



Neighbourhood Profiles: Wonford (Priory Ward)

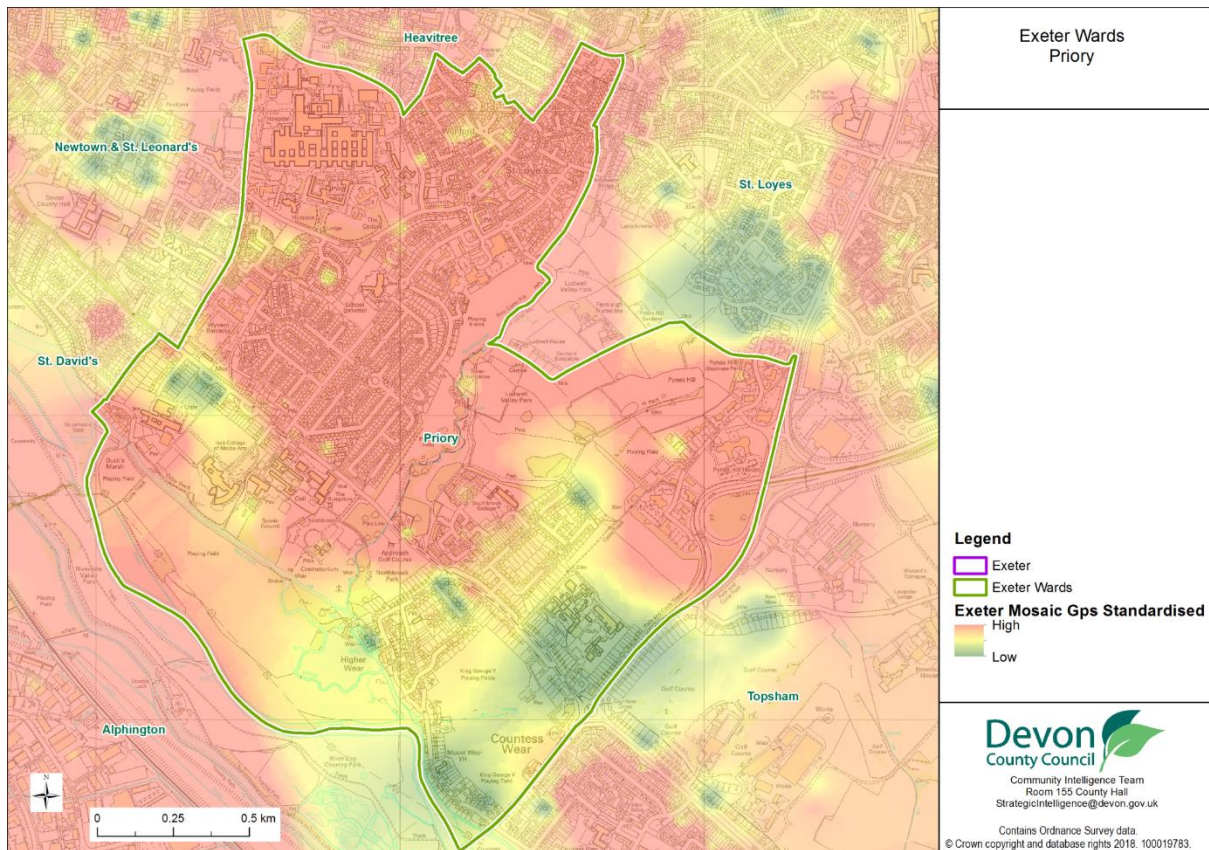
Introduction

Welcome to Wonford! This neighbourhood profile draws on the work of the Wellbeing Exeter community builder in Wonford (Priory Ward), 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 provide 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 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 its 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 involves and highlight the kind of community action going on in Wonford. We hope you find it useful.

