

OWNED BY OXFORD

BUILDING COMMUNITY WEALTH FROM THE GROUND UP



Report on the two year Owned by Oxford pilot project
funded by the Friends Provident Foundation



A report prepared on behalf of the Owned by Oxford Partnership.
Written by Anna Thorne, Community Action Groups Oxfordshire

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Our partnership	2
Executive summary	3
BACKGROUND	4
Oxford's wealth problem	4
About community wealth building	6
Our project context	7
OWNED BY OXFORD'S APPROACH	8
Our principles	8
Our learning questions	9
Our methodology	9
A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION	10
The team	10
Creating the steering group	10
Developing a mapping tool	11
Walking alongside community enterprises	12
Access to resources and funding	13
The projects funded by Owned by Oxford	14
Exploring a community space for The Leys	18
Trialling a retrofit co-op for Barton	19
Influencing for change in Oxford	20
Growing the co-operative and community-owned enterprise business sector	24
LEARNING	25
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	26
REFERENCES	28
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	30

INTRODUCTION

Owned by Oxford: building community wealth from the ground up

Oxford has a wealth problem. There's no shortage of money in our city, it's just not fairly distributed. And that's a problem for everyone.

Owned by Oxford is using community wealth building to address this problem. We're a partnership of grassroots community enterprises and infrastructure projects working with larger Oxford institutions, to test out and innovate new ideas.

Our long-term vision is for a fair, democratic, and sustainable economy in Oxford, an economy owned and controlled by its community that puts people, planet and wellbeing before profit.

This report explores the journey and learning of the partnership so far.

Funded by the Friends Provident Foundation



www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk

www.ownedbyoxford.org.uk



OUR PARTNERSHIP



African Families in the UK (AFiUK)

equips African and other ethnic minority families in the UK to take their rightful place as fruitful members of our society.

www.afiuk.org



Aspire

is an Oxford-based social enterprise with a mission to empower people to realise their potential, providing support with employment, enterprise development, and housing.

www.aspireoxford.co.uk



Community Action Groups Oxfordshire (CAG)

is a network of 100+ community action groups working to create a safer, fairer, greener, more sustainable county.

www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk



Co-operative Futures

is a business development consultancy specialising in co-operative, mutual, and community-led businesses.

<https://futures.coop>



Digital Commons Co-operative (DCC)

develops community tech that helps social movements defend the planet and re-generate the economy we need for a fairer world.

<https://digitalcommons.coop>



Makespace Oxford

revives, repurposes, and transforms empty and underused spaces in Oxfordshire to create affordable workspaces for projects committed to positive change.

<https://makespaceoxford.org>



Mothers 4 Justice Ubuntu

centres and empowers those with personal experience of the criminal justice system and campaigns for truth, justice, and accountability at all levels.

<https://mothers4justiceubuntu.wordpress.com/>



Oxford City Council

has an economic strategy that seeks to establish a new standard for economic inclusion and build a world class city for everyone.

www.oxford.gov.uk



Oxford Community Action

supports Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities to tackle structural inequalities and achieve equal representation and participation as active citizens.

<https://oxfordcommunityaction.org>



Solidarity Economy Association

supports the solidarity economy by educating, empowering, and inspiring communities that are committed to economic and social justice.

www.solidarityeconomy.coop



Syrian Sisters

works to strengthen Syrian communities and build the foundation for a civil society that defends women's empowerment.

<https://syriansisters.com>



Transition Lighthouse

provides therapeutic healing and recovery for lived traumatic experiences for African diaspora communities.

<https://transitionlighthouse.weebly.com>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxford is a famously affluent and well-resourced city, but these resources are not fairly distributed, making Oxford one of the most unequal urban areas in the UK.

The Owned by Oxford project launched in April 2021 with the aim of addressing this inequality in the city through community wealth building.

Funded by the Friends Provident Foundation, the pilot was set up by a small group of Oxford infrastructure organisations with the intention of developing a “top down meets bottom up” approach, creating an interface between council-led Preston-style models of community wealth building and grassroots community development.

At an early stage, issues of class, race, and economic power emerged, and work was done to ensure ownership of the project by Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities – those who are most affected by Oxford’s particular inequalities.

Owned by Oxford is now a diverse partnership of organisations and individuals. Together, we have been testing out and creating new routes for the considerable resources held by Oxford anchor institutions – Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Universities, and larger businesses – to support authentically community-owned and run enterprises as part of the journey to a new economy for the city, one that puts people, planet, and wellbeing before profit.

The project work has been led by Community Action Groups Oxfordshire and delivered by a small, part-time team employed across a number of organisations, and focussing on: supporting and incubating grassroots enterprises, raising awareness of community wealth building, influencing policy and practice, and mapping the community-led economy network across Oxford.

Community wealth building is still a new and unfamiliar economic practice for many stakeholders in the city, and there is a need to create a shared understanding, language, and approach in order to grow support for this model.

Through creating a new network and interfaces for collaboration, Owned by Oxford has facilitated important discussions around community wealth building and inequality in the city, as well as providing opportunities to test out and innovate and raising awareness of progressive economic approaches across a range of organisations.

Our project has raised the profile of the rich and dynamic ecosystem of grassroots enterprises, community research, and knowledge that already exists within the city. But there are significant gaps in appropriate support, training, and resourcing for this ecosystem, and the structural inequalities around access to funding and assets remain barriers to growth and sustainability. The ongoing impact of the pandemic, austerity, cost of living and energy crises make these barriers even harder to overcome.

Important institutions in Oxford, including Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils as well as the Universities, have made political and strategic commitments to community wealth building and addressing inequality and are working in partnership to develop an inclusive economy for Oxfordshire. But Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities remain very much the “less-heard voices” in these discussions. Anchor institutions need to genuinely engage with community groups, activists, and innovators at the earliest stage in the development of policy and practice. To be effective, this engagement needs proper funding.

THE OWNED BY OXFORD PEOPLE:

Nuha Abdo from Syrian Sisters and Damascus Rose Kitchen

Nigel Carter, Imade Edosomwan, Mujahid Hamid, Hassan Sabrie from Oxford Community Action

Jacqui Gitau and **Millie Khisa** from African Families in the UK

Simon Grove-White, Clayton Lavallin and **Matt Peachey** from Oxford City Council

Colm Massey from Digital Commons Co-operative and Solidarity Economy Association

Nicole Noel-Shodunke from Transition Lighthouse Empowerment Space

Paul Roberts from Aspire

Jabu Nala-Hartley from Mothers 4 Justice Ubuntu and CAG Oxfordshire

Anaïs Bozetine, Katherine Chesson, Anna Thorne and **Alice Williams** from CAG Oxfordshire

Andy Edwards and **Dianne Regisford** from Makespace Oxford

Alice Hemming and **Jo White** from Co-operative Futures

OXFORD'S WEALTH PROBLEM



Oxford is a famous city known for its historic architecture, world class universities, culture, and green spaces, drawing an estimated seven million visitors each year.

