

Newsletter - Spring 2016



Subsidised Buses & Dial a Ride

The County Council has now confirmed that funding for all subsidised bus services will be withdrawn on 20 July 2016, to coincide with the school holidays. It's important to note that not all services will stop. The County Council have provided an online update page on news of each subsidised bus route.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/supported-transport>

The County Council has also withdrawn the county's dial a ride service, which offered a door to door transport service for the elderly and disabled who struggle to use public transport. CFO have received around 55 calls from dial a ride users who are wondering what to do about getting out and accessing services, mostly grocery shopping. Unfortunately, many dial a ride users have no other affordable and accessible transport options ahead of them. Oxford City dial a ride services will be continuing, run by Aspire, but the rest of the rural county remains relatively unserved. However, there are some positive stories;

Firstly there is the new Banbury & District dial a ride service which is already running in Banbury and the surrounding parishes (the new scheme's contact telephone number is: 01295 257715).

Issue Highlights

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The second example comes in the shape of Henley Handybus, an existing minibus scheme, which in response to the cancelled county dial a ride service, will trial a fortnightly shopping service for the dial a ride users in Nettlebed.

It is these positive community actions which provide hope for the very vulnerable who are affected by the withdrawal of the services. CFO are committed to supporting community transport and offer support and advice for schemes wishing to extend their service or for community groups thinking about setting up new transport schemes.

The County Council commissioned CFO to undertake an independent assessment of whether this additional bus usage data would have influenced the recommendations proposed in the report on the subsidised bus service and dial a ride public consultation.

If you have any questions then please get in touch with Emily at CFO.

Updated Bus Usage

In June 2015, the County Council carried out a public consultation on subsidised bus services and dial a ride services. During the consultation a number of individuals asked for bus usage data. Although not used in the methodology, the limited patronage data available was shared with the public as Annex Xb.

In March 2016, the County Council became aware of the existence of additional bus usage data of which it was unaware during the consultation period. It is this data on which the County Council sought comments from the public. The online consultation on the new data ran from 14 March 2016 to 18 April 2016. All relevant documents, including the full spreadsheet of bus usage data was made publically available through the consultation portal. The consultation has come to an end, but the data is still available, please email: supportedtransport@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Service Details				Published Patronage		Data Notes	
Service/Operator	Service	Subsidy	Patronage (May 2015)	Published	Data for services	Data Notes	
1	Weymouth	Weymouth - Oxfordshire Shared					
2	Weymouth	Weymouth - Oxfordshire Shared					
3	Weymouth	Weymouth - Oxfordshire Shared					
4	Weymouth	Weymouth - Oxfordshire Shared					
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Neighbourhood Plan or Community Led Plan? Which is right for you.



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Community Led Plan

CLP is a community-led process that brings all sections of the community together to discuss what improvements are needed in the community and then deliver them.

It generates a real buzz and has proven its worth time and again in bringing people together and thinking positively and creatively about how to improve their community, increasing volunteering and achieving new projects.

These projects have included Good Neighbours Schemes, support groups for the elderly, tourism and business initiatives, community clean-up days, new community facilities and road safety initiatives.

Further support

Community First are currently working with 12 communities on their neighbourhood plans ranging in size from 140 households up to 1250 and another 30 communities on Community Led Plans. Those that attended our recent neighbourhood planning roadshow were particularly interested in hearing how the process works first hand from a couple of communities who have now completed their plan. Copy of the slides and case study can be found here: : <http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/neighbourhood-plan-roadshows-presentations/>

See our website for other useful links and examples of neighbourhood plans. There are many guidelines and toolkits available for neighbourhood planning such as Locality, who are championing all things to do with "Localism" on behalf of the Government. Locality also provide grants and support and from April 2016, you can claim up to £9,000 per group from them. For more information or advice please contact either Tom or Fiona

Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood plans empowers communities to shape the development and growth of a local area.

Once adopted, they become part of the local statutory development plan and will form the basis for determining planning applications in that area.

A neighbourhood plan gives you some say in a range of issues related to the future development in your community (usually housing). It can be a vital document in influencing and managing the type and location of new building, can protect against inappropriate development by including policies maintaining the character of the village and can be used to protect green spaces.