Picture of a Place: Natural communities vs ward boundaries

Wonford is in Priory Ward, which includes the RD&E hospital site, and the area around Burnthouse Lane, which is considered the focus of Wonford identity (and is home to the doctors' surgery, Wynstream primary school, community centre, supermarkets, pharmacy, post office and sports centre), but also extends to the other side of Topsham Road as far as the river, which is quite a different demographic. Housing is largely an inter-war estate of brick-built houses, replacing a city-centre slum, and designed with a Garden City ethos, and including a pub, school, churches and shops, and a recreation ground. A new development of 1 and 2-bedroom flats was built in 2018 on Burnthouse Lane. The boundary between Wonford and Heavitree is especially complex, with social considerations coming into play. A certain distance along Rifford Road, and people like to describe themselves as in Heavitree or St Lyses. Although there is a certain degree of snobbery in this, many long-term residents are proud to say they are 'Laners'. Generations of families, born and subsequently housed in Wonford would not want to live anywhere else; one resident commented: "if I won the lottery I'd have to build a house in Ludwell valley or knock two houses together."

Below is a heat map for Priory (boundary shown in green) showing risk stratification for predicted levels of frailty, as developed and used by the public health team at Devon County Council (red indicates higher risk of frailty).



The area is considered at high risk of frailty. The areas bordering and to the east of Burnthouse Lane rank as the more deprived – one Burnthouse Lane Lower Super Output Area is in the most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile for all indicators except crime. Because of these indicators, funding for community projects is often more successful in this ward of Exeter. There is often a sense from residents that they are ‘fed up’ of external agencies parachuting into the community, not listening to what really matters to the residents. The strong history of community organisers and now community builders in the area, working from the ground up is an important counterbalance to this.

Unlike some other areas in the city, community life in Wonford is not now strongly centred around churches. The Anglican church of St Pauls, built on Burnthouse Lane to serve the newly built estate after the War, was subjected to arson, fell into disrepair and was demolished in 2010. The Heavitree parish decided against rebuilding and instead wanted to reach out to the whole area by employing a youth worker and running an outreach programme, WASP (Wonford and St Pauls), for families with children aged 5-12. This is based out of the Old Post Office building on Wonford Street, where a weekly Chatter Café is also held. The Wonford Methodist Church is now the only church in the immediate area (the small Baptist Chapel on Wonford Street is now used as an office). The space is used for community group meetings and activity such as Girls Brigade and a Parent and Toddler group. More central to community life here is the Community and Learning Centre and Phoenix Suite (see below).

There are examples from the community builder of a **close-knit informal network of friends, family and neighbours** locally, who look out for each other, with families cooking additional meals for older neighbours who live alone, helping with household and garden

tasks, etc. There is a strong sense of community and of pulling together and help in an emergency or when tragedy strikes. In one example, following a house fire five days before Christmas, food and gifts were spontaneously collected and given to the family. In another, when a lady who worked in the local shop died, the entire estate came to a standstill for her funeral. It was standing room only in the chapel as every family on the Lane turned up to pay their respects. A resident said she has lived in different parts of Exeter but keeps coming back to Wonford because it has “such a great community spirit”.

Green/public space

Everyone I speak to loves the green spaces of Wonford and comment on the planters on the Lane and how pretty they look. Most of Wonford’s outdoor facilities are in the extensive interconnected green space on the eastern boundary, including **Wonford Playing Fields**, and **Ludwell Valley Park**, which is soon to be managed by the Devon Wildlife Trust. Much of the valley is pastureland, grazed by cattle in the summer, with significant areas of scrubland and wildflower meadow. Locals call one area Roly Poly Hill (it’s great to roll down in warm weather, or for sledging when it snows!), and the stream running through the park is known as the Panny – soldiers from the adjacent barracks would bring down the horses to water them, and the soldiers would wash out their pans.

Residents have said they would use the parks more if there was more seating and lights for the evenings and better paths leading into the parks. Residents have also expressed a desire to have a community camp out in the fields. Free valley fun days are held over the summer holidays for local families. These are always popular events, with songs being made about the Panny and Roly Poly, and a community picnic taking place in the cherry orchard.

Ludwell Life is a community group formed in 2016 aiming to protect and improve the social and environmental value of Ludwell Valley Park. Recent projects include native tree planting and a community orchard, as well as work to maintain and improve wildlife habitats. Ludwell Life have also created several short walks, complete with direction and maps, to help people make use of the park. A local resident recently managed to secure £50,000 of funding from Keep Britain tidy and Wilkos to renew the path down by the Panny and to provide better access to the path and to the valley via the bridge, which features in Ludwell Life’s walks.