Home to 160,000 people, it is also one of the most culturally diverse cities in the UK, with a vibrant and multicultural community, and the third highest ethnic minority population in south-east England. The 2021 census showed that 35% of residents were born outside of the United Kingdom and 29% were from a Black or minority ethnic group, compared to 19% in England.¹

Oxford has a strong economy with around 6,000 businesses, many in the knowledge, science, and technology-based industries, and around 60% of the adult population has a degree-level qualification or higher. It has the highest employment rate in the country and contributes around £6.8 billion to the national economy each year.² The city economy is underpinned by internationally, nationally, and regionally important anchor institutions, including the

Oxford is the second most unequal urban area in the UK in terms of income, housing affordability, and life expectancy.

University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford Science Park, Oxford Business Park, John Radcliffe Hospital, and MINI Plant.

But in spite of all these resources, the apparent economic success as well as the cultural and academic prestige of the city, Oxford is the second most unequal urban area in the UK in terms of income, housing affordability, and life expectancy.³

These inequalities are longstanding, with roots entwined in colonialism, institutional racism, and classism. Like



many other UK cities, Oxford's institutional wealth can be traced back to Britain's imperial past and the slave trade.⁴ As elsewhere, Oxford's Black and minoritised communities are heavily overrepresented among the city's lowest-income groups. Research from the Runnymede Trust shows that Black and minority ethnic people across the UK are 2.5 times more likely to be in relative poverty and 2.2 times more likely to be in deep poverty than their white counterparts.⁵

There are also clear geographical boundaries to these inequalities, with data for certain neighbourhoods highlighting severe, multiple deprivation, where 30% of children live in poverty and experience a significant gap in educational attainment.⁶ The impact on life outcomes is stark, with a difference in male life expectancy of nearly 14 years between the top and bottom performing areas and just over 11 years for women.⁷ With austerity, the pandemic, and the cost of living and energy cost crisis, the city has seen food poverty and street homelessness increase.^{8 9 10}

This is in contrast to Oxford's extreme private and institutional wealth. In North Oxford, residents are within walking distance of fifteen private schools, and the average property price is £950,000.¹¹ Oxford University and its colleges together own estates, endowments,

Oxford has a strong ecosystem of social enterprises, community projects, activists, and entrepreneurs generating significant social and economic value for the city

investments, and other assets totalling over £9 billion¹², making it one of the wealthiest universities in the world. The historical "town and gown" divide in the city remains strong.

There are a number of strategic forums discussing how the local economy can address the city's stark wealth inequality problem. Yet, although Oxford's Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities are those most affected by wealth inequality, their voices are seldom invited or included within the discussions around policy and practice. In Oxford, as elsewhere, economic strategy and development remain dominated by well-resourced and usually white-led organisations, as well as institutions with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

However, there are opportunities for change with considerable political commitment to building an inclusive and sustainable economy from Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils. Both have strategic commitments to community wealth building and addressing inequality and are working

with key anchor institutions through the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) to realise them. Oxford's universities, colleges, and anchor institutions have been engaging in discussions around how to address their colonial pasts and around authentic power sharing with grassroots projects.^{13 14}

Importantly, Oxford has a strong ecosystem of social enterprises, community projects, activists, and entrepreneurs generating significant social and economic value for the city, often operating under the radar of anchor institutions, evolving and delivering activities that meet local needs and address many of the gaps for underserved communities.

This combination of wealth, political willingness, and community activism has created the space and opportunity for our partnership to test out and develop the Owned by Oxford community wealth building model.

ABOUT COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

Community wealth building is a people-centred approach to local economic development that redirects wealth back into the local economy and places control and benefits in the hands of local people. It is all about supporting the socially and environmentally 'generative' parts of the economy to grow while reducing the extractive, damaging ones.

CLES, the UK organisation for local economics, has developed five principles for community wealth building:

- **Shared ownership of the economy.**
- **Making financial power work for local places.**
- **Fair employment and just labour markets.**
- **Progressive procurement of goods and services.**
- **Socially productive use of land and property.¹⁵**

Community wealth building harnesses the economic and social power of locally rooted institutions. These are commonly referred to as anchor institutions, places such as local councils, universities, housing associations, businesses, or larger charities.

This can be a top-down approach; for example, if a council procures services from a local, community-owned business, this can stop wealth from flowing out of the local economy. And it can also be a grassroots-up approach; for example, if a group of residents organises to buy and run a local building for the benefit of the community, this will put power back into community hands.

Compare this to the current dominant economic practice whereby national or global companies win local service contracts or purchase land and buildings for development, but with no local interest in the area, for the purpose of making profits for shareholders. At the heart of successful community wealth building, you find citizens, partners, and local anchor institutions working together to transform the economy for the benefit of their communities.

Community wealth building was inspired by global movements to address economic inequalities, such as the co-operative movements of Ujamaa in Tanzania and the Mondragon Co-operatives in the Basque region of Spain. It was first articulated as an approach in 2005 by the Democracy Collaborative:

Community wealth building takes progressive elements like community land trusts, worker cooperatives, public banking, and more – elements that have previously only existed as one-offs – and supercharges their power, systemically connecting and scaling them to change people's lives and the economic future of our communities.



It does so in coordination with local governments, economic development teams, anchor institutions, and community leaders and organizations: helping them to work in harmony, identify what elements are needed, and see the big picture as they replicate successful new tactics.¹⁶

The Democracy Collaborative put this approach into practice within a partnership in Cleveland, Ohio, a city that had seen thirty years of post-industrial decline. Here, they localised economic development, securing progressive procurement strategies that got anchor institutions to spend their money locally. And they created the Evergreen Cooperatives¹⁷, a network of green enterprises owned by their employees, the majority of whom are Black and live in local, historically underserved, under-resourced neighbourhoods.

In the UK, the most well-known example of community wealth building is known as "The Preston Model,"¹⁸ where the council led a radical rethinking of models of ownership, economic participation, and procurement practice, across a partnership of local institutions.

Preston isn't alone; there are many local authorities and communities now taking a community wealth building approach, and the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales have made community wealth building a national policy objective.



OUR PROJECT CONTEXT

Funded by Friends Provident Foundation, the Owned by Oxford Community Wealth Building project launched in April 2021 with the aim of addressing wealth inequality in Oxford and developing local economic resilience in areas of the city that are in the 10 to 20% most deprived “super output areas” nationally.¹⁹

Planning for the project had started in 2019 with discussions between the five founding organisations: Aspire, CAG Oxfordshire, Makespace Oxford, Oxford City Council, and the Solidarity Economy Association. The design was originally informed by the ‘Building an Inclusive Economy Through Community Business’ report from Power to Change and CLES²⁰, the community buy-out model demonstrated by the Plunkett Foundation’s ‘More Than a Pub’ programme²¹, and Locality’s ‘Keep It Local’ work.²²

Then, when the COVID pandemic hit, Oxford saw an incredible community response. Much of this was led by under-resourced grassroots organisations, representing under-served communities, with a resolve to “get the job done themselves”.

Inspired by the solidarity, cooperation, and resourcefulness shown by these organisations, the partners developed a community wealth building approach that would be “top-down meets bottom-up”, seeking to create an interface between council-led Preston-style models of community wealth building and grassroots community development approaches.

