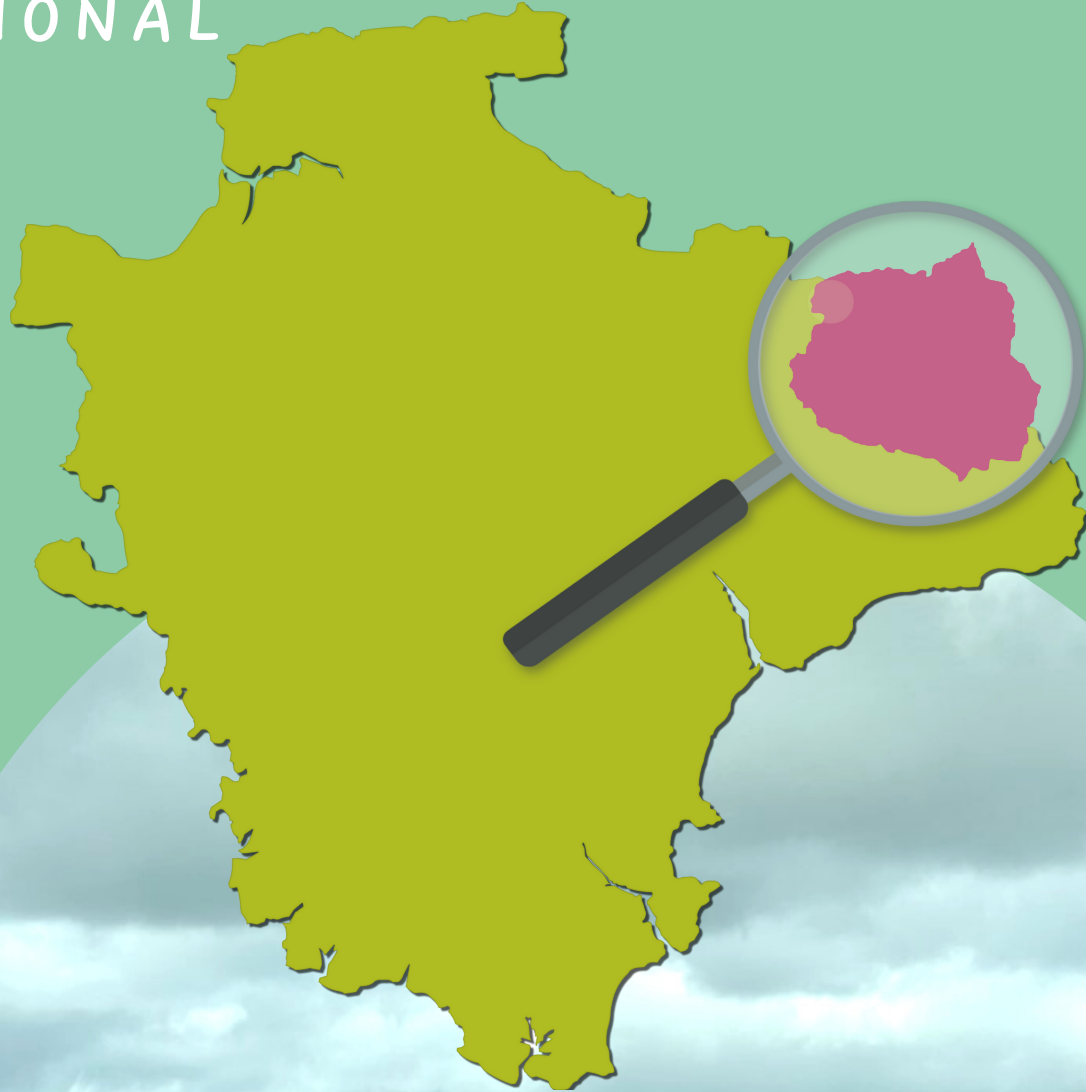


Blackdown Hills

PROFILE OF ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

Completed: October 2022



Devon
Community
Foundation
Giving more locally

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Would you like to make any comments or queries, about this PAL? Contact: insights@devoncf.com

PALs are compiled by the DCF Community Insight Team whose job it is to develop networks and connections to better support people in Devon.

To find out more about the work of DCF, visit: www.devoncf.com

What is a PAL?

A Profile of Associational Life, or PAL, provides a snapshot of what the social fabric in a place-based community looks and feels like. Communities operate in networks of public buildings and spaces, formal and statutory organisations, informal community-based societies and clubs, workplaces, reciprocity, mutual obligation, trust and the social cohesion that comes from history of a place and how the people who live there do things together. PALs map out what is available in a community and collects stories and feelings from people who live or work there.

PLEASE NOTE: PALs cannot cover absolutely everything about a community. Community information changes rapidly and some information may be out of date. If you are involved with a community organisation and would like to take the information in this PAL and keep it updated on your website/noticeboard etc then please feel free to do so!

