

2022/2023 – A Kaleidoscope of Community Action

Annual Report April 2022-March 2023



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CHAIR STATEMENT



This year has been a very busy one for CFO. So busy that Emily Lewis-Edwards, one of our joint-CEOs, decided to return to full-time work from the four days a week which she had hoped would provide a better work/life balance. The trustees are very mindful that all staff are under considerable pressure to provide the best support they can to Oxfordshire's communities and are always hugely impressed by the breadth and depth of the updates provided to the Board. It is

particularly impressive given the reduction in the value of salaries over the past year. The trustees have tried to limit the impact of the increasing costs of living and will continue to keep an eye on rising prices and interest rates to assess what help they may be able to provide. In these difficult circumstances, the loyalty and commitment of CFO staff are very highly valued.

The planning services which we provide to local towns and parishes are continuing to grow – it has been exciting to see the development of our advice in relation to stewardship of community assets such as green and open spaces, facilities, and housing, particularly on major new housing sites.

More communities, local authorities and developers are seeing the value of local management and ownership, which can be a transformative, grassroots way of asserting locally-based responses to the challenges facing us: the climate and ecological emergency, new development, and how to ensure communities are successful and healthy.

On behalf of Oxfordshire County Council Public Health, CFO has also been engaged at the hyper-local level in Abingdon and Banbury, talking to residents to create research profiles of what supports health and wellbeing in the community and explore what more might be done to meet specific local needs. In addition, CFO carried out research with town and parish councils to look into local engagement with climate action and support for young people. The research also identified the need to better support volunteering.

The Board is still hoping to build on the strengths and expertise of existing trustees by finding one or two new members. We were delighted to elect Chris Kenneford at the AGM. He has wide-ranging planning experience which is very useful to the work CFO is doing with parish and town councils and community organisations.

Gill Bindoff, Chair

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CFO was very busy this year delivering the Connected Communities Fund in partnership with Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA). The aim of the funding was to “support the people of Oxfordshire to live well in their community, remaining fit and healthy for as long as possible”. 50+ groups were funded, and many unsuccessful groups received other support, such as fundraising advice.

A survey went out to all town and parish councils to collect information about engagement with climate groups, support for young people, and links to other local groups. There were 78 responses from 60 councils. The survey found that most do engage with community groups but to varying degrees, given the challenges of workloads and not having enough councillors. Some communities have very few groups due to difficulties in finding volunteers, especially younger people, and the most popular solution to wider involvement was to develop joint projects and improve communication.

As well as supporting communities to develop Community-led Plans and other local initiatives (such as increasing volunteering and the upkeep of green spaces), CFO also held multiple training sessions on Asset-Based Community Development and Active Listening. A four-week, in person, training course called Make Connections was also developed and delivered alongside Abingdon and Witney College.

In addition, CFO was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council Public Health to undertake Community Insight Research in Abingdon Caldecott and north Banbury to better understand local health and wellbeing needs. Multiple 121 conversations were held with residents and local groups as well as group discussions and focus groups. CFO remains part of the Caldecott Steering Group, providing advice on the ABCD approach and assisting with follow-up community funding.

[Read a Connected Communities Case Study](#)

Key Facts

50+



Community groups and organisations funded by the Connected Communities Fund

7



Parish councils and communities supported with community-led plans and other local initiatives

6



Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) and Active Listening training courses delivered

3 Research reports delivered on health and wellbeing (Abingdon Caldecott, Grimsbury, and Ruscote (Banbury))

1 Survey to all Town and Parish Councils (78 responses)

1 Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) Peer Support Network created



SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer vision for Oxfordshire

The volunteering landscape has changed over the years, but the reasons why we decide to give time freely to activities or campaigns remains very similar to before. This was highlighted when CFO and OCVA carried out new research into understanding what volunteering meant to people in Oxfordshire. We spoke with over 350 people volunteering with more than 470 diverse groups across the county.

To help guide how we support volunteering, we have developed an [Oxfordshire Vision for Volunteering](#), which includes an in-depth report and a top ten set of principles to nurture this crucial part of community life.



Emily Lewis-Edwards, joint-CEO of CFO, said: “We hope that our ten-point plan will help local authorities, decision-makers and funders to foster the conditions that volunteering needs to thrive into the future. We also hope that our findings offer some useful practical suggestions for community organisations looking to tackle common issues, support their volunteers, and nurture a sustainable, inclusive and flourishing voluntary sector for Oxfordshire.”

Laura Price, CEO of OCVA, said: “This project has shone a spotlight on the often-unacknowledged contribution of thousands of Oxfordshire residents to making the world a better place. Many of these amazing people don’t regard what they do as unusual or remarkable, but life in Oxfordshire would be far less bright without their generosity, commitment, and creativity.”