The model was also informed by national COVID research, including Locality’s ‘We Were Built for This’ report²³, The Democracy Collaborative and CLES ‘Owning the Future’ report and ‘Rescue, Recover, Reform’ framework.²⁴

At an early stage in the project, issues of class, race, and economic power emerged. Owned by Oxford was set up by organisations with white, middle class leadership, so work needed to be done to ensure ownership of the project by Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities – those who are most affected by our city’s particular inequalities. A majority of seats on the steering group were held for representatives of communities experiencing the impact of economic inequality. An historic lack of investment and authentic engagement meant that onboarding grassroots organisations took time and resources, but giving this priority has resulted in the current, diverse, and representative Owned by Oxford partnership.

Our shared, long-term vision is for a fair, democratic, and sustainable economy in Oxford – an economy owned and controlled by its community that serves the wellbeing of people and the environment.

Together, we’ve been testing out how to create routes for the considerable resources held by Oxford anchor institutions – Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Universities, and larger businesses – to support authentically community-owned and run enterprises as part of the journey to a new economy for the city, one that puts people, planet, and wellbeing before profit.



OWNED BY OXFORD'S APPROACH

OUR PRINCIPLES

Oxford has a very different wealth problem to Preston. In Oxford, the issue is the distribution of wealth across the city, rather than how to retain wealth in the area as a whole.

The Owned by Oxford pilot has supported the emergence of genuinely community-led economic activity by Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities. The project has also focussed on two geographically distinct areas of the city experiencing significant inequality, The Leys (made up of two Oxford wards, Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys) and Barton.^{25 26}

There were a number of principles that guided the original planning for this 'Oxford Model' of community wealth building:

- To work with communities most affected by inequality.
- To be led-by and learn from those communities.
- A commitment to authentic engagement.
- To use place-based research and local knowledge.
- To support enterprises that are committed to being locally owned and run.
- To develop businesses that benefit local people and the environment.

As more community members brought their lived experience and expertise to the Owned by Oxford steering group, and the early-stage research and scoping developed, it became clear that, if these principles were to be met, the project activities needed to be adapted.

Starting from an understanding that communities are best placed to know their own needs and strengths, Owned by Oxford resources were focussed on "going where the energy is". This meant giving more time to building relationships and trust. Then enabling, building on, and promoting existing activities and ideas, rather than proposing new ones. Also, acknowledging and amplifying the rich body of community research and knowledge that already exists, rather than generating new processes.

In terms of enterprise support, many of the initiatives and ideas Owned by Oxford connected with were at a very early stage of development, and so wanted hands-on training and practical support specific to their needs – rather than a programme of training or workshops. Project resources also needed to be reallocated to increase the funding available to community activists and entrepreneurs and to devolve resources to community anchor organisations. The Owned by Oxford team provided direct support to grassroots enterprises with grant applications, focusing on creating employed posts in those enterprises.

This work has been conducted in parallel with developing the political consensus, policies and frameworks, which will support these new models to survive and thrive in the wider economy. Our partnership of local anchor organisations provided the links to strategic level opportunities and the wider sharing of the learning for lasting impact. However, community wealth building approaches were very new to many of the potential stakeholders and commissioners. This led the project to take a more targeted approach to raising awareness and finding opportunities for policy shift.

OUR LEARNING QUESTIONS

1

How can the power and resources of anchor institutions - our city's place-based wealth holders such as councils, universities, hospitals - support grassroots initiatives, especially those from minoritised and under-resourced communities, to grow into sustainable community enterprises?

2

What ecosystem of support, resourcing and spaces do we need for these to flourish?

3

How do we shift the existing infrastructure support to meet these needs?

4

How can communities influence and shape policy to create a more resilient, sustainable and fair economy?

5

How can learning from our place-based project be adapted and replicated locally and nationally at a larger scale?

OUR METHODOLOGY

Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities, including those in The Leys and Barton, have experienced an overload of initiatives, including many that “helicopter in”, ask lots of questions, then fade away. It was important to be able to have something additional and useful to offer alongside just gathering data. We needed to be “doing, not just talking”.

Owned by Oxford has used action research and asset-based community development approaches, described by one partner as: “respectful, reciprocal, rather than one-way or extractive, and that seek to foster ‘a dialogue of equals’ via facilitating ‘continuous-ongoing dialogue’, rather than summoning individuals/groups to [come to us], and relying on one-off consultations.”

A range of monitoring, data collection, and evaluation approaches have been used throughout the project timeline, including desktop literature reviews, individual discussions, interviews, stakeholder workshops, and surveys. We also developed a CRM for the project based on an Airtable template designed for the not-for-profit sector by The Good Ship project.²⁷

The project delivery model has evolved in response to:

- National research, including the Ubele Initiative²⁸, Stir to Action's *Technocratic to Democratic: Bringing together democratic business and policy*²⁹, Marmot review³⁰, Power to Change and The Foundation for Social Investment's *Minoritised Ethnic Community and Social Enterprises*.³¹
- Local community-led research, including Makespace Oxford's *Community Spaces 2021*³², the Pamoja Oxfordshire BAME Infrastructure Mapping Project 2021³³, and OCA and Healthwatch's *Oxford's New and Emerging Communities and Wellbeing 2021*.³⁴
- Our own action learning approach, consultation, and evaluation.

We had input from two external consultants:

- Rawz, an Oxford-based community researcher and founder of the Urban Music Foundation, conducted interviews with Owned by Oxford steering group members: Owned by Oxford Evaluation Report 2022.³⁵
- Clare Dodwell, a local health and social care consultant, advised on evaluation approaches and conducted interviews with anchor institution stakeholders.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

THE TEAM

As lead partner for the project, CAG Oxfordshire employed a part-time Coordinator to oversee the Owned by Oxford activities during the pilot period.

The Coordinator supported a small team of part-time posts including the Barton and Leys Communities Advocates; the Oxford City Council Community Wealth Building Officer; two Development Posts, one in African Families in the UK and the other in Oxford Community Action; the Solidarity Economy Association consultancy on mapping; and additional enterprise support from the CAG team.



Working with the wider Owned by Oxford partnership, the team were responsible for:

- creating a partnership to grow grassroots-led community wealth building for Oxford.
- raising awareness of community wealth building and growing the opportunities.
- providing support and training to incubate grassroots ideas and for community businesses to thrive.
- nurturing activists and entrepreneurs to become ambassadors for community wealth building.
- a seed-funding grant programme.
- mapping the community-led economy network across Oxford.
- championing community wealth building approaches within anchor institutions and developing best practice around procurement.

CREATING THE STEERING GROUP

The first priority was to create a steering group for Owned by Oxford that was truly representative, recognising that solutions to local issues are already held within communities, but resources and power are inequitably distributed across our city.

This required time and a focus on relationship building and earning trust.

The biggest challenge to this was resourcing. The representatives of the founder partners on Owned by Oxford were all in paid roles, attending in paid time. But others weren't, so we revised the budget to ensure that those participating in the project on behalf of enterprises without funding were remunerated for their time engaging with the development processes, attending partnership meetings, and acting as Owned by Oxford ambassadors.