Community
Insight
Team



POSITIVE
PEOPLE

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Giving more locally

INTRODUCTION

The Blackdown Hills was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1991. Its span touches two counties, four local authority districts and 40 parishes, which of course are just lines on a map for the 13500 (or thereabouts!) people who live in the AONB and connect across those administrative boundaries.

It is rural, and its small settlements are accessed by mostly narrow roads that dip up and down as well as winding round, using ancient routes that follow the natural contours of the land. It has a diverse natural landscape, hosting many wildlife species over its plateaux, three major river valleys, sloped woodlands, and farm and pasture lands. It also holds a wealth of human history from archeological finds to unique old architectural features. Visit [The Blackdown Archives](#) for some insights into history.

Comprehensive details about the area can be found on [Blackdown Hills AONB](#). Devon Community Foundation also manages [The Blackdown Hills Countryside Fund](#).

This profile is a light-touch snapshot of what community life feels like in the Hills at one point in time and is not intended to be an authoritative encapsulation of its entirety. We either looked at online, connected with people by phone, or visited and spoke to residents of these areas: Broadhembury, Blackborough, Sheldon, Slade, Madford, Bolham Water, Clayhidon, Ford Street, Smeatharpe, Upottery, Luppitt, Beacon, Coombe Raleigh, Monkton, Yarcombe, Membury, Awliscombe, Dunkeswell, Churchston, Burnworthy, Culmhead, Churchinford, Buckland St Mary, Whitestaunton, Northay, Warnbrook, Cotleigh, Stockland, Corfe, Chardstock, Staple Fitzpaine and Culmstock.

You can find more detailed profiles for both Hemyock and Uffculme on [our website](#) and we may add others over time.



The settlements vary tremendously in what they offer depending on the size of the central areas, or whether they are very small and mostly connect to larger areas. Some appear to be quite affluent, and self-sustaining, but there were pockets of poverty and challenges mostly linked to the rurality and transport links which we explore further under the Community Comments and Opportunities section.

PUBLIC SERVICES & TRANSPORT

The mobile library services visited some of the larger settlements on a regular basis. The routes for the Somerset services can be found [here](#) and for Devon [here](#). Most village websites listed the library service times and venues, some using village halls and some co-ordinating with monthly farmers or street markets.

For transport - the [CBO Community Bus](#) will close this year, having been dormant through the Covid lockdowns and its assets are passing to the [Blackdown Hills support group](#) in Hemyock which also offer a volunteer driver service.

[TRIP](#) whilst based in Honiton, operates a transport service in some parts of the area. It also offers a befriending hub in Dunkeswell once a month at Throgmorton Hall. Corfe had a community car scheme which closed during Covid lockdowns and does not appear to have reopened – this was designed to

help people get to health appointments etc. However, there is a dial-a-ride service operating a



Public Services & Transport Contd.

minibus into Taunton and Wellington.

Some public and school bus services include [Hatch Green Coaches](#); and [Dartline](#); during the weekdays, but weekend and evening services are very low or non-existent.

For health – people told us they travelled to hospitals in Exeter, Taunton, Tiverton, Wellington, Axminster, Honiton and Chard, and this also seems to be the case for dentists and pharmacies. Some areas travelled to the nearest town for GP services too, although there is some availability in Dunkeswell; Churchinford; and in Hemyock.



For shops people often rely on supermarket delivery or visits to surrounding towns although there were some small shops and stores mainly on the main routes where they might be some passing trade, and in the larger settlements; and several community owned assets such as [Churchingford Community Shop](#); [Stockland Community Pub](#); [Yarcombe Community Pub](#) and [Chardstock Community Shop](#). In Membry, the village hall hosts a weekly community café and a post office. Other post offices were also found across the area in stores and halls, but rarely cash-points.

We also saw posters advertising regular farmer and street markets such as Yarcombe. And at Throgmorton Community Centre, Dunkeswell,

selling meat, eggs, cards and crafts, pies and cakes.

There were also quite a few local offers providing goods like these:

- At Clayhidon there is a camping site with a little shop [Kingsmead Centre](#);
- Milk and beef is available from [Palmers Farm](#);
- Robin Pike in Broadhembury produces and sells quality hand-spun local honey. He also collects swarms big or small [Broadhembury Honey & Bee's](#);
- Craft [Cider](#) business;
- Beech Hayes Farm Shop just north of Churchinford;

- Milk vending machine and eggs, cheese and snacks from a Yarcombe farm;
- Plenty of roadside produce stalls.

LOCAL POLITICS

Both Mid and East Devon District Councils cover the area, with Devon County Council.

On the Somerset side, the new Somerset Unitary Council was set up in May this year, with the Principal Authorities of the Districts and Somerset Council to be abolished in April 2023.

