

# 2020 – a year like no other

Supporting our communities through a tough year  
**Annual Report April 2020-March 2021**



COMMUNITY  
HALLS



TOWN AND  
NEIGHBOURHOOD  
PLANNING



COLLABORATIVE  
HOUSING



SOCIAL ACTION



CHAIRPERSON'S  
STATEMENT



FINANCIAL  
STATEMENT

# COMMUNITY HALLS

**Advice from CFO was more in demand than ever during this unprecedented year. Our key aim was to enable halls to operate safely and efficiently navigate the many changing COVID rules and regulations. Local Authorities looked to CFO as the main support for halls and community centres.**

We also encouraged and helped halls to apply for the government funding available to support them during this time of little revenue - this has been a lifeline for many.



Many halls provided a backbone of support for their communities, running essential services like food banks and support groups. Many hired their halls to the NHS for training or as vaccination centres. Some halls supported those who could not work from home, while others remained closed but used the time to carry out necessary repairs and improvement projects.

INFORMATION LEAFLET

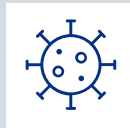
## Key Facts

3,600



Hits on CFO website for COVID information updates

1,200



Hits for COVID support funding for community halls

312



Volunteers attended Zoom network meetings

**283 community halls** kept regularly up to date with advice on ever-changing COVID regulations.

# TOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

**It was a challenging year. Many of the Neighbourhood Planning groups CFO supported were forced to suspend or dial back their projects as a result of the pandemic. Unable to meet groups in person, CFO moved to online support, our work focusing on policy and research to keep plans ticking along.**

Yet the needs of communities haven't gone away with COVID. Many people in Oxfordshire do not have access to good quality, secure and affordable housing. Many new housing developments are built without much thought for community infrastructure. We've been pleased to support local housing projects by undertaking housing needs surveys in several communities, while our Neighbourhood Planning advice emphasizes the need to explore all means to help make our communities more welcoming, environmentally sustainable, and resilient.

And after talking to our town and parish council members, we have developed new services to help communities deal with the often-complex spatial planning and development issues facing many. Our new services focus on Development Management (planning applications), Planning Obligations (Section 106 agreements support and advice) and Planning Appeals.

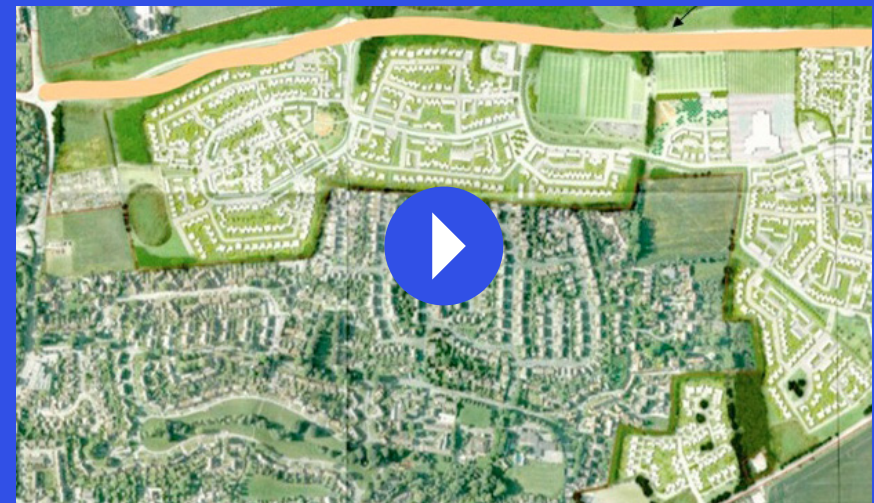
CFO is the honest broker between planners and communities – we're the planning consultant with a conscience. We offer a free advice session if you are a member of CFO – so get in touch!

INFORMATION LEAFLET

## Key Facts

<b>7</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>3</b>	
Neighbourhood Plans supported in Oxfordshire		Housing Needs Survey completed		New spatial planning services rolled out	

**3 research** commissions on planning issues completed  
**1 new** Community Planning Officer appointed



# COLLABORATIVE HOUSING

**CFO hosts the Collaborative Housing Hub – established in 2019, the Hub provides support to the Community-Led Housing sector across the Thames Valley. We give comprehensive advice and support to any communities wanting to achieve their own housing solutions, whether that be through Community Land Trusts, Cohousing, Co-ops, or self-help and self-build housing.**

Despite COVID and funding issues, the Hub steadily increased the number of groups we support - our reputation for trusted advice and expertise is growing. We are also working hard with Local Authorities to create policies that better support Community-Led Housing and to improve community access to land and finance. Locally-rooted projects can be an important part of housing delivery plans.

In 2020, we held an online Community-Led Housing Festival – 160 people attended and there was much in-depth discussion and some excellent speakers. The festival has brought more interest in our work from Local Authorities, Housing Associations, funders, and – crucially – many local communities. You can view recordings of the festival sessions and find lots of other useful information on our website.

