

Central Oxford Community Profile

(St. Thomas, St. Ebbe's, Friars Wharf and Grandpont)

Community Insight Report



Cover Photos provided by Oxford City Council and South Oxford Adventure Playground

**COMMUNITY
GLUE**

Produced by Community Glue CIC with support from Oxford City Council
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1 Summary of Findings

1.1 Work and employment, money and poverty

The residents we spoke to were generally unconcerned about access to employment in the area, perhaps because they expected to travel at least as far as other parts of the city for work. Similarly, there were few comments about work-related training, which people would not expect to find on their doorsteps. This did not mean that people were unaffected by money: poverty and financial insecurity were major concerns among residents. Local agencies saw poverty as a driver of homelessness in the area, and there was a widespread perception that the 'safety net' of support services had degraded significantly. There are still options for welfare advice in the area, although they are sometimes seen as inadequate and inaccessible. There is a scarcity of cheap shops and free or low-cost activities in the city centre, and people on low or fixed incomes often feel excluded as a result.

1.2 Access to Health and Social Care

People typically felt well-served by NHS primary care services, which were accessed through local GP surgeries, in the specialist surgery for homeless people in Luther Street, and often at other locations throughout the city. Older adults and disabled people who needed out-patient appointments at hospitals said their access was limited by parking and transport costs. There were concerns that people from some ethnic groups were not accessing appropriate care. Despite cuts over the last decade, there is a strong network of support from voluntary organisations and social enterprises. This is mainly focussed on homelessness and related needs such as addiction and mental health. Housing Associations and church and community groups also provide important but more targeted support around health and wellbeing.

1.3 Housing and Homelessness

The insight-gathering process was focussed on the areas with highest levels of social housing, and a lot of effort was put into speaking directly with residents. There seemed to be three main clusters of social housing in St. Thomas, St. Ebbe's and Friar's Wharf (on opposite sides of Oxpens Road), and across the river in parts of Grandpont. These clusters were sometimes perceived as culturally distinct. O'Hanlon House is the only large residential project for homeless people left in the area but there are many small-scale projects, some on short-term leases. There are residences for students, and hotels and guesthouses for tourists. Owner-occupiers and people in the private rented sector also participated in the project, principally through our online survey.

There appears to be a dynamic relationship between social housing, homelessness and the poor health outcomes experienced by people in the area. For both groups, the tendency may be to attract people who are statistically more likely to have ongoing health conditions into the area (for example through the Oxford Register of Affordable Housing or following homelessness after discharge from psychiatric hospital). At the same time, statistically healthy young people starting their working lives would be unlikely to be able to find well-paid work or affordable housing in the area, and so might leave. These dynamic factors need

to be considered alongside the more obvious determinants of health such as nutritious food, exercise and access to health and social care.

People living in social housing frequently told us about problems with maintenance and services. There are many social landlords in the area as well as some housing directly maintained by the City Council. Our perception was that provision had become fragmented, while at the same time processes for managing relationships with tenants had become distant and dysfunctional. Refuse collection was another important issue for residents. Many felt it was unfair that shared recycling bins would not be emptied if they contained the wrong things when flats were given to people with cognitive impairments or mental health issues, and there was no way to stop passers-by from leaving their refuse. We were told that rough sleeping in the area is still common. Those responsible for managing evictions and clearing up afterwards make attempts to link people into homelessness supports. There are pathways from the streets into local homelessness services and associated provision, but these are often stretched thinly and limited in what they can do by complex thresholds and eligibility criteria. These problems stem from commissioning arrangements which are focussed on getting better value from a fixed pot of money during a period of growing demand. Some homelessness services directly manage properties in the area but in most cases, people will ultimately need to move to other parts of the city or county to gain access to longer-term tenancies.

Those in privately rented properties or owning their own homes shared concerns about nuisance, waste collection, and transport with other residents. Affordable housing (to rent or buy) seemed to be a specific concern amongst this group.

1.4 Food and Nutrition

Those who could afford to do so were able to buy food, typically from one of the 'local' branches of the main supermarkets, or by travelling further to purchase more cheaply and in bulk. Deliveries were also popular. We found several free and low-cost food options that were available to people in the area, although usually they were not actually *in* the area. Access was sometimes limited by perceived stigma of projects as well as their locations.

1.5 Transport and Access

Transport and physical access were frequent topics of discussion. As in the wider city, people had a broad range of views that were often very polarised. One insightful comment was that transport policies had been designed 'in reverse', in this context meaning for people living in other parts of the city and visiting the centre rather than the other way around. Generally, people seemed to find it easy to move around within the area, to get to other parts of the city, and to use public transport to visit destinations that were further afield. Disabled people and frail older adults typically liked living in the area, which is flat and has good access to nearby amenities. However, there were concerns about the maintenance of paving, the price of taxis, limited 'blue badge' parking and misuse of the 'disabled' parking bays in the area. The ongoing closure of bridges over the river and under the railway line has caused a lot of disruption and makes it harder for people to access

support and shopping in West Oxford. Many spoke positively about access for bicycles, although some residents were concerned about cyclists using footpaths and going too fast.

1.6 Child Education and Childcare

A relatively small number of the residents we spoke to had children, and much of what we learned came from organisations providing childcare to those living in the area. There seems to be a pattern of reducing numbers of young families in the area, which is perceived as a threat to the community and to the ongoing viability of the two primary schools. Older children must travel further to go to secondary school. There are local opportunities for pre-school activities and nursery care, which are often very highly thought of by those who use them. However, some residents do not use them because of cost and/or perceptions that they are not culturally appropriate.

There is an adventure playground locally, and a range of sporting and leisure activities are available for children and young people, either in the area or nearby. Again, cost and cultural differences present barriers for some people. We did not find any project specifically aimed at young people (16-18) in the area, and there were no spaces in which they were explicitly allowed to congregate. However, there were several interesting projects with a wider geographical remit that were accessible to all young people from across the city.

1.7 Crime, safety and nuisance

Most of the people we spoke to and who responded to our online survey said they felt safe in the area, particularly during the day. Some felt that the closure of the gas pipe footbridge (which crosses the river from Grandpont to Friars Wharf) left them choosing between a crossing perceived as unsafe (the old gasworks rail bridge) or not crossing at all. There were some concerns about people sleeping rough and dealing drugs in Grandpont nature reserve, although the consensus among local agencies was that the former were rarely an actual threat. The housing and homelessness services reported that the area was relatively 'quiet' in terms of drug use and crime and was therefore often a good option for people trying to escape a life of addiction and crime. As with any large city, there were some comments about drunkenness, noise and antisocial behaviour late at night, particularly around Park End Street and the railway station.