Community Planning



Community Led Plans proving their worth

8 Community Plans have been completed in the last few months with 15 more underway, 2 about to start and over 30 other communities interested. Community Led Plans are an excellent tool for engaging the whole community and agreeing actions to improve neighbourhoods,

<http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/housing-community-planning/community-led-planning/>



Positive actions

Fringford's plan identified things that the village would like to see addressed like traffic issues, improving communications, new sports facilities, a community shop, a village pond, broadband and social activities.

<http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/fringford-village-hall/>



Watchfield sent a questionnaire to every household to give people the opportunity to indicate the priority projects that the residents wanted. The results provide evidence for ensuring that developer contributions (from 800+ homes) go towards things the community needs.

The 3 villages of Uffington, Baulking and Woostone (Vale of White Horse) combined and completed their Community Plan in December 2015. <http://www.uffington.net/community-led-neighbourhood-plans/>

It sets out a clear action plan including appointing a neighbourhood connector to address the needs of the elderly, a plan for school parking, an outdoor picnic or concert, a tree planting scheme, better facilities for local businesses, and completing a Neighbourhood Plan. Their Community Plan provides an evidence base for their Neighbourhood Plan which is now underway and will give statutory weight to the community's decisions about future development.



Neighbourhood Plan

Case study of Drayton's Neighbourhood Plan

Local planning authority area:
Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire

Parish/neighbourhood in the plan area:
Drayton

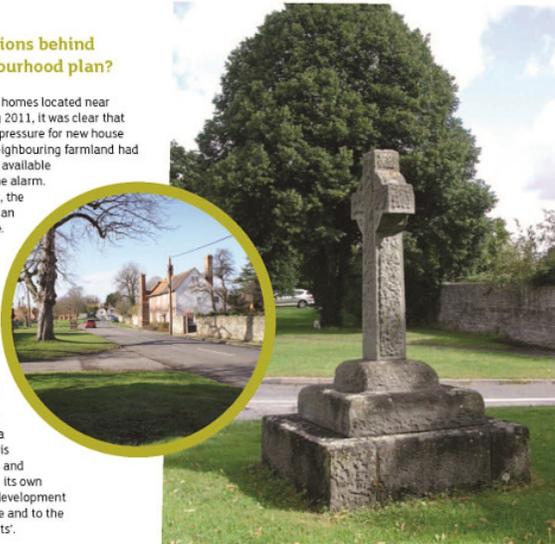
Timeframe

Housing needs survey: 2012
Launch of project: September 2012
Submission date: December 2014
Referendum: March 2015

What were the motivations behind developing the neighbourhood plan?

Drayton is a village of about 1000 homes located near Abingdon in south Oxfordshire. By 2011, it was clear that Drayton would not be immune to pressure for new house building. Indeed, the owners of neighbouring farmland had indicated a willingness to make it available for development. This caused some alarm. But instead of outright opposition, the community realised this could be an opportunity to improve the village. The Localism Act 2011 showed how a neighbourhood plan can enable local people to secure the right type of development for their community, while still meeting the needs of the wider area.

The vision set out in the final plan indicates what we set out to do: 'The Drayton Neighbourhood Plan intends the village to be home to a thriving working community that is strongly linked to its environment and to its neighbours, a place that has its own identity and in which any future development adds to the character of the village and to the quality of life of Drayton's residents'.



What local issues did the plan process identify?

The primary purpose of this plan is to ensure that any housing development meets the needs of Drayton's existing and future inhabitants, fits into the overall character of the village, and contributes to its long-term viability.

Housing development in Drayton over the past 80 years has not paid sufficient attention to the historical character and the overall look and cohesion of the village. Ribbon development has been allowed to extend the village ever closer to the boundaries of neighbouring towns and villages.

A housing needs survey was undertaken in 2012 and revealed a need for more affordable housing for first time buyers, for people who wished to live nearer to family members, for young people who wanted to stay and to enable those nearing retirement to downsize and remain in the village.

It was agreed that a housing strategy should therefore address both the needs of existing residents and future inhabitants; be proportionate in scale to the existing village; contribute to improving the village's amenities and environment; be well designed and enhance the character of the village; and meet the energy conservation criteria set out in the district council's local plan.