MORE THAN MINUTES. CO.UK

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Heyford Park Community Development Project

The long-term project at Heyford Park continues to put down community roots. Building on the excellent work done by Lesley Montague, Rosie Phillips has maintained the links with the Parish Council, community garden, Residents' Association, Heyford and Bicester Veterans, Heyford Pantry (including assisting with food deliveries), the Chapel and the Heritage Centre, as well as daytime users of the Community Centre.

Closer links have also been made with developers, with Rosie attending community liaison meetings and working with the marketing team on a page on the Heyford Park website listing all local clubs and activities.

New community-based ventures have been developed, including a Tai Chi class, sponsored by Banbury and Bicester College, and a Warm Space session for the winter months (which became a Community Hub during warmer months). Rosie also undertook a local publicity drive, with more people from the surrounding area now coming along to events at Heyford Park. She was also part of the organising committee for the Heyford Park Jubilee Party – a huge success, with Rosie elected to dress as the Queen for the occasion! New initiatives are being considered, including a discussion with local running groups and Cherwell District Council to explore a Wayfinding route around the development. Talks are also underway to recreate the lunch club in some format, run by local residents.



Heyford Park Heritage Centre

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Woodstock Community Development Project

The Woodstock Community Development Project is a partnership between Blenheim Estate, Woodstock Town Council and Community First Oxfordshire. The aim is to work with local residents to support and further develop a vibrant and self-sustaining community. Our community development worker Kay Sentance has been hard at work developing relationships made over past months and exploring other opportunities as they arise, supporting the further development of community-led resources and networks. We're in the second year of a three-year project and a key aim is ensuring project legacy - handing over projects and initiatives to community groups/ volunteers.

Much effort this year focused on supporting Woodstock-wide youth and volunteer involvement initiatives (including a forum) and working with important local groups such as Sustainable Woodstock to increase community engagement with climate action, green living, and sustainability. Kay has also been working with residents on the new Park View development to make connections with each other and the wider community and put in place a Park View Resident's Forum.



Woodstock, West Oxfordshire



Kay leads a community workshop



SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Woodstock Community Development Project

In addition, Kay developed and rolled out an Instagram photo competition ('What does Woodstock mean to you?'), supported the Wake up to Woodstock business network, brokered a collaboration with Woodstock and Bladon News, and provided on the ground support for the Woodstock Live music festival.

What people said: Connected Communities support

'I owe so much of this success [receiving funding] to you and your patience for sticking with me – my genuine thanks for that.'

'Without your ongoing support this wouldn't have been possible.'

What people said: CFO training

'Thank you for putting together the brilliant asset-based community development training. It was a great introduction to a topic I knew almost nothing about and has really opened my eyes to a new way of creating and sustaining projects in the community - and one which makes perfect sense.'

'Thank you for the Active Listening course last week. It was extremely useful and has really made me reflect how to listen and absorb what people are telling me. Thanks so much once again for being such an encouraging course leader.'