1.8 Community

Community is a subjective concept, but many people living in the area clearly do feel a strong sense of attachment to the place and to one another. The complex history of the area means that some people are still a part of the community while not actually living there, while other residents see themselves as living in Oxford without having a strong local connection. Community membership can be an important insulator from hardship and loneliness, and often provides useful connections to knowledge and resources. As such it is an important social determinant of health. Many of our recommendations are about building communities by extending the environmental and social resources available to people and linking them more effectively to those in neighbouring areas.

As well as communities organised in places, we found that groups of people had built common ground in several other ways. Parents of young children, older adults, people who were homeless or had recently escaped homelessness often had strong connections with one another, as did people living in social housing (particularly in the Friars Wharf/St Ebbe's area, which perhaps had more of the character of an 'estate' than the discontinuous blocks in St. Thomas). There were some important limitations in our work. We were unable to make contact with minority ethnic communities in the area, and it seems likely that there were communities of youths and young adults who did not talk to us.

Fostering bonds within and between communities requires spaces and opportunities for people to connect. We found that there was a small and diminishing number of venues for locals to meet with one another. Many of the pubs, clubs and cafes in the area had closed, and those that survived were often looking for the business of visitors, students and better-off residents. There are some interesting new projects providing community spaces as well as ideas to transform older buildings, and there are a small number of affordable meeting rooms in the area and at its borders. Creative residents in two of the spaces we visited had formed their own *ad hoc* social areas with improvised furniture.

People were almost universally positive about the green and blue spaces in the area, which were well-used in the daytime. Well-maintained outdoor spaces seemed to have a positive effect on people's wellbeing and sense of community, even if they used them alone rather than as places to meet or exercise with others. There were concerns about new developments in the area eroding these precious resources, or re-purposing them towards tourists.

Residents often talked about the need to find cheap or free things to do. This seemed particularly important for older adults and parents of young children. Church groups are very active in the area and offer a great deal, although the religious character of the organisations can put some people off even when events are intended to be for everyone.

There were also opportunities for people in the area to connect with neighbours, for example at the community centres in West and South Oxford. There was a lot of goodwill from organisations and groups that bordered the area, often accompanied by a frank admission that those living in the area had been poorly served. Limited resources (both money and people) were often a reason why outreach was ineffective.

2 Summary Recommendations

In the report, we included suggestions which are listed after every part of the section titled *Assets, Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement*, and have been reproduced alongside one another for ease of access in the *Recommendations* section under the three themes detailed below. Though some ideas have been contributed by the project team, many have come directly from local support organisations and residents. They have not always been 'filtered' and some are direct quotes. Nevertheless, there is a lot of consistency about what people have said, for example about restoring the sense of community in the area and providing a better physical and social environment for residents.

The rapid speed at which data for this report was collected has precluded a consensus process around the recommendations, although a draft report was circulated to and discussed by members of the steering group and some of the organisations that have participated. Consequently, we recommend that those responsible for implementation keep an open mind about emerging opportunities and different ideas for meeting some of the needs we have identified.

The recommendations we are making fall into one or more of three broad categories. The first could be termed 'community advocacy', while the second and third categories are respectively 'co-ordination' and 'development'.

Community advocacy refers to issues that can only be resolved by the responsible legal bodies. These included increased provision of health and social care services, improving affordability of and access to housing, better transport infrastructure and public transport, and re-establishing liaison between agencies responsible for public safety. There were also smaller specific issues which people asked us to take up. These included provision of Speech and Language Therapy at South Oxford Family Room, pushing repairs to pavements and bridges that connected the area to West Oxford, and reviewing the arrangements for refuse collection where they were clearly not working properly.

Many of the issues we encountered will not be surprising. Often local organisations, groups and individuals have been working to resolve them for years. With resources under pressure there often wasn't time for people to co-ordinate activities and schemes with one another, for example around timings, promotion and publicity, outreach and volunteering. A lot of the suggestions we had were around improving co-ordination and sharing resources and ideas. These are the kinds of issues that could be tackled through some combination of small grant funding and development work. Areas where we felt co-ordination could be improved included enterprise support, the availability of free and low-cost activities for people unable to work because of age or disability, money and welfare advice, the many projects aimed at reducing food poverty and food waste, and leisure and outdoor pursuits for children and young people. Volunteering was important both as a means of increasing capacity for existing projects, and as a strategy for improving the accessibility of projects that were not perceived as 'for us' by some communities. We were also made aware of Local Area Co-ordination and Social Prescribing projects that also have the potential to link people directly to informal supports.

The final category of recommendations relates to the scope for new initiatives or developments. These might overlap with or emerge from co-ordination. For example, many tenants of the different social landlords had similar complaints about repairs and maintenance. Bringing tenants together through meetings and perhaps eventually some sort of association could bring different elements of the local community together, and to surface common issues. Such a group might ultimately initiate its own projects, for example the development of social spaces and recreation areas on the sites of some blocks of social housing. The clearest 'ask' of residents was for a community space for their own use. While a new community centre might seem unrealistic, there are many initiatives and