DEVELOPING A MAPPING TOOL

The Solidarity Economy Association led the development of the Owned by Oxford mapping tool. The map provides one point of access to promote, find, and grow:

- purposeful community enterprises.
- the contribution these organisations make to the area.
- training, development, and infrastructure resources.
- networks of solidarity and support.
- opportunities for anchor institutions to support and develop.
- goods and services available locally to buyers.

Adapting an open-source Airtable CRM template, designed for small not-for-profit organisations by The Good Ship, enabled the team to collect and organise data on the community wealth building ecosystem for Oxford. The map uses an interface with Digital Commons Co-operative's Mykomap systems and draws data from other solidarity economy initiatives and sources to display different directories and data sets for both internal and public use. The process was also used as part of the case study in a Co-operative Councils Innovation Network funded project.³⁶

Drawing data from multiple external databases with conflicting and complementary data about organisations has been complicated to resolve and there have been challenges around creating user-friendly interfaces for data entry.

The Owned by Oxford map aims to provide a useful directory of local organisations for procurement teams and work is ongoing to ensure it clearly identifies and allows searching by category of service and products.

Longer term, the aim is for community enterprises to have full control of their own entries and to be able to easily find local partners, support organisations, and investors. The map brings these enterprises to the attention of those with the power to purchase, commission, and design procurement policy. The mapping will be firmly in the hands of the community, inviting anchor institutions in and illustrating the case for co-design of services and solutions.

We expect that as the mapping develops, it will help to strengthen the local solidarity economy network and increase awareness and understanding of the value of grassroots economic community development approaches. As a result, there will be an increase in place-based wealth and resources, so growing a more equal, regenerative and resilient, local economy for the community.

CAG and DCC have secured new funding to build on this work and are developing the first stages of a county-wide project, Oxfordshire Connects.



WALKING ALONGSIDE COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES

Our mapping showed that co-operatives and community-owned enterprises in Oxford tended to cluster in specific areas and among specific demographics. There were far fewer in The Leys and Barton, the areas targeted by Owned by Oxford. This pattern of poor representation of co-operatives in poorer parts of working class communities is something that the Solidarity Economy Association has observed in their work across the UK.

However, there were plenty of grassroots initiatives for Owned by Oxford to engage with in these areas. For example, Oxfordshire Community Action, a very well-known project delivering services ranging from food distribution to health research. They had many evolving ideas but were under-resourced and lacked the capacity to plan for a sustainable enterprise model. And initiatives such as Ellim Services, which proposed selling centralised back-office support for small enterprises, delivered by migrant women predominantly living in The Leys, but was very much at the idea stage and without access to investment.

What the initiatives and community partners fed back was that they needed hands-on support. Oxford has a well-established network of organisations providing social enterprise training and infrastructure support, but take-up of this offer by grassroots initiatives is low. The approaches were described as heavily bureaucratic, and there was a perception that this support was 'not meant for us'.

Capacity was also an issue. For grassroots projects led by a small number of people who are having to 'redesign the plane while trying to keep it in the air', it is unlikely that the organisation could fund attendance at a webinar, networking event, or training programme. The same applies for the individuals who were juggling low-paid jobs and caring responsibilities while trying to get their initiative off the ground. The need to pay

bills and family commitments left them with little time for training or writing bids or proposals on a voluntary basis, which was a challenge.

So initially, the most useful role the Owned by Oxford team could play was to help secure resources, often through direct support with grant applications. This created the capacity for those leading community initiatives to have time to reflect and plan. Alongside fundraising, we started to explore how to develop new trading elements for projects in order to create longer-term sustainability. Our team made time to attend grassroots activities, to build trust and understanding, and to be available for discussions when opportunities arose.

Development from the grassroots up is not a linear process. There is a real need for close, bespoke support that draws on different expertise at different points, whether that's business planning, legal advice, or funding applications³⁷. This is a flexible and patient development approach that prioritises building trust and relationships as well as creating bridges to more specialist support. As well as "walking alongside", Owned by Oxford also delivered more formal community wealth building sessions and connected groups with national and local training and resources.

This commitment to a hands-on approach has been a real strength but having just a few part-time individuals available to the project meant there was very little resilience in the support system. The appointment of the two Communities Advocates, one at Makespace Oxford and one at CAG, as well as creating development posts in AFiUK and OCA to work directly on the project, had a significant impact on our reach and capacity to support grassroots organisations. These new practitioners brought very different and valuable skills, as well as lived experience of the inequalities the project was aiming to address.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND FUNDING

The lack of a level playing field in terms of access to grants, investment, space, and resources was a key message from grassroots entrepreneurs.

Funding and procurement opportunities favour larger organisations, those with paid staff able to dedicate time and resources to putting together successful applications or tenders.^{38 39} It's very difficult for organisations staffed entirely by volunteers to compete equally for limited pots of money in an already extremely competitive market. This can lead to larger organisations winning funding to carry out work that they are not necessarily best placed to do. Acting, in effect, as fund managers, these larger organisations may then engage in partnerships with grassroots organisations in order to actually reach the communities they are required to serve. As one community leader told us, "It's always the same organisations being given the contracts."

This can lead to transactional relationships between the organisations, which can feel disingenuous; larger organisations set the terms and strategy, while grassroots organisations are forced to adapt their organic practices to fit the funding targets of their larger partners. Rarely are the full core costs or credit for the work equally shared. This creates a cycle, increasing the larger organisation's capacity to successfully apply for further funding, while the smaller organisation, which carried out the work on the ground, faces continued uncertainty around cash flow.

Getting suitable premises was also a live concern for community entrepreneurs, who contrasted their experience of unsuccessfully searching for office space with

seeing better known and connected organisations secure leases.

This inequity in access to resources was seen as the main obstacle to getting community enterprises off the ground. Community partners described facing a high bar in terms of the work they had to put in "just to be taken seriously" and "demonstrating that we are professionals". There was a shared frustration at being asked to identify, describe, and quantify on paper a need that was clearly visible and already well-evidenced. Community knowledge, expertise, and lived experience were not being given the appropriate value by funders and other authorities.



Owned by Oxford seed funding grants

Owned by Oxford oversaw a seed-funding pot of £25,000 from the Friends Provident Foundation to support the establishment of the enterprises we were working with.

Given the identified need for very early-stage, flexible investment that was accessible to Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised community-led enterprises, we committed to taking a progressive funding approach. Acknowledging the structural inequalities around access to investment, the application process was kept as simple as possible, with applicants able to share pre-existing documents or reports and develop their proposals through discussion. The grant agreement and reporting requirements were light-touch and supported community enterprises to take risks, test things out, and make space to reflect and develop.

To apply, organisations needed to:

- Be run by, and of benefit to, the local community, supporting local solutions for local issues.
- Ensure that their business respects and benefits the environment.
- Create good jobs paid at the Oxford Living Wage.