Woodstock community life



Egg painting at a children's Easter event

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Shops

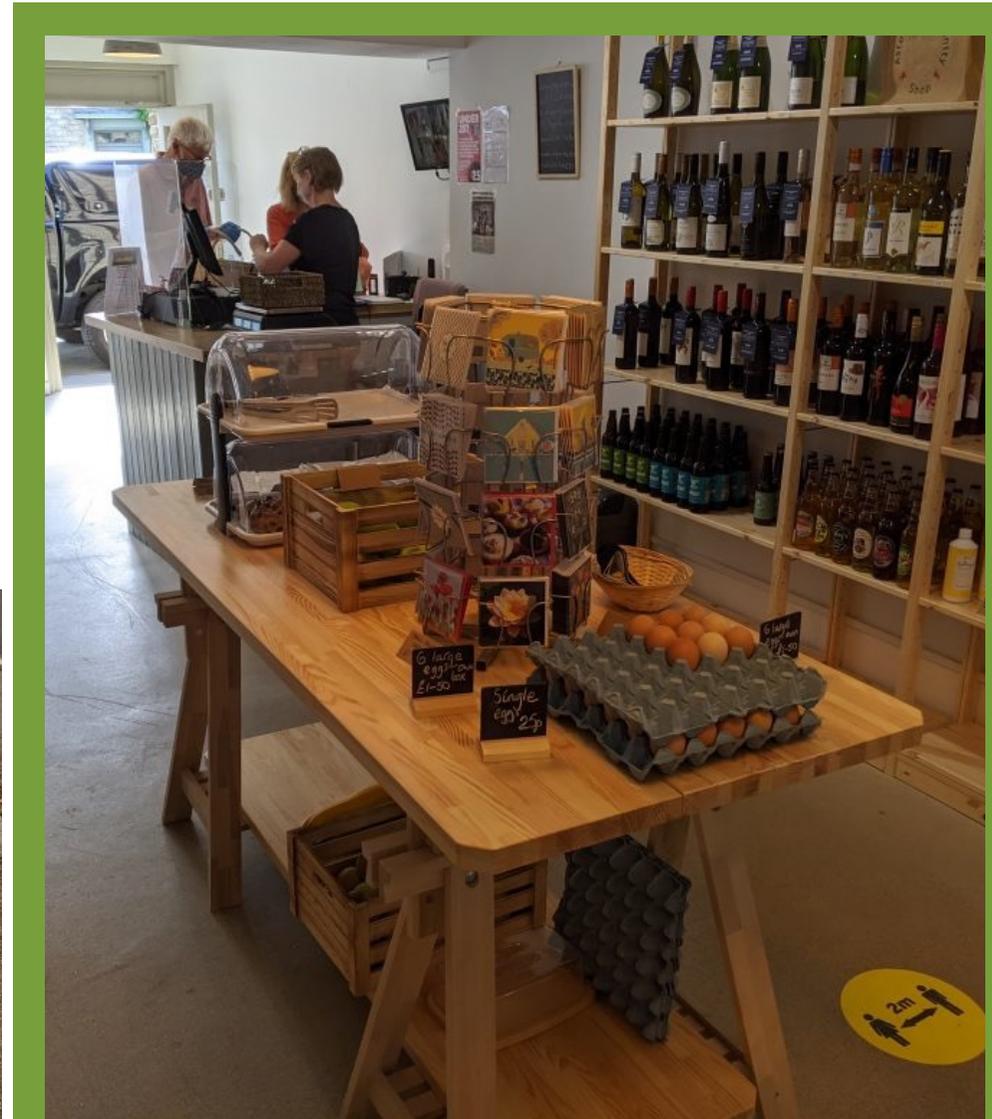
Important discussion topics at networking meetings have included: shops closing earlier due to lack of volunteers; encouraging people to shop locally instead of using online ordering for basics like milk and bread; problems resulting from several wholesalers going bust; and the rising price of minimum delivery charges.

Energy bills are also a major worry. Community shops which managed to build up modest surpluses in lockdown (when the community shopped more locally) are now losing these to rocketing energy bills. There was help from the government's energy bills support for businesses until April, but since then shops have been trying extremely hard to reduce their energy consumption in order to survive. However, some community shops are thriving – it really depends on what competition is nearby and how many loyal customers they have.

One way of helping with a shortfall of volunteers has been to encourage school age volunteers through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme to fill the gaps. And solutions to delivery problems have been to source new local products. CFO's shops adviser Tessa Hall will be undertaking more regular visits in the next year to offer more support.



Volunteers always needed



Aston Community Shop still going well after opening in 2020, in spite of rising energy bills

SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Transport

Oxfordshire's community transport sector continues to thrive despite all the challenges! We still have over 85 car and minibus schemes offering specific transport services for the communities they serve. All of these schemes rely on volunteers who give up a lot of their time to run these 'lifeline' transport schemes. Much like public transport services, they do need investing in both financially (particularly the minibus schemes) and by volunteering to support the scheme or by using the services they provide.

Oxfordshire County Council secured additional funding to support small improvements in some rural areas with better bus services, and although this is good news for some, it highlights the real need for investment in both our public and community transport sectors. CFO can feel a campaign coming on...



COMMUNITY HALLS

The main issues affecting halls were about coping with energy bills. Rising prices have been very hard to manage after two years of low activity and loss of income during the Covid lockdowns. Many halls had to put their hire charges up or add a surcharge for the winter months to stay afloat.

One good thing to come from the pandemic was the use of online meetings – these have become a very useful platform for networking meetings, where ideas can be discussed and expertise shared. There has been much conversation about heat pumps, funding for insulation and energy audits, and other solutions, such as infrared heating systems. Many halls are also keen to utilise energy efficiency measures such as an app to remotely control the heating – this has become more feasible given the County Council broadband rollout, and also makes life much easier for caretakers!