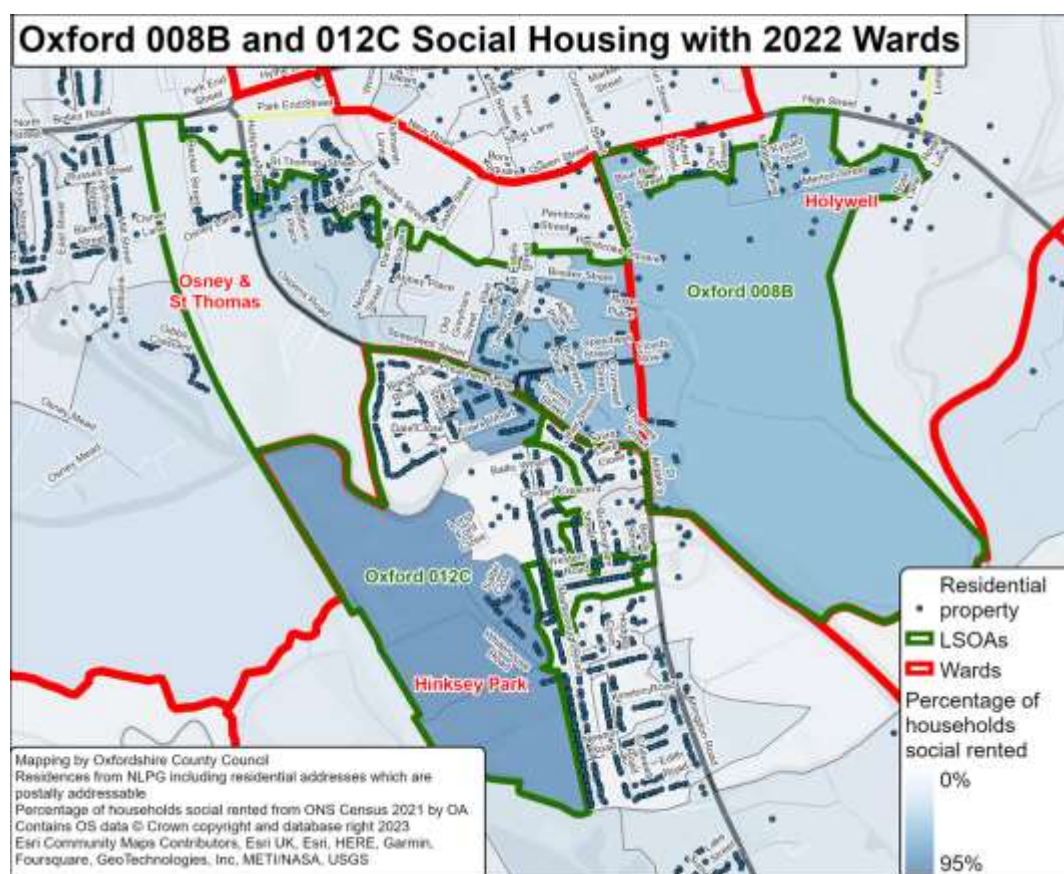
organisations that could develop in this direction. Makespace currently runs a project on Frideswide Square, and we heard about plans to develop a community space in St Thomas Church. Other Community Centres in South and West Oxford could potentially offer support in developing a new centre, but in the meanwhile might increase outreach and 'satellite' projects if grant funding were available. There were also suggestions about unused spaces owned by Oxford University, unlet shops and the proposed Oxpens development. All these avenues could be explored further if grant funding and/or development worker time were available for that purpose.

3 Background

The immediate precursor to this project was the Director of Public Health Annual Report (OCC 2020). This reported data from the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) showing that despite being one of the wealthiest counties in the country, Oxfordshire contained 10 wards which feature areas within the 20% most deprived in England.

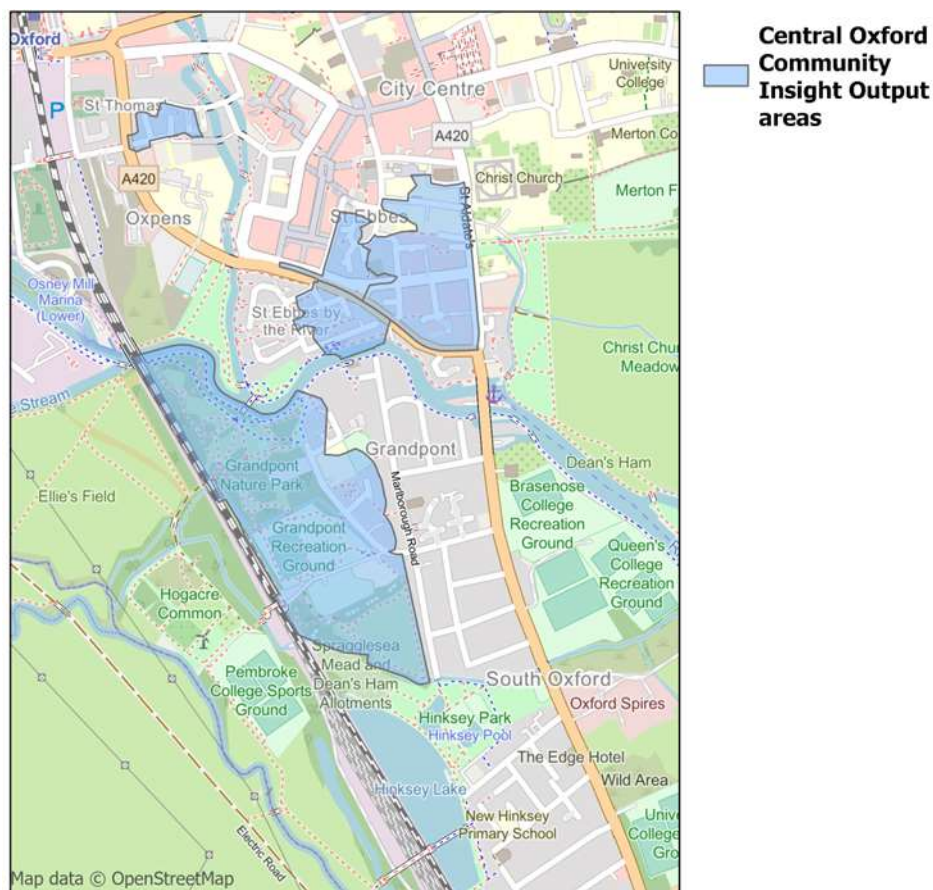
A subsequent analysis by the County Council Public Health team found that one of the areas fell in what was previously the Carfax ward but since a boundary change, now straddled the Osney and St. Thomas and Holywell wards. Due to the high student population in the area, the project focussed on the areas within central Oxford with high concentrations of social housing. When compared to Oxford averages, these areas were found to have a higher rate of household deprivation. Further detail on this is contained in the accompanying data pack for this Community insight profile.

Figure 1 Social Housing within Osney, Hinksey and Holywell Wards



Higher concentrations of social housing appeared in three 'patches' within the wider area.

Figure 2 Areas with High Concentrations of Social Housing



Mapping by Oxfordshire County Council

In July 2023, Community Glue CIC was commissioned to co-ordinate the generation of community insights with a range of locally based organisations and groups to:

- Understand what the experience is of those living in the areas in relation to health and wellbeing.
- Outline the health outcomes and the factors that influence them and bring this to life through the voices of the community.
- Provide information and recommendations for local organisations, stakeholders and residents working together to improve health and wellbeing of the community in the bespoke areas and beyond.

Having now completed our insight gathering, we know that people living in these areas use many different terms to describe their communities. For the purpose of this report, we are describing the locality as St. Thomas, St Ebbe's, Friars Wharf and Grandpont (hereafter 'the area').