The Blackdown Hills Parish Network has regular meetings across all the parishes to form connections and agreements. The parish councils seem well-utilised and often leading consultations across the area. Websites for them vary in content and accessibility, but several have very active Facebook pages such as Broadhembury Parish and website with regular activities organised, as well as offering its own Grants to local groups. Churchstanton Parish Council has listened to its residents and has installed dog waste bins and has a dog control order with fines for dog mess offenders. Dunkeswell Parish Council website has a section for community groups and adverts, but does not appear to be used. The business page is under construction. Its Facebook page is much more up to date and we've included some points from its minutes in the Community Opportunities section below. Chardstock parish council has a website but again its Facebook page is more active and shows recent consultations such as the community shop ballot results. Other parish council websites we looked at include:

Buckland St Mary; Membury Parish Council; Awliscombe parish; Culmstock and Stockland.



A spokesperson from Churchinford Parish Council told us 'Parish and Town Councils can become community leaders but only if they have the assets and money to do so coming down to them from those who hold the power and assets for the moment. One of the Somerset Unitary plans is to set up Local Community Networks across the new Unitary area made up of Parish and Town Council

representatives, alongside ones from the County Unitary, police, health and social care with a budget deciding how to solve their own issues in the area. How this pans out very much depends on who has the votes for reallocation of resources and whether the power is in fact shared, or whether Parish and Town Councils will be stripped of it. If it is allowed to work, it may rejuvenate the Rural Areas.'

COMMUNICATION

Most places had active community Facebook groups such as [Blackdowns Online](#); or this one in [Yarcombe](#) which usually list events, clubs and groups. This one showed the local toddler group times and venues. [Broadhembury Village Store, Post Office & Tea Room](#) often shares the events that are happening.

The [Everything Dunkeswell](#) Facebook group (2.4k members) shows plenty of community offers, help and swaps of information. Many of the offers are in other settlements such as Honiton or Feniton, meaning personal transport is essential, and we found this as a theme across most of the smaller settlement social media pages.

There are also several printed and online newsletters. Often run by the churches, we looked at these ones in detail:

[Dunkeswell and Sheldon News](#) and [Parish Magazine](#) of the Dunkeswell Mission Community;

Upottery has the Parish Pump monthly magazine;

[CBO news](#) lists upcoming events for the Churchstanton, Buckland St Mary and Otterford areas – the list at the moment suggests such events as a Steel Band, Tasty-tots bakery for children, yoga, line-dancing and plenty of other choices; [Yarcombe Voices](#) newsletter has back-



Communication Contd.

copies available on-line and contains plenty of local news and articles;

Membury has an online notice board;

Chardstock parish news;

Awliscombe has the 'Awliscombe and Weston Times' newsletter;

Luppitt Packet is the regular newsletter sent out in that parish;

Corfe has a community newsletter.

There was ample evidence that communication occurs regularly, sometimes resulting in active groups such as Broadhembury Village – Broadhembury Village Matters which is a group set up in 2015, concerned by development proposals said to be contained in the Parish Council's draft Neighbourhood Plan.



EDUCATION

There are a number of pre-schools and primary schools across the area. Most are quite small, and in some parishes the children may be dispersed across other areas such as Broadhembury, where although there is a school, the parish is so rural that some children travel by bus daily to Dunkeswell. Dulford and Kerswell primary age children often travel to Kentisbeare, and this is repeated across the area. Most schools have a fund-raising 'friends-of' or PTFA group attached to them.

In some places like Dunkeswell, the Pre-school appeared to be very active community hubs, hosting fun events and generally being a central point for connections.

Education Contd.

After primary, again the children are dispersed. Some travel to Cullompton, Ottery St Mary, Honiton, Taunton, Wellington, Chard, Colyton or Uffculme. Some go further again.

There are also a number of alternative education providers, such as The Outdoors Group which utilises woodland not far from Wrangway in Owlscombe Woods. It offers a range of experiences and training across age-groups. Churchstanton has an alternative education provider usually for ages 13-17 years.

Neroche Woodlanders at Staple Fitzpaine is a social enterprise working with nature to promote well-being amongst all characteristics groups, learnings, and a forest school. It has strong partnerships and funders and offers several volunteering opportunities. Clayhidon has a Community Support Project offering workshops and retreats (Charges Apply). At Madford, a Wildside Experience which offers free taster days for schools as well as residential camps for schools and community groups. Occasionally, offers are by the churches. For example in Clayhidon, St Andrews Church holds a wild church outdoors for families and children.

Play Spaces and Youth Clubs provision varies widely. In Broadhembury, there is a play park. Kerswell has a small play park run by the parish council there as well as a wild-play BMX track.

Uppottery had a very well cared for village hall with MUGA and play park right next to it with a community playing field. There was also an under 15's and under 13's cricket and women's soft ball cricket at Glebe park. Luppitt also has a well looked after village hall with MUGA, football pitch, and brand-new play equipment in excellent condition, and a second play park on the edge of the village. In Dunkeswell, New Century Park has an open games area, with two equipped play areas for different ages, and some seating. There is a small



green open area with a Womens Institute Plaque just up from the Highfield Estate. In Stockland the play park is by the Victory Hall. Churchinford had both a community field with an area for ball games and also a wild bmx track on the outskirts. Corfe had a good play area.