If your community has recognised a local housing problem and you would like to find out if you could respond to this through a community approach, please [get in touch!](#)



## Key Facts

16



**Groups** supported with advice and training

8



**Groups** supported with technical advice and project management

8



**Training events/ workshops held**

**3 research commissions** on behalf of Local Authorities  
**6 meetings** with Local Authorities at senior level



# SOCIAL ACTION

**It has been wonderful to see how communities rallied in response to COVID-19 - neighbours connected and looked out for each other, and many informal support groups were established to support the vulnerable. The importance of community life for health and wellbeing has never been more apparent.**

In 2020, CFO concentrated our efforts on supporting community COVID action – we gave guidance and support to many groups, from transport schemes to community halls and community shops, ensuring they remained COVID compliant and were able to re-open safely. Community shops really rose to the COVID challenge, helping with food

boxes and home deliveries. Many shops were able to expand their lines from local food producers and turnover increased for many shops – CFO will be working to help keep new community shop volunteers on board and help maintain their new-found popularity.

CFO's community worker at Heyford Park helped with delivery of food parcels around North Oxfordshire and the setting up of community fridges. Elsewhere, to support communities coming out of lockdown, CFO collaborated with Abingdon and Witney College community learning team to deliver 'Bringing your community together' coaching and training.

## Key Facts

86



**Volunteer transport schemes** supported through the pandemic

12



**Volunteer driver schemes** received free PPE (thanks to support from Oxfordshire County Council)

18



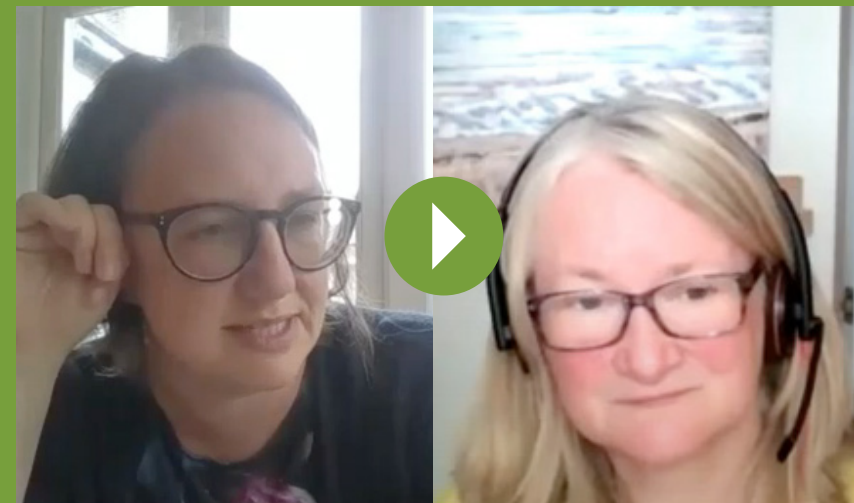
**Housing Association participants** (staff and residents) attended community engagement and resilience training

**10 young people** attended community engagement and resilience training

**30 volunteer drivers** attended virtual networking and support meetings

**20 community shops** supported across Oxfordshire

**1 new community shop** opened in Aston



# CHAIR STATEMENT

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The year has been like no other. While we were able to celebrate our 100th Anniversary as the first Rural Community Council in the country, we also had to completely change the way we work. Our staff have had to adapt to working from home with all the challenges that go with that, and to find new ways to support all the people and communities who depend on Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) for help and advice. That we have come out of the pandemic year as a stronger, more

effective and more flexible organisation is entirely down to the excellent leadership of the two Chief Executives and the brilliant work of the staff team. The Trustees have given as much support as they can and have contributed to the ongoing development of the organisation but the credit for not only surviving but thriving goes to each and every member of staff who have contributed so much during this really difficult time.

**Although most communications have been online during the year, we have managed to continue to provide the advice which communities need.** We were quick to respond to the emergency situation caused by

the pandemic and offered up to date information and help, especially to community hall committees and community transport groups. We developed a new website which is working very well and made the best use of the technology to improve access to information. The webinars which we started to use for our anniversary celebrations and community hall network meetings are proving to be a very good way of sharing information and providing support on a wide range of topics. It was a rapid learning curve but CFO is now very well placed to respond to communities' needs in ways which suit them best.

**We developed a new 5-year strategy during the year – not because we wanted to make any fundamental changes, but because we wanted to better reflect the world we live in.** Our vision for the service we provide is to support 'Strong, diverse, inclusive and thriving communities'. We recognise the importance of eliminating unconscious bias and are striving to become an organisation which is genuinely inclusive. Of course, we are not alone in aiming for this. We are working with other voluntary organisations in the county to make Oxfordshire a fairer place to live.

**Gill Bindoff, Chair**

# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

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	2020-21	2019-20
Project Grants	£187k	£192k
Other Income	£64k	£96k
Collaborative Housing Hub	£81k	£94k
Interest on Deposit	£2k	£3k
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£334k</b>	<b>£385k</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£334k</b>	<b>£327k</b>

# OUR STAFF & TRUSTEES

## Staff

### Tom McCulloch

Joint Chief Executive Officer

### Emily Lewis-Edwards

Joint Chief Executive Officer

### Fiona Brown

Communities Lead –  
Collaborative Housing

### Tessa Hall

Community Buildings and  
Retail Advisor

### Sue Hunt

Oil Scheme Administrator and  
Office Manager

### Stephen McKenna

Community Planning Officer

### Lesley Montague

Community Development Worker

### Kay Sentance

Community Development Worker

### Lisa Stead

Community Development  
Programme Officer

### Rachel Woods

Community Development Worker

## Trustees

### Chair

Gill Bindoff

### President

Jonathan Reuvid

### Vice-Chair

Edward Dowler

### Treasurer

Malcolm Taylor

Jon Bright

Andrew McHugh

Jackie Wilderspin

# CONTACTS

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