Health in St. Thomas, St Ebbe's, Friars Wharf and Grandpont

As well as the biological factors that are known to impact on health within specific geographical areas, social factors also have a significant impact. The Director of Public

Health Report for Oxfordshire characterises these as stemming from the social community and living environment, people’s wellbeing and connection, and their lifestyle choices and behaviours (OCC 2020). Michael Marmot and colleagues have produced perhaps the best known work on the social determinants of health, and identified the following interacting factors that shape health and wellbeing:

“...material circumstances, the social environment, psychosocial factors, behaviours, and biological factors. In turn, these factors are influenced by social position, itself shaped by education, occupation, income, gender, ethnicity and race. All these influences are affected by the socio-political and cultural and social context in which they sit.”

Marmot 2010ⁱ

In our work, we have been concerned with the social and cultural factors that impact on barriers and enablers of health and wellbeing. To gain insight into these social and cultural factors, it has been helpful to talk to people in groups as well as individuals, and to consider their comments in the context of the history of the area.

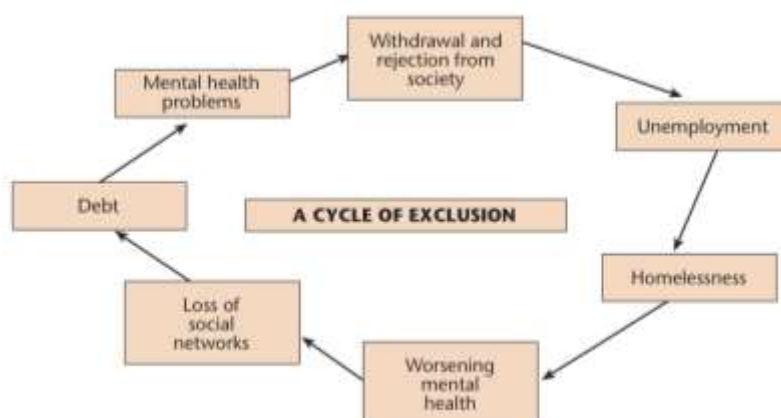
It has long been understood that poverty and poor health are closely linked. Since the 1980s measures of deprivation have been used as a way of looking at the wider factors that impact on health and disability (Burchardt 2003). These have been conceptualised in different ways. In the 1990s and early 2000s, it was common to think of them in terms of ‘social exclusion’. An early definition was that a person was socially excluded if:

“...(a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society and (c) he or she would like to so participate.”

Burchard et al 1999:229ⁱⁱ

Health relates to social exclusion as one of a series of factors that produce circular compounding effects. For example, in mental health:

Figure 3 A cycle of exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit 2004:20)



In our work profiling the area, we have been conscious not only of these factors, but also the ways in which they interact at an individual level. To gather insight about how they affect people, we have focussed on the generation and analysis of qualitative data to complement the quantitative data available through for example the IMD, the 2021 Census and the Oxfordshire County Council Residents' Survey 2022.

3.1 History

Dating back to mediaeval times, the three areas we researched have distinct histories, many people in St Thomas, St Ebbe's (including Friars Wharf) and Grandpont seeing themselves as belonging to one of those particular areas, rather than to the city as a whole. St Thomas residents still look more to the West of Oxford, and Grandpont is very much south of the river.

St Thomas and St Ebbe's have long been centres of commerce, trade, and 'nightlife'. Although poor areas, social networks were strong, with many clubs, societies and church groups for young and old, and there was a spirit of shared community sentiment. People found cheap, but often temporary or insecure accommodation in the area. Hostels for homeless people developed through the 20th century. Recent cuts to local authority budgets led to the closure of several hostels in the last decade. Some such as O'Hanlon House survive, but the local population of homeless people continues to increase. The number of rough sleepers in Oxford has multiplied four-fold since 2012.

St Ebbe's was a lively, close-knit district, much of its housing needed improvement, but its redevelopment in the mid-20th century obliterated the good and the bad:

*"[It] overrode the old St Ebbe's, almost as though it had never existed. The dense network of streets disappeared under a huge car park, highways and a shopping arcade. Two small developments of maisonettes and houses created a tenuous link with the old St Ebbe's, but they were isolated from the city by fast roads and the river."*ⁱⁱⁱ

This left the area with a disjointed and disconnected feel, and the clubs and societies (and most of the local pubs) have gone. Residents were dispersed around the council estates of the city, though some returned with new housing developments in the 1980s. Residents had little or no say in what happened to their community. The shock of this upheaval seems to persist in St Ebbe's to this day, perhaps reflected in the sense of powerlessness and invisibility clearly expressed by many of the people we spoke to.

St Thomas housing escaped the wholesale destruction that afflicted St Ebbe's, but it also lost much of its social infrastructure with the developments of the later 20th century. Grandpont on the other hand, fared better. Along with part of St Ebbes, it contained the vast city gasworks, which was a major employer of local people for about 150 years until its closure in the 1960s. When the works were decommissioned and cleared, most of the larger Grandpont site was transformed into a nature reserve, much valued locally, and new social housing at Riverside Court and Salter Close. Residents were not 'cleared' as happened north of the river, and the old connections to communities on the Abingdon Road persist.

4 Methodology

4.1 Aims

Over the spring of 2023 the remit for the insight-gathering process was developed by a steering group of local agencies. The objectives of the insight-gathering process were to:

- a. Understand what the experience is of those living in the areas in relation to health and wellbeing.
- b. Outline the health outcomes and the factors that influence them and bring this to life through the voices of the community.
- c. Provide information and recommendations for local organisations, stakeholders and residents working together to improve health and wellbeing of the community in the bespoke areas and beyond.

The terms of the agreement between the City Council and Community Glue also included the objectives of identifying:

- d. Strengths and assets in the area that support and enable their health and wellbeing - what matters to the local community.
- e. Challenges to their health and wellbeing and what they think would help to address these.
- f. Impacts of the cost of living.

Elements of the study design aimed at meeting these objectives are bracketed below [a-f].

4.2 Methods

Qualitative Data

Qualitative methods are often appropriate when investigating lived experiences^{iv}. Suggested approaches to data generation included attending community events, interviews and focus groups with individual residents and community groups/organisations. To allow participants to focus on the issues that were important to them, a semi-structured approach was adopted [a,b]. This flexible method also enabled data generation in situations that were unpredictable (for example at a community social event), making completion of a structured questionnaire unlikely [a,b].

To enable data analysis to take place quickly, a framework approach was adopted [c]^v. The approach uses a framework based on a set of codes organised into categories that has been jointly developed by investigators. In this case, an initial framework for qualitative data was developed from suggested questions provided by the project steering group [d,e,f]^{vi}. These were discussed and developed within the team and agreed by the project steering group (see Data Framework and Topic Lists in appendices). Framework analysis is a popular approach where investigators have different disciplinary backgrounds^{vii}. In this case there were five people involved in data generation (three from Community Glue, one from Makespace and one from Oxford City Council).