In Chardstock, the village hall hosts the youth club. Upottery village hall also advertises a youth club. Dunkeswell has a Youth Club which meets at Throgmorton Hall at 6pm on Thursday nights in term time. There are several Young Farmers Clubs in the area. Hemyock has developed its skatepark offer since we visited for our profile there.

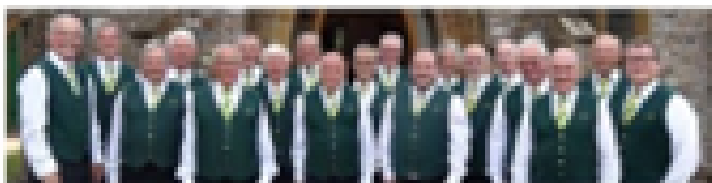
COMMUNITY EVENTS

There seems to be a good variety of regular connections events plus some specials such as Jubilee parties. We found a surprising number of summer festivals happening across the area including Festival on the Hills music, creativity and friendship festival, occurring annually at Smeatharpe; also in Smeatharpe usually in August is the Honiton Hill Rally.

Near Culmhead is the annual Buddhafield Festival and the site offers Buddhist and Vegan led retreats and other events throughout the year.

Summer Concert

The Wyndham Singers



Saturday 25th June 7.30pm

St. Mary's Church, Hemyock

Free Admission

Retiring Collection for

St. Mary's Church & Hemyock

Blackborough's annual music festival Altitude Devon run by Devon Rural Events CIC, and the Blackborough Horse and Dog Show; other dog shows were advertised and led by the Ferne Animal Sanctuary which also has a café and visitor centre at Wambrook. It is looking for Volunteers; and a fun dog show at Sheldon.

Yarcombe has a very famous annual Terrier Race Day event. The village hall holds regular talks, such as one by Pauline Rooke about photographs that capture the spirit of the Blackdown Hills.

Community Events Contd.

In Dunkeswell there are regular offers such as a walking treasure trail in the summer; a Murder Mystery event in October and an annual Guy trail dunkeswellvillagehall@gmail.com. The pre-school offered an inflatable fun day this summer. The Garden Society holds an annual show at Throgmorton Village Hall.

Wild East Devon offers Plant medicine walks

Cotleigh appears to have an annual fete, and Stockland an annual country fair.

Stockland was offering 'The Goat Show' through Villages in Action's rural touring scheme, the Running Dog Theatre CIC - a family theatre show, at the time of our visit, at its Victory Hall. It also holds an annual country fair.

Upottery Primary School offered a Barn Dance at Luppitt Village Hall and Pet Show in Upottery. Upottery also has a Flower and Produce Show in August.

Corfe has an annual flower show, bake-off, Christmas party and a fete. Staple Fitzpaine has an annual fete.

The Repair Café operates regularly across the area, often at Hemyock, and we saw a poster for one in Otterford too.



Otterford Repair Café
Sunday 11th Sep 2022
11am-2pm
Otterford Parish Hall,
TA20 3RS

Electrical, IT, Knife sharpening, Garden Tools, Clothes/Textiles, Book Binding, Bicycles and much more...

Café serving Tea, Coffee, Soft Drinks, Cakes, Sandwiches and Snacks

Free Entry

For more information, or to volunteer please contact:

Sue White 01460 234568 sue@mainlymanagement.com

Follow us on Facebook - Otterford Repair Cafe

COMMUNITY HUBS & GROUPS

The village halls seem to be where most of the community connectivity and events are centred around, as can be expected from a rural dispersed area. The halls varied in size and condition and offers varied depending on the population size and the alternative hubs that were available. There are also schools, pubs and churches spread right across.

Broadhembury Memorial Hall hosts many groups such as the Gardening Club; the Art Club; lunch club; repair cafes; flower-arranging; coffee meetings; quiz nights and seasonal parties such as Harvest Supper, Christmas meal and New Year event.

Broadhembury has a thriving WI, attended by some from Payhembury, as well as the Over 60's and Senior Citizens' Luncheon clubs. Broadhembury Mothers' Union has united with Payhembury. There is a Defibrillator and Electric Vehicle charging point; and the Church details a calendar with bell-ringing practice. We were told that people stop and chat daily in the informal street which has no pavements. Sandbags are kept in the The Drewe Arms which also has regular live music.

Upottery was seemingly quite a wealthy area with large houses and a well looked after pub. The Local church is currently fundraising for £15k towards maintenance and repair (sign on their noticeboard). A Defibrillator is located next to the pub. There is Upottery football club and a full noticeboard in village centre. It also has Manor Rooms hosting yoga and the youth club. The well cared for Village Hall has clubs such as short mat Bowling Club which meets on Monday evenings and gives free tuition and equipment. We were told it is used by Smeatharpe residents too. Smeatharpe has a Village Hall – used by WI, whist and Upottery Airfield Heritage Trust, and private parties

too. There is a Defibrilator outside and a parish council noticeboard which had quite a few posters in. The treasurer, kindly showed us around inside and said he was also involved with the allotments and local school. The Living History Group promotes the airfield heritage trust. Upottery list of clubs and societies appears to be kept up to date.



Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

'Cotleigh, near Upottery has a [village website](#) with information on booking the village hall which hosts the under 5's baby and toddler group and short mat bowls. There is an active church. There is a village [Facebook page](#). There is a defibrillator in the old phone box. The playing field is owned and managed by a [Trust](#). Connections seem to be with Stockland which has a village hall with a cricket pitch and a tennis club; a [Primary School](#) and a church. The Community [Facebook group](#) has 435 members.

Luppitt has a well looked after village hall with MUGA and football pitch. The Summer fete and flower show takes place there in August and End of Summer Bash in Sept. A Poppy Club meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month for people to come together to make a poppy display for St Mary's. There's a 'Peace Garden' which is market garden selling produce. There are noticeboards on the village hall and by the Inn. The Church is St Mary's. There's a Buddhist monastery between Luppitt and Upottery. Nearby Beacon, a small rural hamlet of farms and a B&B, had some posters advertising events at Luppitt as it is within the same parish.



Monkton has the A30 going straight through it which is very noisy and busy. It had what appeared to be a run-down parish council building, with graffiti on the outside, and not too welcoming although the bunting and noticeboard outside suggested that it might be a hub.

The noticeboard in the bus stop only had council notices such as their accounts. Has a little church and a farmhouse café and a b&b, and a popular ice cream café on outskirts. The houses appeared large with large gardens.



Blackborough is within Kentisbeare parish on the edge of the AONB. There were a lot of detached houses with gates here and we did not bump into anyone to chat to directly in the village. There is a cemetery but the church no longer exists. [Blackborough Village hall](#) holds a few regular activities such as yoga,

Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

a supper club and skittles and the phone box outside has been converted into a defibrillator station. There is a noticeboard outside. '

Sheldon village had a lot of properties with houses set far back from the main road and there we didn't see anyone walking around. There is a ten-minute drive from Sheldon to Dunkeswell, some of which goes steeply downhill past farmhouses and private houses with large front gardens. There is a village hall in Sheldon but we cannot locate a website. The hall was locked when we visited but there were a few posters outside it for a Fun Dog Show in Sheldon, the Hemyock repair café, and the Culm Vulley U3a. The Church had a noticeboard outside it and a noticeboard inside the church. Its website hosts the parish newsletter, and mentions clubs held in the village hall such as table tennis, crafts and yoga, picnic and worship. It states there is village hall committee and also mentions a village broadsheet named 'Sheldon Matters'. In



Dunkeswell we noticed an advert for the 'sheldon singers'. Slade is situated between Blackborough, Sheldon and Dunkeswell, it is steep on one side with large farms and gated houses further down the track. We spotted some event signs on the lampposts, but this community seemed dispersed and isolated.

Clayhidon has a village hall with regular events, film nights and coffee mornings. The Pub also hosts events and has an outdoor area with beach huts for distancing and protection against the weather.

The noticeboard in Bolham Water had posts of events happening in Clayhidon Village Hall.

In the Yarty Valley, Yarcombe parish is primarily rural and farming but the central point has a church hosting a toddler group; a chapel; a post office; and a village hall hosting groups and clubs, and a tennis court. Yarcombe Young Farmers Club appears active in the area.

Stockland village, with the Stockland Hill transmitting station high above, is a very pretty village of mostly



Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

unusual stone-built houses in very good order. The Victory Hall has been renovated and offers shows and talks. There is a school, a church, play area, cricket pitch and a tennis club.

Awliscombe has a hall, with a toddler club, a young wives group, football, gardening and short mat bowls clubs. Creative Beings is a CIC here which engages people through painting, planting, walking and writing. It offers outreach and partnership working and uses TRIP for transport. There is a school, and a church and a pub.

Dunkeswell is one of the larger settlements, with a population of around 1500 in the centre and more spread out over the wider parish. It is dominated by the airfield which operates as a civilian airfield now and provides local employment as well as many leisure activities and a popular café. Opposite the airfield is a modern industrial estate hosting several businesses which looked to be viable and busy at the time of our visit. There is an older part of the airfield which hosts an established auctioneer's business, but other units appeared in poor condition and there was a group of residential caravans and other evidence of poverty in that area. At

the time of our visit, we noticed a tent set up for rough sleeping above the fishponds.

Dunkeswell village hall was set down a quiet back road, and although closed at the time of our visit, had an active notice board outside advertising events such as a treasure trail and music. It also

advertises contacts for allotments, bell-ringing, gardening, art, toddlers, youth, Ladybirds and the Dunkeswell Amateur Art Group.