Freemoovement – on Wonford Playing Fields. A free-access, inclusive exercise class run by an Exeter-based initiative and using trained local volunteers. The community builder has been instrumental in Freemoovement being established in Wonford.

Boot Camp, Ludwell Valley, run by South West Military Fitness.

There are **children’s play areas** at:

Chestnut Avenue, supporting play for young families. Residents have expressed a desire to make improvements, and even talk of a community painting day to spruce up the park.

There is also an older children’s play area near the woods which is designed with help from the children of Wynstream School to blend in with the valley behind.

Dickens Drive has multi age play equipment and Wyvern Park, at the top of Well Oak park estate (locally known as Mushroom) also has multi age play equipment, including a MUGA and plenty of green space for picnics, shielded from the road by bushes.

Spreading the word: how do people connect?

Following on from the work of the previous community organiser, there was a local newsletter which ran for a few years until funding ran out. A local resident set up the related website, thisiswonford.co.uk, which is in the process of being redone with links to Facebook page of the same name. This is liked by 400 people and provides a channel for information largely around activities in the community centre, although it does share information from the Community Builder's Facebook page and the sports centre.

Many Wonford residents have said that they don't know what is going on in their area. Lots of people do not access social media. Residents have expressed an interest in a community newsletter, or offered to help distribute leaflets advertising the 'This is Wonford' website.

Wonford Community Organisations and Groups (COGS) was established by residents after a government grant was made available to the community. Residents formed a committee to review local group's bids for these funds and decide who would receive the money. It was here residents noticed that lots of groups were run by local volunteers and didn't know what was going on around them so COGs was developed to support them. Although now fewer organisations physically turn up for meetings every couple of months or so, there is a lively email correspondence, which is useful for keeping up to date and in touch.

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.

Wonford Community and Learning Centre – is next to the Sports Centre, and has since 2017 had a lease on the next-door Phoenix Suite. A huge range of activities and services are offered across the two sites, including: tea dances, singing, legal advice, bingo, bowls, and walking for health. The osteoporosis exercise group is more specialist and attracts people from across the city. Exeter FoodCycle holds a free community meal every week, using donated surplus food from local businesses, with people coming from as far as Ottery St. Mary. In addition to this, other groups outside of Wonford use the space for meet ups, learning support for children not in education and Weight Watchers.

The Phoenix has a volunteer-run community café offering an affordable brunch, which is often used by people following an activity at the sports centre, which increases the social value of the activity (such as participants in the walking netball sessions), and is very popular. The local Walking for Health group also uses the Phoenix after their walk, and there is now talk of holding a second café on Wednesday mornings. A Saturday pop up café has started out of the back of the community centre to catch people at football training and walking their dogs. This has been really successful so far. A café session specifically for parents and carers also runs. The community builder uses the community café as unofficial 'office hours' – people know to find her there.

The Phoenix hosts the national community football programme Premier League Kicks. There were credit union facilities, until Plough and Share went into administration. Once a month an energy charity holds a pop-up event, distributing low-energy light bulbs, and providing residents with free energy advice. One Small Step, which supports people to make healthy changes to their lifestyle, has a pop-up once a month in the Phoenix and their stop smoking van is in Lidl's carpark nearby weekly. Laptops are also available for residents to use in the Phoenix suite, for accessing the internet, job searches, etc. The Volunteer Coordinator can offer guidance if requested. A Dad's/Men's group has just re-started on Saturday mornings, following requests from residents.

A new early evening youth café aimed at school years 7, 8 and 9 was launched on Wednesdays in autumn 2018. A youth worker has now been employed to work on improving provision for young people. The community builder has been involved in this development, as a result of listening to the concerns of parents. It is supported by a team of 5 volunteers. There are around 20 regular attendees.

Space at the Phoenix is available to rent, with a reduced rate for new community groups. Between the community Centre and Phoenix Suite, over 50 volunteers - mainly local residents - help enable all these community-led activities to happen.