The approach to sampling was purposive and aimed at maximising diversity in the sense that our remit was to try and access *“...residents from all age groups, representing the range of communities in the area with a focus on areas experiencing disadvantage including those who may not typically take part in and complete survey style questionnaires ... including residents not involved in community groups and organisations...”* as well as the full range of agencies providing support and services in the area. The main approaches to making contact with residents and local support agencies included:

- Posters in shared spaces and fliers posted to all residents where letterboxes were accessible.
- A ‘landing page’ on the Community Glue web site, promoted through social media networks connected with the area.
- Brokering of contacts through the steering group and other key informants
- Snowball sampling (asking participants who else we should talk to).

To promote participation amongst economically disadvantaged groups, a £10 shopping voucher was offered to private individuals giving their time to the project.

To allow time for analysis, a cut-off date of 6th October 2023 was set, although in fact several meetings did take place the following week. During this time conversations took place with 28 people from organisations active in the area, and 30 local residents (some respondents fell into both categories). Data was coded at source by the relevant members of the team. Additional qualitative data were derived from free text answers from 20 respondents to the online survey (below) and 3 unsolicited emails and texts. These were then compiled according to the data framework described above. The process of compiling the data allows for re-coding for consistency and the refinement of sub-categories.

Qualitative research typically does not aim to produce findings that are generalisable from the sample to a larger population. In the present report we have included quotes from participants and some detail about the context of interactions in lieu of thick description, and attempted to work reflexively within the time available.

Quantitative Data

As well as the qualitative data, we developed a quantitative survey hosted by SurveyMonkey^{viii}. Questions were developed from those provided by the steering group and optimised for mobile phone use in an attempt to reach *“...those who may not typically take part in and complete survey style questionnaires.”* This involved considerably reducing the number of questions, changing the format to allow viewing in a smaller screen, and the use of ‘skip logic’ to avoid asking incongruous questions (e.g. about type of tenancy to respondents who were owner-occupiers). The survey questions are shown in the appendices. Substantive questions related principally to the services and supports people accessed in and out of the area, alongside the main perceived barriers to health and wellbeing.

In other cases, questions were reproduced directly from sources such as the 2021 census. Colleagues in the public health team analysed demographic data from a range of sources, which are reproduced in the corresponding data pack. The purpose of including these questions and some demographic variables was not to reproduce these larger, better resourced and therefore more reliable investigations but to assess whether the insight gathering process had indeed accessed the full range of local populations. The original intention had also been to collect demographic details for individual participants, but in many cases the practical circumstances of the contact made this unachievable (e.g. discussion with one participant who stopped us for a chat while we were handing out fliers in the rain, or coffee morning with older residents some of whom had cognitive impairments).

The online survey was again promoted through social media, fliers, posters and a link on the Community Glue 'landing page'. Responses were received from 28 people, with a further three completing a paper version, making 31 respondents in total. The sample is inherently self-selecting, and in this case skewed towards those owning a home outright or with a mortgage, who made up 2/3 of the 21 people who answered this question. The analysis enabled limited filtering and cross-tabulation to suggest where particular issues or concerns may have been of a particular concern to some. However, there was no attempt to recruit a representative sample of people living in the area, and no calculations of statistical significance have been performed. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise from these results.

5 Assets, Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement

This chapter contains the main results of our investigation of the strengths and assets in the area that support and enable people's health and wellbeing, the challenges to their health and wellbeing and what they think would help to address these. We have considered what matters to the local communities themselves, and explored issues linked to the cost-of-living crisis.

5.1 Work and employment

There was comparatively little comment on work and employment opportunities amongst those we spoke to. Only 3 of 31 respondents to our online survey cited job security as a barrier to wellbeing. As one interviewee commented, Oxford is a high employment area. Another suggested that there is not enough work in the city centre to support the people living in the proposed new residential developments.

Those concerned with people who were homeless (and by implication often also experiencing mental distress, using addictive drugs and commonly in contact with the police and criminal justice system^{ix}) frequently mentioned Aspire. This charity and non-profit company is based in the old St Thomas school in Osney Lane but with services covering differing geographical areas. We spoke to several of their staff who summarised their work in relation to employment. They employ Education, Training and Support Workers who help homeless people (in some cases refugees) to move into employment. Aspire also runs an enterprise development hub, which is based in Cowley, and to which people can self-refer. They are interested in developing links with local businesses who can offer skill-sharing and development.

We spoke to two local business owners, one on Frideswide Square and the other in Paradise Street. One commented that there was nowhere for people to start businesses locally, explaining that the Castle development could have had stalls and booths for this purpose.

"You can almost feel the seeds in the ground, but you've got to water them."

Local Business Owner

Another bemoaned the closure of The Jam Factory, where local workers had previously met for a pint after work. The lack of local social spaces meant that there was nowhere for local entrepreneurs to meet each other.

"I don't even know who lives next door to me. I see their bins go out, but have never met them."

Local Business Owner

Suggestions:

One of the local business owners suggested some sort of mentoring or support group for people, particularly young people wanting to start businesses in the area. This could potentially link with the [Aspire Enterprise Hub](#) and also the wider [Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership](#).

Work-related skills and training

As with employment, this issue received few comments. This is perhaps related to Oxford's global reputation as a centre of learning, and the presence of the County's largest vocational and further education centre on the perimeter of the area ([City of Oxford College](#), run by Activate Learning).

The tables below show the responses to the relevant questions in our online survey (n=31)

Table 1: Survey responses to question 'Work and training/education. Pick the answer that best describes you'

No response	8
I feel able to access local opportunities to learn new skills and/or gain qualifications	2
I have the skills and/or qualifications to find employment	16
None of the above	5

Table 2: Survey responses to question 'How do you use these services or facilities? Training or education for yourself'

Mostly in the area	3
Partly in the area	2
Outside the area	5
Not at all	10
Not answered	11

Only one resident mentioned the availability of work-related training. He had been able to qualify as a tradesperson at Level 2 through an apprenticeship in Oxford, but had to travel to Bristol to find a Level 3 course that wasn't tied to employment. With no secondary schools within the area, it is perhaps unsurprising that young adults would be used to the idea that they would need to travel to find specialist vocational training or education.