The majority of clubs and groups such as keep fit, coffee morning, film club, TRIP befriending Hub, Mobile Library, Farmers Market, Ladybirds meeting, garden Society Summer Show, Songs and Worship use the Throgmorton Community Centre. Highfield Sports & Social Club, Dunkeswell has Pool, Darts, Skittles, Snooker, a Jukebox, Live Bands and a kids play room. This is on the Highfield Estate where there is also a stores and take-away food outlets. There

Dunkeswell Village Hall



Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

is a post office. There is a sports field near the allotments behind Catalina Close, and Dunkeswell Rovers Football Club meets on Wednesday evenings.

There is Churches - Dunkeswell Mission Community and a Methodist Church.

Churchinford is one of the larger settlements, where 6 roads meet. It has grown recently with some new housing, and has a vibrant pub in the centre; a church and a Care Home . It has a village hall and also a community field with allotments, picnic tables and a ball games area run by a volunteer group. It has a wild BMX track in an old quarry area which it is currently consulting on and renovating. Churchinford Village Hall hosts a Women's Institute; a Golden Age Club, the Blackdown Hills Gardening Club, Monday coffee mornings, a monthly Film Club, Over 65's lunches, and a village market. There are cricket and football clubs just outside the village.



Churchstanton and Burnworthy has a church and a school. Churchstanton has a branch of the Royal British Legion . A Craft Club and arts studio offers regular events at a small charge.

Buckland St Mary village hall does not have a website, but there are phone numbers for bookings available, and an annual music festival in the field. There is a cricket club, a



gardening club, and a ladies craft club.

Buckland St Mary parish spreads over a wide farming area, including the hamlets Birchwood, Blackwater, Blindmoor, Dommett and Newtown, but the central village cluster includes a church and a primary school. There is a small chapel at Birchwood which is currently closed. There is an upper voices choir called Blackdown Voices looking for

more members. It says it is a small friendly group of women which meets at Buckland St Mary Church 3.45pm to 5.15pm on Saturdays and has tea, cake and chat before singing.

Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

Membury church has regular events. There is a list of clubs and activities [here](#). There is a [Primary academy and pre-school](#); and a Quaker burial ground. The village has a siren system as is prone to flooding.



Culmhead is a peaceful village of older houses and cottages. There is a former Royal Air Force Station with some of the second world war control towers and fighter pens scheduled as Ancient Monuments. The site is currently used as a business park. The [Pub](#) has regular music events.

For a small village of around 120 homes, Corfe appears to have active ways to easily connect. It has an active [information page](#) with a welcome pack detailing a variety groups and clubs. It has a golf club, a village hall, a church, a pub and even a volunteer tree warden. The mobile library visits regularly. It has a village agent from the [Community Council for Somerset](#). (a community connector type role). There is a [Golf Club](#).

Chardstock is one of the larger settlements (around 830 residents) with two churches. There are several groups running, including an [eco-group](#), gardening club, amateur dramatics, and a regular coffee morning at the recently refurbished [village hall](#) which also hosts the [youth club](#). The 15th century pub offers traditional pub games such as darts and skittles. The [Facebook page](#) is active with 725 followers. There is an online [historical record](#) group and a [Mountain Bike](#) club. It has [Chardstock](#) bowling club and [Chardstock](#) cricket club . In Whitestaunton and Northay we saw a church and there is some Roman history as well as an iron age hill fort. It appeared to be a cluster of homes and a listed manor house building. Connections seem to be with the town of Chard, as did those of Warnbrook and Higher Warnbrook which is very rural with a small pub and is close to the Ferne Animal Sanctuary.



Staple Fitzpaine is a smaller settlement of less than 200 residents, but with a pub and a [church](#). It has an active community [Facebook page](#).

Community Hubs & Groups Contd.

Culmstock has an active Christmas lights committee, a church, a pub and a small shop. A Village Hall and a community garden. It links closely with Hemyock. There is a chapel in the wider parish at Prescott. Culmstock has a cricket club.

Ford Street had a noticeboard by the phone box on the junction but seems mostly linked to Wellington town.



Combe Raleigh – has a church with a noticeboard but only held church notices at our visit. Bell ringers practice every Monday. Very well-cared for village, with large houses and gardens.

Other groups include: Blackdown Support Group (see Hemyock profile for more

details on this charity which supports and promotes well-being across the Blackdown Hills, and see the Healthy Living and Activity Centre also in Hemyock.

Heritage Arts People The project, funded by The Pilgrim Trust, is exploring the history, current state and heritage significance of the former C19th church at Dunkeswell Abbey.

Andy's man club has a club running nearby.

Chard Road Runners group is linked to Chardstock, and the Buckland Bolters running group is at Buckland St Mary Primary School.

Taunton Angling Association at Wych Lodge.

Across the area, the pubs and inns were central to community life and varied hugely in their offerings, from music, to chat hubs, to fine dining experiences.



