

A challenging year – helping communities navigate the “new normal”

Annual Report April 2021-March 2022



CHAIRPERSON'S
STATEMENT



SOCIAL ACTION



COMMUNITY
HALLS



COLLABORATIVE
HOUSING



TOWN AND
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PLANNING



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STATEMENT



CHAIR STATEMENT



This year has seen a gradual return to more normal ways of working although the 'new normal' will continue to see the shift to more home working and to meetings online. However, the 'live' shared training with trustees and staff in March was a great opportunity to get together again and to meet new members of staff who have joined CFO during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The training was on climate change, the urgency of taking preventive action, and the

implications for CFO as a community development organisation. The training provided by Chris Church of Oxford Friends of the Earth focused attention on how CFO can adapt its own working practices but, most importantly, on how CFO can support communities to move towards a net zero carbon future.

We also had a focus on climate change at our AGM last year and were fortunate to have Jonathan Porritt as our key speaker. The online meeting was very well attended and confirmed how urgent it is for communities to plan for the challenges we are now all facing.

CFO also needs to be able to be resilient to changing economic circumstances and the Board has a strategic plan in place to continue its core work with Oxfordshire communities while developing new stands of work. Our mission remains to support 'Strong, diverse, inclusive and thriving communities' and we are making an investment in providing a range of planning services which are responsive to the planning issues which many Oxfordshire towns and villages are facing.

As always, the credit for a successful year lies with the strong leadership of the joint CEOs and the commitment of the staff. We are very grateful to them for the high standards they set themselves and their effectiveness in delivering the services CFO provides. The trustees were very sorry to say 'Goodbye' to Sue Hunt on her retirement, particularly as Covid-19 restrictions meant that we were not able to get everyone together to celebrate the enormous contribution she had made over the years as our Company Secretary and Senior Administrator. She was the member of staff who everyone knew and was the first point of contact. We have been lucky to appoint Gemma Tindsley to take on the role and she is looking forward to getting to know everyone over the coming year.

Gill Bindoff, Chair

SOCIAL ACTION

It was a busy year! In response to the pandemic, Oxfordshire County Council awarded CFO and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action £256,000 to distribute to 26 grassroots organisations with the aim of delivering activities to reduce Covid-19 outbreaks. CFO and OCVA supported these groups by providing one to one support, organizing network meetings, signposting, training, and offering facilitated learning and relationships to create greater project impact and sustainability.

We also continued to roll out our community-led planning and community review support. The latter was developed to enable communities to take a snapshot of local issues, concerns and challenges in the aftermath of the pandemic and develop a plan for improving community resiliency and consolidating the wonderful initiatives that were developed in response to Covid-19.

Training featured heavily in our work. With Abingdon and Witney College Community Learning we jointly delivered 'Bring Your Community Together', a community engagement and resilience building course.

A one-hour introduction to Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) course was also rolled out, plus a four-week course called 'Make Connections' (again designed with Abingdon and Witney College).

We were also commissioned by Healthwatch Oxfordshire to carry out research to better understand the levels of isolation felt in rural communities. This included multiple discussion sessions with young people.

Key Facts

86



Volunteer transport schemes supported

65



Attendees at social action training sessions

26



Groups assisted through 'Supporting Communities through Covid-19 Fund'

20 community shops supported across Oxfordshire

5 rural isolation focus groups held with young people

3 on the ground community development projects supported

3 Asset-based Community Development training courses delivered

1 research report on rural isolation delivered

Supporting Communities Through Covid-19 Fund

Why the funding was important for the sector

How the funding was used and what it achieved



OCVA

communityfirst 100 years
oxfordshire

SOCIAL ACTION

Community Shops

Community shops remain well-used and highly regarded local assets. However, as the pandemic eased pre-lockdown habits started to return, with people increasingly doing most of their shopping at supermarkets.