Three sites were eventually included in the plan, comprising 255 new dwellings. This reflects a planned growth of the village of about 25% over the next 15 years. The plan required developers to meet the minimum requirement for affordable housing set out in the local plan and for these homes to be indistinguishable from the rest of the development.

Following the community consultation, it was agreed that each site should:

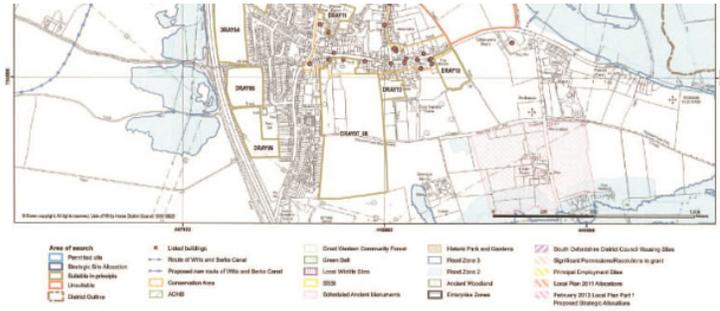
- preserve the historic character of the village
- have low impact on traffic flows
- have minimal impact on surrounding rural landscape
- have low impact on neighbours and green space in the village
- offer easy pedestrian access to amenities
- be subject to low traffic noise
- be within the existing built-up area of the village
- not be located on areas of ecological or archaeological significance

A referendum was held in March 2015 resulting in an overwhelming 'yes' vote: 643 voting 'yes' against 42 voting 'no'. Drayton's Neighbourhood Plan was then formally adopted and the implementation process began.

What challenges were faced in its production?

Some of the biggest challenges were:

- Drawing together everyone's ideas and converting them into coherent policies.
- Writing the plan in acceptable form as an 'official' planning document.
- Dealing with the inevitable resistance to decisions about location of allocated housing sites by some of the existing residents most affected.



How the local planning authority assisted us:

The district council helped us a great deal. One of their senior planning officers was asked to assist us. She attended quite a few of our steering group meetings, but her real contribution was in giving us a very detailed critique of the early drafts of the neighbourhood plan documentation – the plan itself, the sustainability appraisal, and the associated appendices. We could only afford to pay for very limited professional consultancy time, so most of the plan was written by steering group members. We were not conversant with 'planning-speak', and the planning officer showed us how policies should be framed and phrased in order to fit with the local plan, and meet with the approval of the independent examiner.

Who else helped, and how?

To achieve the vision for the plan, five working groups - Look and Feel, Transport, Work and Play, Sustainability and Housing - were set up. Each developed a set of objectives. Proposals were then developed as to how best to achieve these objectives and - in doing so - attain the plan's overall vision. Following this work, individual policies were prepared. Of these, housing, unsurprisingly, required the most attention.

We attended several workshops run by various bodies, including Community First Oxfordshire (CFO - formerly Oxfordshire Rural Community Council) and Oxford Brookes University. Two were run by the Design Council, one in London, one in Swindon. We paid CFO for professional help with, amongst other things, the methodology of site selection and assessment. CFO also analysed the results of our village questionnaire. A Heritage England workshop in Oxford helped with preparation of the village design guide.

How were challenges overcome and how were these solutions identified?

A senior planning officer from the district council gave us advice on putting together the document, which helped us overcome the challenge posed by the group's unfamiliarity with planning terminology and conventions.

There was also a continual programme of community engagement:

- An exhibition at the Jubilee Picnic in July 2012, attended by 150 residents.
- Drayton2020 launch event curry night held in September 2012, attended by 200 residents.
- Village walkabouts on the weekend following the curry night. These were hosted by members of the Drayton2020 Steering Group who again encouraged residents to express their views.
- A pizza evening for young people in March 2013 to talk about housing in the village. This attracted 26 participants, primarily teenagers from within the parish.
- A mid-term consultation event in May 2013 to seek feedback on the site selection criteria proposed for the parish and on possible sites suggested for development by landowners. This event was attended by 110 people.
- A chilli night consultation event in 2013, followed by an exhibition. The aim was to present the results of the site selection discussions. This was attended by 90 residents and 40 visited the exhibition.
- Meetings with landowners who had indicated their intentions to submit significant planning applications were held on several occasions, starting in February 2013.