ENVIRONMENT



This is of course a protected environment for obvious reasons, and there is no shortage of Walking Routes, bridleways and tracks. There are many protected historical landmarks such as Dumpdon Hill Fort (National Trust) with views over the Sidmouth gap; Hembury Fort is a scheduled monument with a management team protecting it; Blackborough Forest is run by the Forestry

Commission and the Woodland Trust, it spans much of the way between Dunkeswell and Blackborough. It is full of towering trees and well-managed. People go

there for walks and with dogs; a Rhododendron Wood - Woodland Trust on the edge of the area, near Kentisbeare; Wellington Monument has just been extensively renovated and is an easy level access walk with lovely views although sadly there was much evidence at our visit of dog fouling on the path; Castle-Neroche is a prehistoric iron age hill fort managed by Forestry England and has walks and bridleways through.

There are forestry sites at nearby Staple Hill and Wych-Lodge; Devon Wildlife Trust has a Nature Reserve at Clayhidon and North of Hemyock Ashculm and at The Rough. Culmstock Beacon has some amazing views. The AONB has a list of wildlife sites.

Peace, tranquillity and protection of the environment was a strong community theme across the area, and some allotments such as Smeatharpe and Upottery have allotments as does Dunkeswell. We saw random guinea fowl wandering around several of the villages we visited.



There is an independent charity registered as The Blackdown Hills Trust which funds conservation projects such as protecting grasslands using cattle and helps farming in protected landscapes. It also helps



Environment Contd.

disadvantaged people access the area safely.

There is a Blackdown Hills Transition Group which was unavailable for comment at the time of writing this profile.

The Connecting the Culm Project is part of an international project testing ways of making river catchments more resilient to the impact of climate change collaborating with people and using nature- based solutions.

There are often events and volunteering opportunities for local people to get involved.



There are ongoing events with Heritage-Arts-People including a project at Dunkeswell Abbey.

Otterhead Estate Nature Reserve is open to the public free of charge. It has a forest school in the grounds, and sometimes hosts events such as for the

Somerset Moth Group. Currently looking for volunteers to help make films about the history of the Estate as well as for monthly work parties.

There is a biodiversity group in Broadhembury and Broadhembury's absence of street lighting means that stars can clearly be observed at night. Broadhembury village is predominantly 16th Century in its construction, although there is evidence of much earlier architecture throughout the village, including the Church which was consecrated in 1259.

Churchinford has a neglected site which has been utilised by young people as a BMX track and is currently under consultation for future use. Churchinford also has a community field, and Allotments with associated charity. And some Parish Meadows.



Neroche Conservation Volunteers have volunteering days on Wednesdays.

Corfe has an interest in environmental and climate change and is looking to develop a sustainable future for the village.

INDUSTRY & ROUTES TO EMPLOYMENT

The area is rich in agricultural heritage, although one person told us that employment in farming is not as it used to be. Farmers are using more technology and machinery, and the traditional farm labourer roles are not as numerous as they once were. Farmers often employ contractors to come in at peak times such as harvest so it is not regular employment. Many farms have also diversified and offer sales from their



buildings and gates, or more ambitious development plans including ice-cream and cider. Otter Brewery was established in 1990 and began brewing its beer from a farmhouse location in the heart of Devon's Blackdown Hills.

We saw plenty of offers of firewood, kindling, chimney sweeps, mobile hairdressers, caring, building, decorating, plant nurseries, gardening suggesting a good range of self-employment. Some areas had helpful lists such as Upottery list of businesses but most were in local newsletters.

The area is rich in camping, glamping, cabin sites, B&B's and hotels. There is a sawmill at Luton. In Madford we spoke to the Sheamus Machin who's a land agent/surveyor and has an office there. Home (sheamusmachin.co.uk). There were industrial estates in Dunkeswell, one with modern buildings and what looked to be thriving businesses, and one that was more run down, with smaller units. There was an established auctioneer which offers regular auctions and sales.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Mostly, the area seemed quite affluent, with well-kept villages and many opportunities to connect with others. There were some large estates and substantial properties with what looked like high net-worth individuals, such as this Grand Designs property. Local people we spoke to didn't think there was abject poverty in the area, although there was a need for affordable housing, there did not seem to be a lack of access to food or low ability to pay for fuel. One person told us his whole adult family had

followed him into the area due to its 'gentle environment' and they are now all involved in the local community in some way or another.



But of course, homes are dispersed, and transport becomes an issue if there is no access to personal transport: "I don't know how anyone lives here without a car". Blackdown Support Group states: the rurality of the Blackdown Hills, 'an area of outstanding natural beauty', hides the deprivation and isolation for those old, infirm or alone, particularly if not possessing their own transport.

Because of the extent and geographical spread of the area, the resources and time spent travelling between clients by the statutory bodies are stretched.

Churchinford resident, Ken, says 'there's a pattern of isolation but also one of coming together during adversity; there's also the famous 'tranquility' that's highlighted in the Blackdowns AONB Documents. I think the Pandemic has brought a whole new approach to how people live with each other and it can mean some are more isolated (young and older), especially if they don't now drive and with very limited access to other forms of travel;



Community Comments Contd.

whilst others are forced into leaving the area because of limited access to jobs, education or better paid work and who certainly can't afford to rent and a very limited supply of Starter Homes or affordable, rented long term, sustainable housing across the whole area..