A Ukrainian cultural evening at a local hall

Key Facts

201



Community Hall members of
CFO's Advice Service



COMMUNITY HALLS

Other challenges include a lack of volunteers to carry out various jobs. At some halls, this has meant that roles such as booking secretary have become paid, meaning hire prices have to rise to cover the additional cost. Other CFO support topics have included safeguarding policies and training and music licensing. Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) has been relaying hall concerns about unfair charges to the national 'Music Licence Group.' Across the nationwide ACRE network, including CFO, we are also looking at ways to bring halls further into the digital age and to make sure halls know about the support and funding that is available to them. The ACRE Platinum Jubilee fund was finally launched with many Oxfordshire halls applying.

Help for Ukrainian refugees

North Moreton Hall was one of the halls providing space for Ukrainian refugees. They managed to secure some funding from Asylum welcome, which supported them to continue English lessons for the refugees that are being housed in the area. The lessons were delivered by Marion Sipton, North Moreton village hall booking secretary, and a team of volunteers. The hall was also used for Ukrainian dancing once a week.



Hope, solidarity, and friendship



COLLABORATIVE HOUSING

CFO hosts Collaborative Housing, the support service for the Community-led Housing sector in the Thames Valley. Our officers, Fiona and Kay, have also been working closely with the CFO planning and community development teams to explore opportunities in relation to Neighbourhood Plans and Community-led Plans, as well as to investigate local housing needs in different places.

We are delighted that Oxfordshire's three 'live' community-led housing schemes have progressed well this year. Oxfordshire Community Land Trust's scheme for eight affordable apartments in Botley, Oxford; Hook Norton Community Land Trust's 12-home passivhaus development and; Thame Community Land Trust's scheme for 31 affordable homes. Beyond these near-completed schemes, there was interest from other communities in community-

led housing approaches, with two new groups being established.

In 2022-23 Collaborative Housing also undertook groundbreaking research for Oxford City Council into community-led moorings on rivers and canals. At the same time, we continue to advocate with communities, developers, and local authorities for the value of community-led housing as part of the mix to meet housing needs. These approaches have multiple other benefits, including supporting community resilience and wellbeing and often offering zero carbon housing solutions.

These relationships and partnerships are vital, and we are delighted that the year ended with a commitment from all six Oxfordshire Local Authorities to provide funding to support Collaborative Housing for a further two years.



Oxfordshire CLT development, Botley, Oxford



Hook Norton CLT development

TOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The year has been busy with Neighbourhood Planning support. We have been working with Milton-under-Wychwood parish Council for several years and are delighted they now have a made Neighbourhood Plan. Elsewhere, many communities continue to undertake new Plans or update their existing ones, with CFO-supported groups in places such as Brize Norton, East Hanney, Eynsham and Bletchingdon working their way through the process. The planning system may be imperfect, but Neighbourhood Planning offers the most effective way to help make that system work as best as it can for the community.

As part of the burgeoning alliances between Oxfordshire groups which support climate, environmental and ecological action, we are extremely pleased to have developed a Neighbourhood Plan partnership with [Wild Oxfordshire \(WO\)](#). WO provide ecological surveys and management

advice for local green spaces, plus training, talks, and networking opportunities across Oxfordshire.

We are also very excited about a new service which the team has developed this year: community-led stewardship support. Communities have many assets. These include green and open space, woodlands, community buildings, housing, and many others. Some will already be place and some will come via new development. Long-term stewardship means not only managing these assets but creatively harnessing them to build community, resilience, and meet needs. We worked with Chipping Norton Town Council on our first stewardship commission, setting out a roadmap for community management of assets in the town. We think there is increasing momentum behind communities, Local Authorities, and developers coming together to explore how long-term stewardship can build successful, resilient places built from the bottom-up.

Key Facts

6



Neighbourhood Plans supported

4



Planning advice sessions with Town and Parish Councils held

3



Housing Needs Surveys completed

1 Stewardship commission completed

1 Transport Needs Survey completed

What people said: Neighbourhood Planning support

'Milton-under Wychwood parish Council is very grateful to the CFO team for the support provided throughout the partnership that has enabled the creation of a made Neighbourhood Plan,'

Chair of Milton-under-Wychwood NP steering group



FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	2022-23	2021-22
Project Grants and Contracts	£310k	£300k
Other Income	£47k	£37k
Interest/Investment Income	£0k	£6k
TOTAL INCOME	£357k	£343k
EXPENDITURE	£359k	£373k

OUR STAFF & TRUSTEES

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Tom McCulloch

Joint Chief Executive Officer

Emily Lewis-Edwards

Joint Chief Executive Officer

Fiona Brown

Collaborative Housing Lead

Tessa Hall

Community Buildings and
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Stephen McKenna

Community Planning Officer

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

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Jonathan Reuvid

Vice-Chair

Jackie Wilderspin

Treasurer

Malcolm Taylor

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