- A Developers' Exhibition – and Drayton2020 Update – took place over a weekend in June 2013 and was attended by 219 people.
- A survey questionnaire was administered to all parish households during summer 2013. A total of 978 questionnaires were distributed and an impressive response rate of 64% was achieved.
- The public were encouraged to attend steering committee meetings, put forward ideas and participate in discussions. Many took advantage of this opportunity.

How has the community benefited from developing a neighbourhood plan?

In 2014, after the consultation was over, a developer suddenly proposed to build a further 28 houses on a fourth site. The group declined to meet the developer. A planning application was duly submitted in 2015 and council officers recommended it be approved. Drayton's community succeeded in getting the application refused, only because they had a neighbourhood plan. Planning applications for neighbouring villages were agreed that same evening, despite their parish council putting forward a well-argued case against.



Community Buildings



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Promoting your Village Hall

With over 200 of Oxfordshire's Village Halls listed the CFO Village Halls directory is the only central resource available to look for venues to hire. Feedback shows that bookings have increased due to this free resource, bringing in much-needed revenue for community buildings.

If you manage a hall and your hall is currently not listed on the above directory, please contact Lynne to request a form in order that your hall details and two photos can be uploaded onto the site.

<http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/community-enterprise/community-halls/community-halls-directory/>

Support for Village Halls

80% of Village halls are members of Community First and receive our Newsletter giving updates on funding, legislation and other helpful tips, such as ensuring you shop around for your insurance needs. We have recently helped save one village hall over £1,300 on their yearly payment.

Our village hall advisor, Lynne is about to attend a specialist training event for all village hall advisors who support England's 10,000 rural village halls looking at current issues from funding to maintenance and broadband provision..

Energy audits - saving money on community buildings

Over 120 community buildings in Oxfordshire have already carried out an energy audit, acted on the recommendations and are seeing real benefits in the efficiency of the building leading to reduced fuel bills.



TOE2, Oxfordshires independent environment funder, are happy to provide grants towards this energy audit. They offer a grant of £330 towards the £660 cost of a community building energy audit.

Once complete, TOE2 will also fund some of key recommendations up to a maximum of £10,000. These audits are also viewed positively by other grant funding sources.

To discuss your project ideas further contact TOE2 01865 407003 or admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk or visit www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk

Our response to Housing Development in Oxfordshire

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However, at the same time, our now extensive involvement with NP has revealed considerable generalised opposition to development in many parts of the county. We don't believe this can be dismissed purely as 'nimbyism'.

As a charity with its roots in community development, we feel we need to understand what lies behind this view and engage with others to see if there is way of planning growth in the county so communities feel more engaged with the process.

Housing Policies

Up to now, CFO has not commented publically on economic and housing growth policies. Instead, we have worked with local authorities and communities to manage their implementation, for example through Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). To date, we have helped 16 communities with NPs and this aspect of our work is set to grow significantly during 16/17.

NDPs are probably the best means for communities to influence housing and business development in their area. We have found that some communities –initially hostile to any new development – come to realise the advantages of additional housing, particularly if it is well designed and meets a local need. Some communities are prepared to consider more housing than they have been allocated under Local Plans because of the benefits of the new infrastructure that can result.

The Problem

We think there are three aspects to this problem.

First, there is widespread misunderstanding of the governance arrangements for planning growth. There is the Growth Board, the SHMA, the SHLAA, the LEP, the SEP, City Deal, LGF, EU Programmes, Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and recent devolution proposals. Even people with business and government experience struggle to understand how it all works.

Continuation

Second, local communities, including many town and parish councils do not feel they can influence any of this. Civic society feels excluded and argues that development is driven by targets they don't accept and can't influence.

Third, many feel that infrastructure in general and transport planning in particular are not aligned with housing and economic growth. Very few people- including those who support housing growth – believe the transport system will be able to cope with the proposed scale of development. But there is a strong feeling that Local Plans will be required to reflect ever higher targets, irrespective of infrastructure limitations.

A draft paper says little about this, suggesting that 'priority will be attached to multi modal corridor based transport investment programmes linked to the scale of housing and employment provision'. This is not convincing.

What can be done?

Underpinning all of this is a lack of strategic oversight and deep public scepticism about the targets. So what might be done?