More needs to be done to improve this Housing crisis rather than it be left to market conditions because families will be forced to split up and lose the links to their communities.'

The preschool in Churchinford has grown in the last 10 years, possibly because of the new housing that has been built, some of which is affordable housing. The Chairperson of a local

organisation told us that there was very little for young families to do, which is why the community field and picnic areas are so important: "This open space is free to use, and regular events and barbeques that are organised there are free to attend". Hemyock Scout Group have stayed there overnight, and the Taunton-based 'Take Art' group has utilised it for an art group. There is an emerging dance group that uses the village hall.

In Dunkeswell there were some indications of poverty. We saw that Honiton Foodsave had recently attended and provided a presentation to the

councillors regarding piloting a Community Fridge project that would be available to the community 24/7. A grant has been obtained by Foodsave, that would help to fund the purchase of a commercial grade fridge and Foodsave are looking for additional funding to make this possible. There were mixed opinions about how this might work but it was generally felt that with the cost of living rising that anyone could find themselves in a situation where help and support may be appreciated or essential. The parish council minutes also noted some



Community Comments Contd.

grants given to Dunkeswell Pre- School, Dunkeswell Garden Society and the Blackdown Support Group.

We also spoke to the Smeatharpe village hall treasurer He mentioned that they'd had gas canisters stolen a couple of times so had come to check on them. They had quite a few grants over Covid so he said financially they're OK at the moment but their income is very small so when that money is used they may be in difficulty.

Churchinford has some opportunities and plans for using the old Quarry site (mentioned in environment above) but also with regard to some legacies and community funds listed on the parish council website. There is also a space on the website for local businesses to advertise.

We were particularly struck by the number of community owned assets (listed earlier) and other initiatives such as this [Broadhembury Community Land Trust](#). There seems to be a strong community interest in holding onto local shops and pubs for the benefit of the local people and no shortage of volunteers to run them. An exception was found in [Chardstock](#) where the annual street fayre ran for around 20 years but it has posted this comment: "Many of the key people on the organising committee stepped down during lockdown and many smallholders also found new directions."

From www.broadhembury.org "Those of us fortunate enough to live here recognise that in the long term we are custodians, not owners, of this unique place and we have a shared obligation to keep it special for future generations". At our visit we were told that everyone stops to say hello; that the hill walks are beautiful; and that they had mostly moved in from other areas and had not lived there long. Sarah, a Trustee of the Broadhembury memorial hall, said she moved to the village 4 years ago. She said the village welcomed her with open arms and that it feels like a self-sufficient community. There were concerns voiced about public transport and the sewage being released into the river.



Community Comments Contd.

There were a number of access points to funding other than those quoted earlier in this document, such as:

- The Churchstanton School Allotments Charity which invites applications for grants from young people (under 25) who are attending University or college or who are training for a work qualification. There are no requirements except that the applicant has to live in Churchstanton Parish. Last year students received £150. This sum will vary depending on the number of applications.



- The area around Churchstanton, known locally as Trickey Warren has a community benefit fund operated by Somerset Community Foundation

- Corfe village charity set up from the sale of land which administers crisis grants to residents.

- Upottery Relief in Need Charity, Upottery PTFA, Upottery pre-school CIO, Upottery Playing Fields, Hartridge Buddhist Monastery.

- Broadhembury Charities very small amounts of funding for individuals

- Stockland Educational Foundation, Parish Lands, and Turbary allotment which seems to allow people to cut turf or furze.

- A newly registered John Griss charity in Clayhidon, small amounts to Clayhidon Pensioners, Mary Waldron educational charity in Clayhidon and Hemyock, Peter Holway also in Hemyock.

- Montywood is for Churchstanton, as is this educational one

- Culmstock has Fuel bill support, and one for the eight oldest residents



Community Comments Contd.

- Awliscombe relief fund
- Dalwood recreational trust applies to social welfare as well as leisure activities
- Some wider rural ones such as West Country Dairy Awards and Laura Persey Trust

There were quite a lot of adverts for holiday homes in the local magazine, and house prices were generally quite high. We saw lots of farms and what looked like they were holiday rental homes.

We also found some conflict between the high support and regard for the green environment and preservation of the natural area with that of the fossil-fuel-burning motor sports that are prevalent such as Honiton Hill Rally; the regular motor-racing events at Smeatharpe; and the air-craft leisure pursuits at Dunkeswell. Whilst these leisure activities bring in visitors and economic activity, they contrast strongly with the nature-based activities, walking and preservation hobbies. One person told us how frustrated they were that the motor-sports were still legal when climate change is such an issue.



There was also ample evidence of alternative lifestyles, through the education routes, but also communities such as Twelve Tribes which has been subject to some controversy around the children's wellbeing in recent years.