven Banks play area has recently been upgraded and attracts families from across the city due to its proximity to the quay, leisure centre and shopping facilities.

Belle Isle park on the eastern river bank also has a play area.

Bromhams Farm Playing Field, on the opposite bank of the river, was partially closed during the flood defence works. The work has now finished here, which has opened up the area for running and cycling groups such as the Exeter Marathon, Freemovement's Freewheelin' initiative and the Bike Bank's fortnightly cycling ride for people with depression and anxiety.

Trews Weir allotments – three sites adjoining the river in the far east of the ward.

Spreading the word: how do people connect?

The St Davids Neighbourhood Partnership produces a newsletter every few months, delivered to 1000 households, and available online [here](#). This does tend to focus on the western end of the ward.

There are no community associations in the eastern area of St Davids, and therefore no newsletters focusing on the area. Cornerstone social housing has a quarterly newsletter for its residents. The community builder is working with Shilhay residents to produce and distribute a newsletter there.

The Mint church and the South Street Methodist church have notice boards but there are no other boards around South Street, Fore Street and Exe Bridges. A community builder listening event with residents of a Cornerstone social housing complex behind Smythen

Street has resulted in the housing association agreeing to site notice boards in the communal green spaces.

Most of the advertising of groups and events around the Quay is done through social media, or through the shops and cafes as there are no public notice boards. The shops are very good at carrying leaflets and are very supportive of any activities happening locally.

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.

St Davids East is a fragmented area, criss-crossed with large roads and the river. Several of the housing complexes include communal rooms, but there is no public community centre (Exeter Community Centre on St Davids Hill is in the west of the ward). The principal community spaces are therefore church-based.

St Leonards Church – on Topsham Road, strictly speaking not in Newtown & St Leonards but in St Davids. Alongside more explicitly Christian groups, the church runs: Dad and Co, a playgroup for dads, carers and under 7s every third Saturday of the month (morning); and a toddler group on Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings.

The Mint Methodist Church – on Fore Street has a wide variety of community-focused groups, including a knitting group, a theatre-goers' group, walking group, coffee morning, craft group, film club, and a toddler group. The Mint is also a Food Bank location, open on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

South Street Baptist Church – hosts a community café on Tuesday and Thursday, 10.30-2pm. The café is run in partnership with Langdon Hospital, Dawlish, providing volunteering opportunities for men recovering from mental ill-health.

Salvation Army – the community hall near to the temple hosts a community lunch on Sundays, monthly coffee mornings, a parent and toddler group on Monday and Wednesday mornings.

Shilhay has a community room that historically was used exclusively for sheltered housing residents, but Exeter City Council is now keen for all local residents to have use of it. At present it is used for a weekly seated exercise class, fortnightly Golden Oldies sing alongs and a weekly art group. The community builder is also working with six residents that are hoping to put on a quiz night, and some children's activity sessions in the summer holidays as what was traditionally sheltered housing now houses families as well.

What else is happening?

Headway Devon, a charity supporting those with acquired brain injury and their families, runs the XCentre on the Quay. The space is rented out as a training venue, aimed at a commercial market, but a carers' drop-in is also based there, one morning a month.

Exeter Foyer has a building with accommodation for 36 young people, along with access to a wide range of support services, and drop-in advice and job-search sessions.

Ride On – a social enterprise based on the Quay. Wednesdays are Bring your own Bike days, when the workshop can be used by riders to service their own bikes.

Councillors' Support

Recent councillor ward grants to organisations in the east of the ward include:

- Exeter Historic Buildings Trust, based at St Nicholas Priory, for a community garden project.
- Trews Weir Allotments.
- Exeter Sea Cadets

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

All of the residents that I have spoken to love living in close proximity to the Quay but being so close to the city centre brings its own issues, especially relating to parking and drug dealing. Shilhay residents say there is insufficient disabled parking, and there is competition for on-street parking with visitors to the area.

Drug dealing is a concern for several residents, partly as a result of the proximity of nightclubs and pubs with sheltered housing. Shilhay residents were concerned about a particular group of individuals drug dealing so the community builder arranged a series of coffee mornings and invited the local PCSOs to address the concerns and improve communications.