With respect to the population who were homeless or living in temporary accommodation, service providers cited Aspire (see 1, above) and [Crisis Skylight](#) as sources of support. Crisis Skylight are based in the Old Fire Station on George Street, a short walk from our area. They use a caseworker service to support people to find appropriate training and apply for jobs. [Emmaus](#) is another Oxford-based service that "...provides accommodation, **work experience, training and support** to people who have experienced homelessness" (our bold). Our impression is that many if not most services aimed at supporting homeless

people in Oxford are co-ordinated with one another, sometimes through formal networks, partnerships and contracting arrangements (see 5, below). Similarly, most homeless people we spoke to did not necessarily see travel to other parts of the city (e.g. Cowley) as a significant barrier to accessing support. Among the providers of homelessness services, there was a sense that training and education support had fallen away during the pandemic and had not yet fully recovered.

The area seems to have a high population of people who are either above working age or unable to work for other reasons (e.g. health/disability or caring/dependent children). For people in this group, 'meaningful activity' other than employment or employment-related training was a significant issue that was raised both by people themselves and the agencies aiming to provide them with support. One of the homelessness providers we spoke to described 'strengths-based' approaches to training, in which people are supported by building on what they can do^x. Often this training aims at developing life skills rather than employment opportunities, but there is sometimes an overlap.

We spoke to a manager at Oxford City Council about vocational training for employment at the Ice Rink and other leisure facilities in the city. He explained that the Council is working with the City of Oxford College and [CIMPSPA](#) to offer training and apprenticeships for young people where leisure/fitness is seen as a viable career, but developments are at an early stage.

Suggestions:

- Many people suggested that lists of meaningful activities, including but not limited to vocational training, would be helpful. Many of these had an educational element (e.g. gardening, cooking).

5.2 Money and poverty

Many of the people we spoke to were affected by poverty, and local service and support providers were clearly aware of this. One homelessness services manager described unprecedented levels of demand for their services in a younger demographic, which he ascribed to austerity, COVID-19, the cost of living crisis and a range of other factors.

"I've seen homelessness figures increase in the years. It's never been this bad."

Experienced Homeless Worker

A surprisingly small fraction of the people answering our online survey said that cost and affordability was a barrier to their wellbeing (23%) and the majority of these (4 out of 7) were owner-occupiers. This arguably shows that precarity also affects those in higher income groups locally.

The mechanisms through which hardship affected people were often complex and highly individual. Often people described issues that could be described as anxiety or depression, which could be impacted by difficult relationships with housing and benefits agencies, and

the difficulties obtaining appropriate support. Some residents spoke in vague terms about 'vulnerable residents' and the kinds of thing that would affect them.

"Life is hard: poverty is the problem".

Local resident

Benefits, money and welfare advice

One resident likened the benefits system to a 'trap' and said that there was nothing locally to help him get out of it. An older resident who had mobility difficulties and lived on the 5th floor of his block explained how when he was being assessed for Attendance Allowance "...the bloke came round at half past 7 in the morning ..." and didn't wait for him to answer the door. This was a typical feeling expressed of the adversarial relationships people experienced.

A lot of the agencies that we spoke to provide support aimed at poverty relief (those addressing food poverty are addressed in 4.6, below). The City Council's Residents Advice service and Citizens Advice have now moved out of St. Aldate's and are meeting with people in a room in the [Westgate Library](#). The new support was criticised by some residents we spoke to. We heard about restricted hours, limited privacy, and sensory overload (lighting, noise). One person said that it feels "degrading" to have no privacy for personal conversations. Another said that the move sends the message "we don't want to know".

The restriction of face-to-face support and its replacement with telephone and online services is clearly not suitable for some people. They told us how some have no mobile phones or have limited data packages or no internet access. Those who did have access talked about the confusion behind finding what they want or getting through to the right person on the phone. The closure of the Co-op Bank in New Road has also caused consternation.

"The Co-op Bank shutting was a major blow – not having a face-to-face option is harder for poorer people who tend to deal more in cash. Post Office pay-ins don't get processed that day. Online banking suits richer people. Changing bank just feels like yet another fight I don't have the energy for."

Older resident

As well as the main money advice services in the statutory and voluntary sector, the Church provides some support through [Christians Against Poverty](#). [St Matthews Church](#) on Marlborough Road offers debt advice, signposting and befriending. [St Ebbe's](#) has a fund to offer interest-free loans to those facing hardship. One of the housing providers, Anchor Housing offers a group called 'Be Wise' which includes financial advice and support with benefits.

Cheap shops and activities

Despite being a major retail centre, residents described a lack of affordable shops in the city centre. Primark was the only example for clothing (compared to several discount outlets and a range of charity shops in Cowley). Some residents are now shopping more on the Botley Road at shops like [Home Bargains](#) and [Aldi](#). However, the multiple bridge closures and associated impact on transport has made this harder.

People have described the limited range of things that can be done for limited or no money (this is discussed in greater detail in 4.10 below). In the winter, this can include places that are warm enough to sit in. Anecdotally the online map of 'warm spaces' in Oxford appears not to be reaching some of the key constituents, perhaps because poor people frequently lack internet access.

Suggestions:

- In conversation with [Hogacre Common](#), (a community space and eco park in Hinskey Park ward) it was suggested that South Oxford Farmers Market could run a Repair Shop – repair rather than buy new (which would be cheaper, and help with learning new skills)
- The West Oxfordshire Community Association ([WOCA](#)) host an IT surgery that would probably get more footfall and therefore be better used at Frideswide Square.
- The agencies offering welfare/benefits advice could be better co-ordinated, with shared publicity. Additional capacity (perhaps in the form of trained volunteers) might also be helpful.
- The City Council have recently produced a leaflet of free things to do in the area. This could be developed and expanded.

5.3 Access to Health and Social Care

As well as issues affecting all residents, we were aware of specific concerns for people who were disabled or had long-term health conditions (who were typically older adults), and also for people using homelessness services (who often also had drug or alcohol-related and mental health issues).

11 of 31 people responding to our online survey stated that either access to health care or a healthcare condition created barriers to their wellbeing. 10 answered 'yes' to the question 'Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?', with three of these saying it affected them a lot.

NHS Primary and Secondary Care

Whenever possible, we asked people about which GP they used. The majority talked about either 19 Beaumont Street (now [Beaumont Elms Practice](#)) or [Luther Street Medical Centre](#), a specialist practice for people experiencing homelessness. However, it was interesting to note that people used GPs throughout the city, often as a result of retaining their registration when they moved into the area. We spoke to people who were registered at various practices located in the Jericho Medical Centre and in Walton Street, at the [St Clement's surgery on Iffley Rd](#), [Market Street](#), [Donnington Health Centre](#), Kennington, and at the St [Bartholemew's Medical Centre on Lake Street](#), which reopened in August after a

period of closure. One respondent explained what a huge difference this had made to her. People were almost universally positive about the primary care services they received.