THE PROJECTS FUNDED BY OWNED BY OXFORD



Planning for the market

THE AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

MARKET is being set up by women at WOW (Women of the World) Space, a self-referred space offering migrant women who have survived trauma the opportunity to build friendships and wellbeing. The market is a way to give the women a safe space to try out their business ideas. Starting small, with a few tables at the community centre, the vision is to grow into a regular African and Caribbean community market with more local businesses involved, offering residents with a business idea a low-cost, low-risk way of testing their products. Jameelah Shodunke from Transition Lighthouse, who is incubating the market, told us: *"In Oxford, local people of African and Caribbean descent can't easily get hold of foods and other products from our cultural heritage; we need to travel all the way to London or even Birmingham! We want to bring these products to our community but also create something that is more than just a place to do your shopping. It will be a regular community event for residents to come together, meet up with friends, and bump into their neighbours!"*

The Owned by Oxford grant is supporting the costs of equipment for the market. *"As the market develops, we'd like to set it up as a co-operative, where stallholders pay a membership fee to join, and together they'd make decisions about how the market operates. Membership could bring certain benefits, like access to shared equipment and support with business administration and insurance. This would make it easier for people who want to set up a business but don't want to do it alone."*

BARTON RETROFIT CO-OP This project aims to upskill local tradespeople to offer a fabric-first, bespoke retrofit service to homes across Oxfordshire. The income from the business will fund a training programme as well as supporting residents in Barton to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, saving money, saving energy, improving health, and regenerating the existing housing stock. Communities Advocate Jabu Nala-Hartley, who is leading the project, explains: *"We're recruiting local builders interested in 'learning through doing', and we have retrofit experts to guide and lead the team."*

The Owned by Oxford grant is supporting the start-up costs along with funding from the Transition Network. The project has begun surveys of Barton homes and is looking for an opportunity to test the model: *"Our aim is to start small and build one 'community retrofit team', then expand and create new teams, and then replicate the model in other communities."*

BLACKBIRD LEYS COMMUNITY LARDER is a food club with a café and access to community support and information services. Coordinator Nigel Roberts tells us: *"It started off as an emergency food distribution service during the pandemic, run by the City Council. The level of demand was extraordinary. There were 120 to 130 people turning up every Wednesday, and the volunteers were shifting almost a tonne of food every week. It was clear that there was a real need for the larder, but it was a big operation for the Council to keep running on an ongoing basis. We took it on from the Council and turned it into a community-led project."*

The Owned by Oxford grant is supporting the costs of a paid coordinator and equipment for trading activities. Now that the project is more established, they are starting to connect and collaborate with other local organisations. *"It's been very encouraging to see that there are local organisations who can see the impact our project is having, who want to support it and even raise funds for it. I'd love to see it grow and to be able to offer more activities."*

DAMASCUS ROSE KITCHEN is a social enterprise that runs a cafe and catering service, led by refugee women. Their story began with a few women based in Oxford, who decided to unite and share their culture by preparing Middle Eastern dishes for their community. In doing so, they were able to preserve a part of the story and identity that they had to leave behind.

They empower other refugee women to make social connections, improve their language skills, and develop their independence in the UK: *"The way*

to their new home was not paved with roses, but by supporting them, each of us contributes to seeing the Damascus Rose in bloom again."

The group was supported by **FLO'S – THE PLACE IN THE PARK**, a community-owned hub where they were able to trial their catering service. Their success led to them taking over running the cafe in a city centre arts project. The Owned by Oxford grant supported them with the scale-up needed to make this transition. The business is going from strength to strength, with their café now open five days a week and catering for a host of local organisations, including Oxford University and Oxford City Council. They would like to set up a community cafe offering Arabic storytelling and catering for families. Ideally, they would have an office back in East Oxford, which is where they feel they belong, but as is the experience of several of the grant recipients, access to affordable workspace is a challenge.



M4JU at Black Lives Matter action in Oxford

Despite this challenge, founder Nuha Abdo sees a *"very, very good future"* ahead. *"The ladies... they are really a part of it and invested in its success. They feel it supports their lives and their families. They work so hard. They want to do their job with a lot of love. They say: We are praying for it to be successful!"*

MOTHERS 4 JUSTICE: M4JU is a collective of mothers and family members of people in prison who are campaigning for justice, accountability, and change within the police and criminal justice systems. A core part of their work is supporting people who are going through the criminal justice system, as well as working closely with their families. M4JU has facilitated discussions between the police and communities about 'stop and search' powers, which disproportionately target young Black people. Founder Jabu Nala-Hartley says: *"We see so many of our children trapped in the revolving door of the criminal justice system. From the preschool to prison pipeline, to probation services, and beyond, our communities are criminalised and denied basic justice, liberties, and life opportunities."* Shifting attitudes about their communities is key to tackling institutional racism.

The Owned by Oxford grant is supporting the development of M4JU's trading plans. In order to expand their work, the group is looking to take on paid staff to deliver their programmes, but they are keen to reduce their reliance on grants, so they are exploring how



The Damascus Rose Kitchen team



Mothers 4 Justice Ubuntu move into The Source

they could generate income through offering research and consultancy services, or even running a catering business from their ex-prison van. *"We are reimagining the future – one where our communities are not discriminated against and downtrodden but liberated and empowered. We will hold the criminal justice system to account and transform it to serve our communities."*

OXFORD COMMUNITY ACTION KITCHEN offers a pop-up café and catering to generate income for OCA's activities, which support new, emerging, and established Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Communities to tackle and overcome barriers created by structural inequalities. Their services include food distribution to hundreds of families each week, initiatives to combat health inequalities such as vaccine take-up, children's and young people's activities, and developing grassroots enterprise. As director Hassan Sabrie describes it, *"We create inclusive and sensitive spaces where people feel comfortable to meet and share. Our weekly community food bank now functions as a vibrant, multi-ethnic community hub, where our members share their ideas and guide our project."*

OCA also delivers collaborative and participatory action research projects such as the 2021 'New and Emerging Communities Wellbeing Research', which showed that Black and minoritised global majority communities struggle to access mainstream services, instead seeking support from family, friends, faith, and community. OCA's culturally appropriate activities act as a bridge to both universal and specialist services where needed. As OCA's Imade Edosomwan says, *"A familiar face makes a bridge, and an unfamiliar face makes a barrier. Familiarity does not always mean that you have met someone before; it can mean they are familiar ethnically or culturally too."*

As with Damascus Rose Kitchen, Flo's – the Place in the Park, provided support and a venue to trial OCA's new catering service. The Owned by Oxford grant supported OCA in developing a business plan and with the costs of setup in the early stages of the kitchen. They have seen their profile grow and now have regular pop-up café slots as well as increasing catering orders.

THE WELLBEING CO-OPERATIVE is a consortium co-operative of freelance health and wellbeing practitioners offering a range of services from acupuncture and yoga to massage and arts and crafts. Practitioners continue to run their own independent businesses, but each business is a member of the co-op.