- There needs to be a body that can provide this strategic oversight. It should align housing, jobs and infrastructure planning and be seen to be democratically legitimate and accessible. Is this a reshaped Growth Board?

- Governance arrangements should be reviewed and better ways of engaging with civic society agreed including direct meetings with Town and Parish Councils (as OCC did re proposed budget reductions). We need a bigger tent.

- A communication strategy should set out these revised governance arrangements clearly so they are better understood than they are at the moment. CFO can help with this.

DCLG's Local Plan Expert Group has recently published a report that is critical of methodologies used to assess 'objective need'. It suggests a three phase approach:

- first assess local need,
- the need caused by potential growth
- consult over how much of this growth is manageable.

This report is shortly to be issued for consultation. We think there is a case for reviewing housing targets so they reflect infrastructure limitations.

Way forward

We think the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan Refresh should respond to:

- Concerns about governance and engagement with civic society
- Concerns about infrastructure, especially transport
- Recent reports which challenge the methodology underpinning the current strategy.

Updates

Bulk oil - saving you money

We started this scheme nearly 5 years ago now to reduce the impact that the high price of domestic oil was having.

The scheme has been a great success and now over 800 members enjoy the benefits of community buying with low fuel pricing and a positive impact on the environment with one tanker delivery to an area. Plus many have the added benefit of a local volunteer co-ordinator looking after their own community, Particularly helping those more elderly and vulnerable, helping read meters and checking fuel levels, or those without the ability and/or internet access.

Like petrol, the domestic oil price had fallen dramatically to an 11 year low in January 2016. The lowest price we achieved was 23.36pppl, but like all good things it looks like it is coming to an end and prices are climbing once more.

To learn more about our oil scheme please see our website or contact Sue, the scheme administrator, at CFO.

Resilient Communities fund

Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution (SSEPD) have established a fund to support communities to prepare for future emergency weather events. The fund is particularly focussed on projects which help vulnerable or isolated people living in the SSEPD network area.

Playground Inspection Training

Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association are offering Playground Inspection Training on Saturday 7th May at Ardley with Fewcott Village Hall and at the Recreation Ground Ardley. For more details contact Nicole O'Donnell oxfordshirepfa@gmail.com

Starter Homes Regulations

This technical consultation document seeks views on the details for the regulations to be made under powers contained in the Housing and Planning Bill; including options for the starter homes requirement on reasonably sized sites. The government want to hear views so the resulting regulations are feasible, proportionate and effective.

This consultation closes on 18 May 2016.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/starter-homes-regulations-technical-consultation>

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CEO Update

Jon Bright

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News from CFO

It's been a very busy period since our last newsletter. We have :

- been very active supporting communities with their Neighbourhood Plans. During 15/16, we have supported 16 communities. This is set to increase significantly in 16/17 and will be a major part of our work.
- organised a successful Neighbourhood Planning event for communities from Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire attended by 100 participants
- been awarded the County Council's Voluntary Infrastructure Contract with OCVA, Oxfordshire Youth and Volunteer Link up
- been asked by the County Council to undertake additional work in connection with the changes to Supported Transport
- been asked by South Oxfordshire DC to advise on community development in Great Western Park, Didcot [check with Tom]
- been asked by AGE UK to strengthen our Red Arrows community transport scheme
- continued to work with AGE UK, the County Council and others on our Village Companies proposal to strengthen care and support for the elderly; and
- moved to new offices in Worton

Jon moving on

At the end of April, I will be standing down as CEO and will join the Charity's Board of Trustees. Rather than replacing the CEO role, Emily Lewis-Edwards and Tom McCulloch will share the CEO responsibilities with the leadership support of a newly appointed Executive Trustee, Graham Shaw. This is in line with emerging practice in some parts of the charity sector.

After 2 years, I will be sad to leave CFO. The organisation is financially sound with a strong staff team helping communities with neighbourhood planning and support for priority communities; community transport and support for an ageing society; and practical advice on managing community buildings. The staff are supported by an excellent panel of associates and an active Board of Trustees.

At the beginning of May, I will be taking up the post of Director of Oxfordshire South and the Vale Citizens Advice Bureau. I look forward to maintaining contact with you, either in this new role or as a CFO Trustee.

Jon Bright