The most frequently mentioned GP practice was 19 Beaumont Street. Almost everyone was very complimentary, for example about the speed of getting an appointment, and that the appointment was long enough. Other than Luther Street, 19 Beaumont Street was the only practice reputed to take on people who were homeless. There was some concern about the then-forthcoming restructuring in October 2023.

"19 Beaumont St will be providing services to Botley patients from both 19 Beaumont St and Botley Medical Centre from 1st October 2023. We are working closely with the team at Manor Surgery who will be taking over the care of patients at Kennington Health Centre."
Statement on Beaumont Elms Practice website

The second most commonly mentioned practice was Luther Street. Most of the residents we spoke to at O'Hanlon House were registered there, and local homelessness workers said they usually featured strongly. One explained that while they were particularly good for clients with mental health issues, they usually tried to move people with addiction issues to Beaumont Street because Luther Street is so close to O'Hanlon House. Luther Street enjoyed a reputation amongst homeless people for being easy to get quick appointments, but one commented that morale there seemed to have dropped recently.

"...it isn't good for people to hang around there."

As well as primary care services, older adults often needed to use hospitals. One explained that telephone appointments at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Clinic had replaced her face-to-face appointments during COVID-19 and continued in this format afterwards. This suited her as she found the journey challenging. Another explained how despite having a car, she usually didn't drive to hospital appointments because parking was such an issue. She was concerned about the number of services apparently being provided by the private sector.

We spoke to two people, one from an African background, who mentioned the difficulty that people from some ethnic groups had in gaining access to healthcare services.

Social services (local authority children's services and adult social care)

People did not mention these frequently, and where they did it was often in connection with another issue, typically housing. Two residents were complimentary about the support they got from their social workers when applying for social housing. Another was concerned about child protection issues such as school truancy, but seemed aware that services were now more thinly stretched in terms of staffing and resources.

Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)

There was a wide range of support, often targeted on people experiencing homelessness.

We spoke to people from [Elmore Community Support](#), [St. Mungo's](#) in Floyds Row, [Aspire](#) –

both the main project and the residential project in Becket Street, [Homeless Oxfordshire](#) and other projects operating under the banner of the [Oxfordshire Homeless Movement](#). We were particularly lucky to partner with the [Lived Experience Advisory Forum](#) (Leaf) who helped us to talk to homeless people as well as the agencies providing them with support.

Despite what appears to be a broad range of services for homeless people, many found it difficult to access drug and alcohol services, or mental health support because they ‘didn’t fit the criteria’. To some extent this picture was reflected by professionals, who patiently explained the complex patchwork of contracts for service provision, geographical areas covered, clinical thresholds for eligibility and processes for prioritising. The general picture was that one off services are being spread more thinly over a wider geographical area, making it harder for agencies to proactively support people with the most chaotic lifestyles (‘assertive outreach’) or respond quickly in a crisis. We were told that reductions in mental health professionals meant that some homelessness services that had offered specific support couldn’t do so any longer. Perhaps partly as a result of this, some homeless people were accessing services in other parts of the city, for example the [Oxfordshire Mind](#), [Restore](#) and [Turning Point](#) services on the Cowley Road and in Cowley Centre.

Alongside these commissioned supports, there are others provided by Church and volunteer groups. For example, St Matthew’s Church runs a [health and wellbeing course](#) open to people who aren’t part of the congregation that uses the Mind ‘8 ways to wellbeing’ model. An outreach worker based in St. Ebbe’s spends a lot of his time helping people access health and social care support. The Ice Rink runs disability-inclusive sessions on Thursdays between 13:30 and 15:45. The [Terrence Higgins Trust](#) offers sexual health advice from their premises on Rectory Road, but also on a sessional basis in the downstairs room at the [Jolly Farmers](#) pub on Paradise Street.

Housing Associations and Social Landlords

As well as their roles in providing housing, social landlords often route people to additional support. One Housing Officer explained how people are supposed to disclose health conditions on a form when they move in, but many don’t – presumably in fear of social stigma or embarrassment. Levels of mental distress are apparently high, as are numbers of people with diagnosed psychiatric or neurological conditions, many of whom reportedly self-medicate with cannabis – another reason why disclosure is low. Housing and Tenancy Management Officers relayed that they would like to help more people but can’t do so until approached. Social landlords are also involved in facilitating home-based care, for example by providing key safe access and parking for carers. We heard several stories about where these arrangements had broken down, leaving people without care.

Diminishing Services

From the closure of the old residential projects in Simon House and Lucy Faithful House to the apparent difficulties in accessing community-based mental health support, there was an impression that health and social care supports were becoming progressively harder to access.

"People who are suffering [poor] mental health need help there and then. If the area is being developed there should be somewhere to just drop in."

Local Resident

"Let's get rid of all of the amenities for all the people that really need them".

Local Business Owner

Suggestions:

- The obvious suggestions made by many people related to more help being available, and more accessible. In particular, open access mental health support close to the city centre was thought to be important.
- Additional locally-based training for staff working for social landlords would help them develop a picture of local issues and the supports that area have available.
- One volunteer at South Oxford Community Centre (SOCC) would like to start offering reminiscence therapy via Age UK locally – currently people have to travel to the dementia cafe in Cowley. More could be done to support the development of these kind of initiatives and sustain them subsequently.
- Two people suggested more support to help people improve their wellbeing through activities like gardening and dog-walking. We are aware of social prescribing services in the area, but this could also be improved if Local Area Co-ordination is introduced, which is being piloted in the County Council's draft Health and Wellbeing strategy.

5.4 Housing and Homelessness

The area at the centre of this project is partly defined by the high concentration of social housing stock, and as we have already noted this part of the city has a long historical tradition of providing temporary shelter for homeless people. Because a specific part of our remit was to focus on residents of social housing and the services and supports available to them, we collected a large amount of data in this area. During analysis it became apparent that a comprehensive picture of both social housing and homelessness provision would necessitate an investigation of these across the city and county, because this is the level at which services are organised. This would clearly go beyond the remit of the project, and this chapter is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, the aim is to provide enough information to place the provision within the area into context.

While areas of higher social housing stock were the main focus of our work, it is important to remember that the area also contains properties that are occupied by their owners, are available for private rental, and which are temporarily inhabited by transient populations of students and tourists.