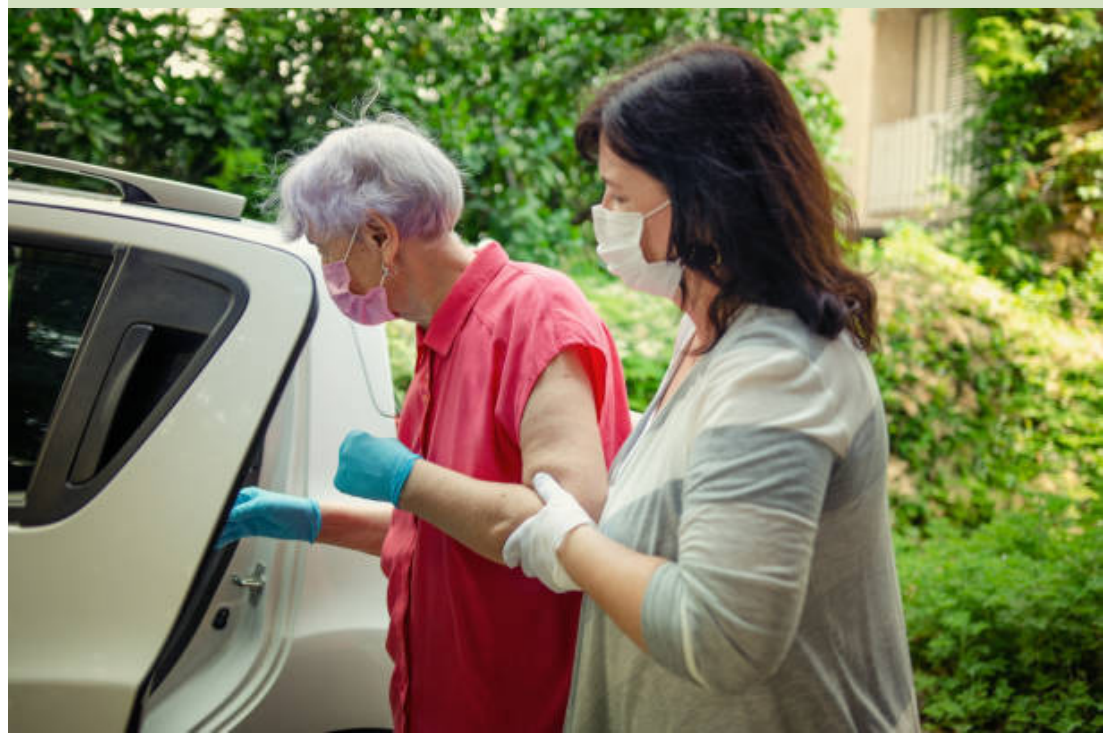
Post-Brexit issues also began to bite this year, notably due to a shortage of delivery drivers. As a result, wholesale delivery companies put up the price of their minimum orders, causing problems with smaller shops which do not have the storage space, or even the turnover, for more products. Some shops are now sharing their deliveries, while CFO has been working with partners, including the Plunkett Foundation, to negotiate better deals for these small but vital rural businesses. Via CFO, shops were also able to share their suppliers lists and find new sources for popular products.



Community Transport

The impact of Coronavirus continues to be felt within the community transport sector, as it does within the public transport sector generally. 2021-2022 was a year of slowly returning to a different normal; fewer people used public transport and community transport, the needs of those requiring community transport were often more complex owing to stretched health and social services and fewer people returned to their volunteering roles. Despite these major challenges, the 86 voluntary car schemes and community minibus schemes continued to offer transport services in their local communities whenever they could.

We are now seeing a rise in demand for community transport services against a stretched capacity in community transport schemes as volunteer numbers are lower than hoped for. And this will be the focus for CFO in 2022 – a volunteer vision and campaign to attract people into volunteering locally for schemes such as volunteer driving.



SOCIAL ACTION

Heyford Park Community Development Project

Now in its fourth year, the Heyford Park Community Development Project brings together Community First Oxfordshire, Dorchester Living, Cherwell District Council, Heyford Park Parish Council and other community partners. The project aims to bring the different parts of the community together, working with residents to develop a vibrant, resilient and self-sustaining community.

Activity in 2021 focused on deepening the connections established in previous years. Links with the Resident's Association and Parish Council were particularly important in joining up community activity, improving communication, and developing new ideas and initiatives. Specific work has included: supporting the Mums and Tots group and the Veteran's Association; discussing small businesses initiatives; exploring ideas with the Heritage Centre; supporting the community pantry and; helping volunteers pull together Jubilee celebrations.

Find out more about our work in the Heyford Park Project Report.

[DOWNLOAD THE REPORT](#)



"The community development worker has used her skills to develop strong networks. I have seen increased opportunities for residents of all ages and a joined-up community feel. The community know how to get involved in projects as well as sharing information, support and guidance."

**Jon Wild, Community Development Manager,
Cherwell District Council.**



Sharon Keen, Heyford Park Community Garden volunteer

SOCIAL ACTION

Woodstock Community Development Project

The Woodstock CDP is a partnership between Blenheim Estate, Woodstock Town Council and Community First Oxfordshire. Launched in April 2021, the project will run for 3 years. It aims to build bridges between existing and new residents and support current and new community groups and activities to meet locally-identified needs.

The new project put down solid roots in 2021. We supported several events with Sustainable Woodstock and also 'This is Woodstock Day', which aimed to increase local volunteering. We also made links with school links and other groups, while supporting community venues with an Open Day and creating a new community venues directory. On the new Park View development, we have been working with residents to help build community connections. Events and initiatives have included Summer and Jubilee Parties, bulb planting and easter egg-painting, and support for the development of a Resident's Forum.