The co-operative will offer members a shared social media presence and website, a centralised booking system, shared 'back office' services, peer-support, and training. They are also exploring how to support members with sick pay. The offer to the community will be better access to wellbeing services: Director Joe Jennings explains: *"Access to health and wellbeing services should be a right, not a privilege. Coming together allows for economies of scale, which means we are able to offer more affordable services. It can also help us apply for larger pots of funding to help reach those who couldn't usually access our services."*

The Oxford grant has supported website development and a temporary organisational development post, allowing a founding member to be paid to put time into developing the organisation during its infancy. *"Because we're all running our own businesses and some of us have dependents and care commitments, it's hard to find the time to dedicate to developing the organisation and setting up the necessary systems and processes. Having this post in place makes all the difference."*



The Oxford Community Action team

EXPLORING A COMMUNITY SPACE FOR THE LEYS

Led by Makespace Oxford and their Communities Advocate, Owned by Oxford's work in The Leys focussed around plans for the redevelopment of the long-established Blackbird Leys Community Centre.



Regeneration plans for the area had been delayed due to the pandemic, but the consultation restarted in 2021 offering a great opportunity for discussions around community wealth building and ownership approaches. Makespace was also leading on delivery of the £1.9 million Meanwhile in Oxfordshire programme⁴⁰ which had the potential to support local initiatives to find suitable temporary premises while the area was without a community centre.

One idea was for the community to take over a local pub, owned by the Council and leased to a brewery chain, which had been closed for some time and was falling into disrepair. This would have created a meanwhile site for the Community Centre residents to decamp to, with a longer term vision of becoming a permanent community hub. This initiative was supported by a number of local stakeholders and there was a willingness to explore options from the Council but lack of engagement from the current leaseholder meant it wasn't possible to take it forward. A community group took steps to have the site classified as an Asset

of Community Value meaning this remains a possibility for the future as the pub is still closed.

Another proposal was to commission and site a high quality, temporary building or series of buildings on vacant land that could then be relocated across the city at a later date for use by a different community. This idea gained traction and feasibility studies were conducted on a range of sites, and Meanwhile in Oxfordshire grant funds were invested in procuring professional and architectural services to deliver an options appraisal and assess site constraints and opportunities. However the timescales around planning requirements and the unfamiliar approach this would have represented for council officers, meant that it wasn't possible to complete within the Meanwhile In Oxfordshire timeframe. Additional resources are needed to continue coordinating/bringing this idea to life.

In response to the lack of success around our attempts to secure space for grassroots enterprises on The Leys, Owned by Oxford developed The Oasis and Dome projects to

provide temporary space for local groups to come together and organise.

The Oasis has transformed an unused office inside the existing Community Centre. Using a small budget, along with creative and thoughtful design led by the Makespace Communities Advocate, we co-created a warm, beautiful and welcoming shared space in what is generally a neglected building. This process generated significant interest and visibility for the project and our objectives, with the intention of strengthening community activism and engagement around future uses of the community centre.

The Dome is a pop-up event space, a clear geodesic dome that was used to host a number of open discussion sessions with The Leys communities – all connected to community visions for the area. Out of this has come renewed interest and local political support for the new Community Centre – or perhaps for the existing one as the regeneration plans are still unclear – to be taken into community ownership and become The Oasis, a social enterprise and action Hub.

TRIALLING A RETROFIT CO-OP FOR BARTON

The work in Barton was led by the CAG Oxfordshire Communities Advocate, who is also a local resident and city councillor.

Barton Retrofit Co-op was developed as a proposal in response to community needs. Barton has some of the worst housing stock in the city, much of which is owned by Oxford City council. The poorly insulated, cold, damp buildings are also home to some of the poorest communities in the city, who are struggling with rising costs and energy bills.

The project aims to upskill local tradespeople to offer a fabric-first, bespoke retrofit service to homes across Oxfordshire. The income from the business will fund a training programme as well as supporting residents in Barton to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, saving money, saving energy, improving health, and regenerating the existing housing stock.

There is a team of retrofit and low-energy design experts supporting the project, and surveys have been conducted on three different home types.

There is an acknowledged issue in Barton with poor relationships between the City Council and tenants. Residents are frustrated by inaction on basic improvements and the sense that they have no control over their homes. In our discussions with Council officers, it was clear that there was a commitment to address this and to ensure residents have access to energy saving measures that are being rolled out. This desire for improvements on both sides created a 'space of possibility' between the Council and tenants, which could unblock the impasse, advance the aims on both sides, and lead to new economic entities, and an increased supply of retrofit-skilled people in the labour market.

There has been considerable interest and excitement around the project, but the two biggest challenges have been securing training routes for potential members and finding support for the first "testing out" of the proposal on a property. There are possibilities of a larger social enterprise such as Aspire incubating the enterprise through this first stage and CAG have secured Transition Network funding to support this.



INFLUENCING FOR CHANGE IN OXFORD

The Owned by Oxford project funded a part-time Community Wealth Building Officer based in the City Council economic development team. This was a critical role, raising awareness of community wealth building and the Owned by Oxford pilot both internally and across the broader anchor institution networks. The post also highlighted grassroots initiatives that might not otherwise have been known to local anchors.

The Community Wealth Building Officer engaged in the development of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, which brought together representatives from large anchor institutions, employers, social enterprises, and other projects, including the Owned by Oxford partnership. Although there were tensions and differences between the approaches of the two

partnerships, particularly around representation and engagement with community voices, the Owned by Oxford team's presentation at an Inclusive Economy in Action event created significant interest and excitement. This highlighted the opportunity for the Owned by Oxford partnership to act as a bridge between grassroots enterprises and wealth-holders in the city. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership has invited a number of Owned by Oxford organisations to participate in working groups, and it is hoped that this will provide further opportunities to bring the voices of marginalised communities to the forefront in these spaces. That said, resources for grassroots groups to attend these sorts of policy discussions remain limited, thereby limiting the potential for full engagement. A specific fund is needed to address this.





Procurement

Much of Owned by Oxford's early work with anchors looked at how to create procurement opportunities for grassroots organisations. In the City Council, there was a commitment to community wealth building at a leadership level, but translating this into changes in practice and creating genuine opportunities for social and community businesses requires a deliberate, long-term focus on commissioning pipelines. This approach needs significant capacity and an organisation-wide commitment. The hyperlocal focus of the Owned by Oxford project made it difficult to justify making process changes for the organisation as a whole when the number of contracts likely to match within the area was very small. However, work is underway to create city- and countywide approaches to procuring for social value, and the strength of the Owned by Oxford partnership means that connected organisations will be well placed to engage with new opportunities in the future.

The theme of structural challenges was common across many anchor institutions, with staff at all levels feeling very stretched due to austerity and the additional pressures felt from the pandemic. There were also some ideological and political differences exposed within

organisations, with conflicting targets and approaches in different departments and in corporate aims. And because staff were stretched, they didn't have time to take an upstream approach to thinking through and designing specifications for goods and services in a way that might create opportunities for locally owned community businesses.

The Owned by Oxford initiatives were generally not large enough or sufficiently developed to be able to win contracts to wholly provide services to councils or other large anchors. Also, there weren't obvious procurement matches with the services these organisations could offer, with the majority of City Council contracts relating to construction and built environment projects rather than the more social focus of the services provided by organisations in the network. Where opportunities did arise that might have been a suitable fit, for example, a café concession at a park and ride site, organisations within the Owned by Oxford network were encouraged to apply but chose not to take this forward due to perceived disadvantages and barriers within the process. The Social Value Working Group of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is looking at ways in which local anchors could help address these barriers, including through encouraging collaboration and partnering on



tenders. One model that might be applied locally is the Innovation Cooperative⁴¹ that has been established in Greater Manchester to support collective tendering on public contracts.