St Paul's Green is used by the church to hold informal services twice a year. It has also held a couple of "big lunch" events and a local couple held their wedding and reception couple there. Residents are keen to see something on this site, such as a community hub with a workshop/café where residents could be taught basic skills to help with getting a job.

What else is happening?

- Wynstream School holds weekly Baby and Me drop-in session on Tuesdays.
- *GP Link* – Exeter Community Initiatives runs this family support project through Wonford Green surgery, identifying families who could benefit from some parenting support and other advice and information on general wellbeing, but also wider social problems such as debt and housing. The surgery is in the process of setting up a patients' participation group, with the support of the Community Builder.
- *Wonford Planters* – an active gardening group taking on a growing number of raised beds etc in the area and using a network of volunteers to maintain them. This came about after residents expressed concern about not being able to see the bus coming along Burnthouse Lane because the bushes had overgrown, impacting on visibility. In another part of Wonford, in response to the community builder listening to people on their doorsteps, residents expressed their desire to tidy up the top corner of their street. The Community Builder helped link residents with Wonford Planters; the corner was given a makeover and replanted with donated plants and bulbs, and is now looked after by the residents.
- *Pubs* – The Dolphin on Burnthouse Lane is a St Austell pub and has a community pot for local causes, as well as contributing staff time to work on community projects. The Wonford Inn also contributes to local fundraising.
- *Exeter Children's Centre* – run by Action for Children since April 2018. They now work with families with children up to age 8, but as in other areas the services now are

through referrals or self-referrals, rather than a programme of general-access drop-ins. The Centre hosts a relatively new role, parent progression officer, coordinated by Exeter Community Initiatives, supporting parents wanting to get back into work.

- *Wonford Sports Centre* – offers netball for Juniors, ‘returners’ and ‘walkers’, various exercise classes and a beginners’ running group starting from Wynstream School after school drop-off and suitable for people with pushchairs, all part of the Devon Girls Can campaign. There’s also a gym, and spinning class, martial arts, a walking football group, an active Mum’s cycling group and trampoline and street dance classes for children. The Astro-pitch is also recently refurbished and can be booked. There is a more recent focus on supporting the community with ideas around being active, and not always at a cost. Through the Community Builder, there are stronger connections forming between the centre and community organisations in Wonford.
- *Amersham Court* is a sheltered housing complex for older residents and families with disabled members. It has a common room which hosts a seated exercise class open to non-residents, although only residents are currently attending. A recent coffee morning organised by the builder to listen to residents’ interests has resulted in a six-week activity in partnership with RAMM. Two Amersham residents are now meeting to take forward other ideas from the coffee morning.
- Also now based in Amersham’s common room is the *Krafty Café*. This came about following community builder conversations with a local resident wanting to do something to combat social isolation. The builder supported her to access a grant from a DCC councillor. Some members used to attend the now-defunct TLC (Together Let’s Communicate) mental health recovery NHS group. Others are outpatients from Russell clinic (based in nearby Wonford House, HQ of Devon Partnership Trust, providing mental health services), wanting to begin to re-integrate into community life. Their participation has been facilitated by Wellbeing Exeter following an awareness-raising event at Central Library. The Krafty Café group requested a dementia awareness course, so they can better support members, which is being held in the community centre.

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

There is not a great deal for older children and teenagers to do in Wonford, especially those who are not sporty, or who cannot travel, with a number of past activities no longer running. The Army cadet corps on Dryden Road is an exception. Exeter Police Cadets started in Isca school but is now held at police HQ. Residents comment that unless there is a risk of serious anti-social behaviour, there is little interest in providing activities for teens. Many people would like to see a skate park, as the BMX track “isn’t any good for skateboards and not many children use it anyway.” Some young people say they would like a teen shelter in the park so they have some place to hang out not just on the streets.

There are lots of big families in Wonford and apart from the community led summer fun days people often say there is not enough for them to do as a whole family as clubs tend to be aimed at specific age groups. Something being discussed in response to this, is the idea of social family bike rides. The situation is slowly changing, partly as a result of community builder activity. There is also potential to make more use of the Ludwell Valley Park, and to involve more local people in activities there.