Neighbourhood get together



Park View 'Crufts' event



Sustainable Woodstock – nature and community nurture

COMMUNITY HALLS

From safeguarding, insurance, and security to risk assessments, governance support and renovations, the range of enquiries fielded by the CFO Halls officer was far-reaching. In addition, navigation of ever-changing Covid-19 regulations was a major theme in CFO support.

Other pandemic-related issues arose, including the threat of Legionnaires Disease due to plumbing not being used regularly. Many committees were relieved that they took advantage of the grant funds available to small businesses in the lockdown closures – these were a lifeline after two-years of very little income. CFO also continued to roll out online training. Sessions included safeguarding, booking systems, and project management. And despite all the challenges, several communities came together to celebrate the completion of major building improvement projects.



Key Facts

1000+

**Webpage hits for
Covid-19 information**

283

**Halls kept up to
date with regular
newsletters**



226

**Attendees at
community hall
Zoom support
sessions**



COLLABORATIVE HOUSING

CFO hosts the Collaborative Housing Hub, the support service for Community-Led Housing sector across the Thames Valley. With support from the Hub, projects are delivering 51 new homes across the region.

Hook Norton Community Land Trust is hoping to be on site in autumn 2022 to construct 12 passivhaus standard homes for local people. Thame Community Land Trust has planning in principle for 31 affordable homes for local people and hope to be on site in mid-2023. The Hub has supported these groups with project management, enabling them to drive their schemes forward. Elsewhere, Oxfordshire CLT is onsite, constructing 8 flats for affordable rent in Botley on the outskirts of Oxford.

Post-pandemic and with the current cost of living crisis, the Hub has definitely seen an increase in communities wanting to respond to their needs for good quality affordable housing. In the past 6 months alone, we have supported



Celebrations as Oxfordshire CLT break ground on its new development in Botley.

6 new groups keen to initiate projects. We have also seen strong interest from Parish Councils, recognising the role they can play in supporting community-led housing in their areas.

The Hub continues to advocate for funding that meets the needs of community-led housing and for closer partnerships with Local Authorities to help release land.



Key Facts

12



Groups supported with advice and training

10



Groups supported with technical advice and project management

2



Research commissions on behalf of Local Authorities

6 training events/workshops held

5 meetings with Local Authorities at senior level



[More information about Collaborative Housing](#)

TOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

As 2021 went on, community planning projects which had gone into hiatus during the pandemic picked up increasing momentum. This was particularly the case with Neighbourhood Planning. This remains a pillar of CFO's work – these plans are the most useful tool in the box for communities seeking to make the most of the planning system. Unsurprisingly, there is increasing interest in developing policies to offer local responses to the climate and ecological emergency facing the planet. Biodiversity and Local Green Spaces are popular topics, as are Local Design Codes, helping ensure housing is best in keeping with local character. CFO is enthusiastically supporting these aspirations – Zero Carbon Communities is one of our strategic aims.

The planning services that CFO introduced in 2020 have become increasingly popular. We developed these in response to what communities told us they needed support with. Our planning advice sessions are proving popular and useful, touching on all kinds of locally-specific and more strategic issues, from flooding and future development to traffic and major transport developments.

Housing needs surveys remain a backbone of our activity. House prices and private rents remain eye-watering. On top of this comes a rural premium, forcing local people to move away from their home community. These surveys are vital in proving the local case for affordable housing and supporting community-led housing initiatives to meet needs, such as cohousing and schemes and community land trusts.

What is also becoming apparent is an increasing interest in local people taking more of a lead in stewarding local assets, such as green spaces and community buildings. CFO is listening – watch this space!

Key Facts

8



Planning advice sessions with Town and Parish Councils held

6



Neighbourhood Plans supported

4



Housing Needs Surveys completed

3 planning consultation responses completed

1 Transport Needs Survey completed



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FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	2021-22	2020-21
Project Grants and Contracts	£300k	£291k
Other Income	£37k	£41k
Interest/Investment Income	£6k	£2k
TOTAL INCOME	£343k	£334k
EXPENDITURE	£373k	£334k

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

Stephen McKenna

Community Planning Officer

Lesley Montague

Community Development Worker

Rosie Phillips

Community Development Worker

Kay Sentance

Community Development Worker

Lisa Stead

Community Development
Programme Officer

Gemma Tindsley

Senior Administrator

Lorna Mills

Community Oil Buying Coordinator

Trustees

Chair

Gill Bindoff

President

Jonathan Reuvid

Vice-Chair

Jackie Wilderspin

Treasurer

Malcolm Taylor

Jon Bright

Andrew McHugh

Bev Hindle

CONTACTS

Community First Oxfordshire

South Stables
Worton Rectory Farm
Worton, Witney
OX29 4SU

T: 01865 883488

E: info@communityfirstoxon.org

www.communityfirstoxon.org



[facebook.com/
communityfirstoxon](https://facebook.com/communityfirstoxon)



[@oxcommunitybuzz](https://twitter.com/oxcommunitybuzz)

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