Procurement legislation prevents public authorities from directly advantaging particular organisational types or organisations from particular geographical areas, and this can be a direct barrier to “levelling the playing field” in the way that the project sought to do. The City Council and other anchor organisations account for social value when awarding contracts, but this must be agnostic of organisational type. However, it is possible to structure specifications and questions in a procurement assessment to account for types of social value which are likely to be found in cooperatives or community businesses – for example, measures of increased equity, participation, personal agency, etc. The absence of these kinds of measures from commonly used social value assessment standards, including the National TOMs Framework, means that these benefits are often ‘hidden’ from tender assessments of social value. This was explored during the project through a policy prototype carried out with funding from the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN), which developed a proof-of-concept social value framework based on these values.

Further work would be needed to bring this into practice, and officers from the City Council are now leading an expanded national Policy Lab with the CCIN to develop a Social Value Toolkit for Councils, which will provide councils with tools to support the delivery of these and other social value outcomes in local economic contexts.

There was more success through making grassroots projects more visible to managers with smaller, devolved budgets as well as to purposeful ‘middle tier’ local organisations looking to buy from organisations that were local and democratic in their design. Patience was needed, but the networks that Owned by Oxford built up did help realise opportunities when they arose, including brokering a relationship between a local food provider and housing association to establish a café and restaurant at an extra care housing site.

Use of assets

The City Council’s primary drivers for the use of its assets remain commercial revenues and land for housing to generate income for services. The local government funding crisis brought about by austerity and magnified by the pandemic has put additional pressure on these resources. It was hoped that the Meanwhile in Oxfordshire programme would help to address inequality of access to business premises, but, in fact, it had limited impact in the areas and for the groups targeted by Owned by Oxford.

One exception to this was the creation of a new shared workspace in Oxford city centre in a former institutional building, now an underused office and meeting space. Makespace invested almost £30k of the Meanwhile in Oxfordshire capital grant in refurbishing the building and making it fit for purpose as a shared workspace, workshop and rehearsal studio, and private meeting and counselling space. The new hub, entitled ‘the Source,’ now offers affordable workspace to Mothers 4 Justice

Ubuntu, Mandala Theatre and Iraqi Women of Art and War – all initiatives founded and led by women of colour. There are considerable benefits to the building's central location within the city. Funding from the City Council's ARG "Build Back Better" fund helped Makespace provide these spaces at significantly reduced rates to community-led organisations, bridging a significant barrier to accessing city centre spaces. However, it is notable that the building is located outside of the target areas where Owned by Oxford focused its energy and therefore has not impacted the target communities beyond the direct impact on the tenant organisations themselves.

A different model of shared workspace was developed through a collaboration between Aspire Oxford and the Midcounties Co-operative, launching a new enterprise hub at a Co-op food store in a busy shopping centre in Cowley, East Oxford. Run by Aspire, the hub offers a flexible space in the local community for emerging enterprises and entrepreneurs, with free use of the space and IT equipment as well as access to business support. This became a base for the Owned by Oxford team to meet and support community enterprises.

Shifts in policy and practice

Over the course of the project, the City Council strengthened its commitments within the procurement strategy to account for social value in procurement and to commission social and community businesses, as well as to secure resources for local projects through social value commitments on larger contracts.⁴²

Procurement officers were able to use the Owned by Oxford team and network to improve supplier contributions to social value and to create a list of suppliers on the new procurement portal who are based in the Oxford postcode area. The City Council is looking at ways to streamline the process of matching suppliers with local networks and organisations.

Alongside procurement policy, the Community Wealth Building Officer worked with enterprises and community networks to understand how City Council policy or practice might be working against its intended aims. This has included setting up a cross Council group to explore what would be needed to create a supportive environment to help community-led markets flourish, where current policy and practice were obstructing new developments.⁴³

Overall, managers within the City Council's economic development and procurement teams have recognised the value of Owned by Oxford and the related work to encourage the growth of local, community-based businesses in deprived areas of the city, ultimately helping to address inequalities. This is seen in the Council's Economic Development Strategy, published in 2022⁴⁴, which includes a focus on community wealth building and references the Owned by Oxford project model.

The local allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund offered an opportunity to join up support approaches around the local social economy and fund enterprise support activity in a targeted way. The Owned by Oxford project's learning informed the design of the investment plan⁴⁵, ensuring the targeting of resources towards supporting social and community enterprise in areas of deprivation and minoritised communities. There is scope for the findings of the project to influence the design of future support programmes. This has led to the creation of a permanent community wealth building role within the City Council, and a proportion of local Shared Prosperity funding has been earmarked to support the community wealth building agenda.

There were many challenges to getting larger anchor institutions to fully engage with the project. Though there might be considerable support from particular leaders or managers, where this hadn't been rolled out across an organisation, the team found blockages could occur at many levels. Rather than focussing just on securing a top-down shift from anchor institutions around procurement and commissioning, the project has considered how to set the agenda from the ground up, perhaps harnessing the procurement power of smaller organisations. Fostering a dialogue of equals, in line with the project ethos, Owned by Oxford considered how to use the influence, knowledge, and capacity of current stakeholders to develop a manifesto and promote sign-up amongst our network of small community anchor institutions and progressive businesses. Though still in development, the manifesto could be a "how to" for supporting a local, grassroots led economy – a model that Owned by Oxford can show and share.



GROWING THE CO-OPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY-OWNED ENTERPRISE BUSINESS SECTOR

The co-operative sector in Oxford, though large compared to some cities, remains fairly niche, and has few connections to the communities targeted under the Owned by Oxford project.

At the time that the project launched, there was no specialist co-operative development support available in the city and a low level of awareness of co-operative structures and their distinct value amongst Oxford's commissioners and decision makers. However, one of the city's strengths is a very effective social enterprise sector and network of organisations providing related training and infrastructure support. This has led to the social enterprise model successfully entering mainstream economic development discourse in the city. While this is a big positive in and of itself, it has made it difficult to differentiate the co-operative model and to create the momentum and space to grow the city's community-owned enterprise sector.

Though there were lots of ideas and initiatives buzzing around in The Leys and Barton, it was rare that co-operative models were discussed. Generally, entrepreneurs operated as sole traders and were self-employed. Where activists were coming together around social action issues, they tended to set up as charities or community interest companies and were unsure of the case for collective ownership models. Although setting

up democratic enterprises remained a central goal of the Owned by Oxford project, this needed to be offered as one option with advice that reflected and enabled choice rather than dictating governance models.

Following a successful bid for City Council "Build Back Better" funding, Co-operative Futures was able to appoint an Oxford-based co-op development worker as part of the Owned by Oxford team. This has had a significant impact on the project capacity, bringing specialist knowledge and expertise and incubating co-operative initiatives in response to market gaps such as social care, retrofit, and back-office support for small businesses.

There are also many advocates for co-operatives within the city, and the community wealth building officer has been project lead, on behalf of the Oxford City Council, on two Cooperative Councils Innovation Network funded projects: "Growing an Inclusive Co-operative Economy", which included Owned by Oxford as a case study,⁴⁶ and "Turning Co-operative Values into "Social Values" for Procurement", which is considering how to design a procurement framework based on co-operative values.⁴⁷



LEARNING

Barriers to equality: Oxford's Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities are those most affected by wealth inequality, yet their voices are seldom heard within the discussions around policy and practice. Economic strategy and development remain dominated by well-resourced and usually white-led organisations, as well as institutions with vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

Valuing grassroots economic activity: There is already a rich and dynamic ecosystem of community projects and enterprises operating at grassroots level in Oxford generating significant social and economic value for the city, often operating under the radar of anchor institutions, evolving and delivering activities that meet local needs and address many of the gaps for underserved communities.

The importance of autonomy: These enterprises need support, training and resourcing that is collaborative, not directive. Community initiatives need to be able to lead their own development, to be able to say what they need, rather than being required to adapt and fit to a top-down model in order to access training and investment.

Very early-stage, flexible investment: There is a need for a progressive funding approach that acknowledges the historical and structural inequalities around access to grants and investment and that supports community enterprises to take risks, test out, reflect, and develop. Funders should give appropriate value to community knowledge, expertise, and lived experience.

Capacity support: There is a shared need for embedded specialist support covering business setup, administration, HR, finance, marketing, and fundraising. This needs to be hands-on and bespoke, understanding that one size doesn't fit all. Wherever possible, posts should be resourced within the grassroots organisations themselves.

Authentic engagement and accountability: Anchor institutions should genuinely engage with community groups, activists, and innovators at the earliest stage in the development of policy and practice. To be effective, this engagement needs proper funding. There must be "seats at the tables" as well as an explicit commitment to sharing power, listening, and making change happen from a relationship-based approach, as opposed to transaction-based one.

Existing community wisdom, knowledge and research: There is a rich body of community research and knowledge that already exists within the city. There is also a feeling of consultation and overload in marginalised communities. Rather than generating new processes and consultation, action can be taken on what is already known.

Multifaceted communities: Anchor institutions need better routes to hear from, and so understand, the



The ObO team at the Playground for a New Economy Festival

complexity of our diverse communities. For example, current approaches to service commissioning can be too simplistic, with a "large size fits all" approach that doesn't identify important differences. Existing strengths and assets may be bypassed or undermined. It can also be divisive, creating wasteful competition between groups for contracts and resources.

Community wealth building advocacy: Community wealth building is still a new and unfamiliar economic practice for many stakeholders. There is work to be done to raise awareness and to develop a shared understanding and language in order to grow support for this model in the city.

Community businesses: There is real interest and enthusiasm in the city around co-operative and democratic business models but knowledge and understanding of how they work is also limited. There remains a gap in advocacy and expertise around training and development of these models.

Increasing inequity and inequality: The ongoing impact of the pandemic, austerity, cuts, cost of living and energy crises means that the resources available to the communities and individuals is even more stretched. The capacity to set up and deliver new enterprises is limited and will need proper resourcing.

Anchor institution commitment: Important institutions in Oxford, including Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils as well as the Universities, have made political and strategic commitments to community wealth building and addressing inequality and are working in partnership to develop an inclusive economy for Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership presents a great opportunity for community wealth building approaches.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Owned by Oxford pilot has led the creation of a new network and interface between grassroots and mid-sized organisations working for social change in Oxford. This has helped the sectors become less siloed and more inclusive and has created new “bridges” for collaboration.

The Owned by Oxford network has facilitated rich discussions around community wealth building and inequality in the city, as well as providing opportunities to test out and innovate, raising awareness of progressive economic approaches across a range of organisations.

Through prioritising funding for work carried out by grassroots organisations and forefronting this work, the project has played an important role in increasing the legitimacy of community-led enterprises in the eyes of anchor institutions, funders, and other gatekeepers.

The OIEP has now launched its Inclusive Economy Charter for the county, and both County and City Councils have committed funding to extend and build on the Owned by Oxford project work in 2023. Community wealth building is referenced within their economic and social value strategies, and the Owned by Oxford partnership is identified as a key part of delivering this.

However, there is still work to be done to develop Oxford’s anchor institutions’ understanding of the central importance of grassroots community wealth building for the development of an inclusive economy. Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities remain very much the “less-heard voices” in these discussions.

The tasks remain significant, and there are tensions to be navigated between the urgency to act and address injustice now and the need to take time learning, securing deep understanding, and building community and sustainability.

Although there are new opportunities and emerging markets to respond to, Oxford’s community-led enterprise network is nascent, with only a few genuinely community-owned businesses that are sufficiently established to secure statutory contracts for service delivery.

And there is a need to create a shared vision that all members of Owned by Oxford can take forward, carrying a clear understanding of what community wealth building is, and strong ideas on how it can be achieved.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

Development of the Owned by Oxford Partnership

- Continue to diversify the membership of the Owned by Oxford initiative, support grassroots organisations in “talking to power”, and fund their representatives to deliver the work.
- Train and resource community advocates and ambassadors to ensure that the voices of Black, minoritised, and economically marginalised communities are heard and that they influence the design of the new economy.
- Co-create a shared vision of community wealth building using language that works for all.
- Provide a forum where large, mid-size and grassroots organisations can interact on a “human level” and support links between Oxford’s diverse communities.
- Give Oxford residents a sense of ownership; many citizens feel no ownership over the city, particularly the city centre.
- Use the influence, knowledge, and capacity of current stakeholders to develop and promote the Owned by Oxford manifesto.

Growing the community enterprise network

- Continue to support the development of the Owned by Oxford enterprises and place-based projects.
- Offer hands-on, bespoke support for new enterprise development.
- Provide training and assistance with securing contracts and funding, and signpost potential funders to grassroots enterprises.
- Disrupt the cycle of larger organisations acting as “fund managers” for service delivery contracts.
- Establish a community-led enterprise funding pot.
- Facilitate community collaborations, partnerships, and consortiums to engage with procurement processes.
- Support the establishment of the co-operative development service in the city.

Influencing policy and practice

- Expand Owned by Oxford’s relationships with Oxford City Council stakeholders.
- Engage with a wider range of anchor institutions through the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, including the County Council and the universities.
- Develop Oxford-wide Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) based on community wealth building and co-operative values.
- Develop the Owned by Oxford mapping tool in discussion with commissioners and procurement teams.
- Ensure the learning from the project is shared through national networks and partnerships.

The Owned by Oxford partnership is continuing to grow and develop, meeting regularly to respond to new opportunities and considering how to keep the momentum going with the gains that have been so hard won alongside uncertainty around future resourcing for the project. CAG Oxfordshire facilitates the steering group, coordinates project work and is leading on funding bids..

OWNED BY OXFORD’S LONG-TERM VISION REMAINS A FAIR, DEMOCRATIC AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY IN OXFORD, AN ECONOMY OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY ITS COMMUNITY, AND THAT PUTS PEOPLE, PLANET AND WELLBEING BEFORE PROFIT.

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