Social Housing

Early on in the project we benefited from walking tours of the area, during which very knowledgeable City Councillors pointed out the diverse array of social housing, seemingly managed by an equally varied range of providers. The City Council still directly manages

many properties, while others are let by a wide range of providers including Green Square Accord, A2Domision, Peabody and others. Some of the homeless support organisations also rent or own properties in the area that are used for ‘move on’ from hostels or direct access for people sleeping rough (see 4.5.2 below). In some cases, individual buildings are clearly co-located in something that could be described as an ‘estate’, for example the blocks to the east of Trinity Street along Friars Wharf. In others, for example those assembled at the bottom of St Ebbe’s Street and Littlegate Street, they are separate blocks surrounded by the other amenities typical of a bustling city centre.

Wherever possible we spoke to the social landlords, who were often generous in giving us their time, and inviting us to events such as coffee mornings and residents’ meetings where we could talk to people directly. We are also grateful to the Community Champions and outreach workers who distributed fliers, social media posts and helped us build trust with residents. Despite the many conversations we had, we know we did not speak to everyone, so our report will inevitably contain omissions.

The relationship between social housing provision within the area, and between the area and other parts of the city and county, is extremely complex. Many people have come to the area through the various systems for allocating ‘Council Housing’ that have existed over the past 70 years. It is important to know that historically tenancies have been organised across the city, and sometimes even the county. For example, we heard that people from St Ebbe’s were relocated to Berinsfield when the old terraced housing was demolished in the 1950s, and talked to people in the area who had family members in other estates within the city. Often people had ‘chosen’ to move to the area because a property had become available, rather than because they wanted to live in the area. We discuss the impact of this on ‘community of place’ in 10, below.

The current system for affordable housing (known as the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing, or ORAH) has been in place since 2019^{xi}, and it is used to allocate properties available through the partnership the City Council has developed with the major social housing providers in the city. The system is complex but can be summarised as follows:

- Once accepted as eligible for the Housing Register by the Council, applicants are placed in one of 5 ‘bands’ that reflect broad categories of housing need. The length of time people have been waiting is considered alongside the ‘band’ to determine those at the top of the ‘waiting list’.
- Vacant properties are advertised, sometimes only to specific sub-groups of eligible tenants (e.g. those who are statutorily homeless, or those needing supported or sheltered accommodation). Eligible tenants may then ‘bid’ for tenancies through an online system or in writing.
- Shortlists of eligible tenants are compiled, then a decision is made based on a wide range of factors, not simply position on the ‘list’. Additional issues considered include whether tenants have previously exhibited anti-social behaviours.

Some of people’s feedback to us related to the way this system produced unintended (and sometimes undesirable) outcomes. Some single homeless adults living in local shelters or

sleeping rough felt they had “no chance” of getting a property in the area. One woman who had grown up in the area told us the long story of her own period of homelessness, being awarded a property in another estate, and eventually moving back to the area through exchange. One disabled resident told us how when her adult daughter went to college, her housing benefit was reduced because her flat was now ‘too large’ (the ‘bedroom tax’). Another in a similar situation explained how when downsizing, she was expected to take the first option that came up, which might not be accessible and would need expensive adaptations for her disability. This type of bureaucratic pressure risks separating people with illnesses and disability from their support networks within the community. For some people with limited mobility this is clearly a desirable area to live, with good level access to the city centre and amenities.

“It’s lovely living around here”

Disabled Women With Ground Floor Flat

Despite the clear commitment of some staff to provide high quality support to tenants, many experienced difficulties. In that sense the people we spoke to were clearly a self-selecting sample – those who wanted to take the opportunity to make a difference to residents. Complaints most commonly related to grounds and maintenance, and refuse collection. There is a perceived reduction in service across the board, perhaps with the exception of specialist provision for older adults.

One of the Tenancy Management Officers (TMOs) explained the situation to us. There had been a simultaneous attempt to create a single national system for logging tenants’ issues, which was clearly not working. It had also become harder to recruit and retain appropriately qualified grounds and maintenance staff. The result was poor living conditions, and tenants who felt ignored. A resident said of the maintenance service “He’s OK, apart from the vertigo.” meaning that the second floor was never reached. When the TMOs were able to visit, they were overwhelmed with complaints. We saw that with our own eyes in one block, where people emptied into the courtyard to have their say. Often the consequences of poor repair were minor, but the link with people’s sense of wellbeing was obvious.

“I hate living here, I have damp growing in my kitchen. The housing association takes ages to do anything.”

Female resident

“You have to speak to someone in Ealing, who doesn’t know where you are.”

Older Adult

Many people complained of problems with the bins and in particular recycling not being taken because the bins contained the wrong things. Residents in several different properties explained that it wasn’t reasonable to expect people who were often struggling with issues such as mental illness or dementia to remember what went into which bin. This can lead to rubbish not being collected for weeks. Often wheelie bins are very large and shared by many

residents, so pest control can be an issue. One TMO explained the system to us. Once a 'bin' is identified as containing 'contaminated' waste then it needs to be marked for 'special collection'. This means it needs to be reported to the Housing Association, who then report it to the waste collection service, who organise an additional visit to collect it. This can take up to 6 weeks, when routine collections are fortnightly. Consequently, waste builds up. We heard accounts from residents who had personally climbed into bins and sorted through the contents to remove the incorrect material, only to be told by the 'bin man' that they would not remove it because it had been designated 'contaminated'.

Residents often experience these type of issues with maintenance and waste as a kind of collective punishment, as they pay for example for 'special collections' via a service charge. The sense of injustice is particularly acute for people who are in employment and notice the deductions, who perceive that they are paying for work they are doing themselves (e.g. small maintenance jobs, and gardening). Again, many social landlords seem to have complex bureaucratic systems to deal with such complaints, which don't seem to be effective.

Homelessness

Two of the 'big three' facilities in the city centre – Simon House and Lucy Faithful House – were closed following planned budget cuts in 2015^{xii}. O'Hanlon House is still in use but there are concerns about its sustainability:

"I couldn't believe it when they took down Lucy Faithful House. That was huge and so important for the area. They'll come for O'Hanlon house next which will be terrible. It's the only hostel around that will take anyone."

Local Homelessness Project Worker

This concern does not seem to be an issue at the moment (O'Hanlon House is reported to be very cost-effective), but there is a bigger question about the future in relation to larger congregate hostels more broadly. While the number of large 'shelters' has reduced, there are some newer options available to people. ASPIRE maintains places at three houses on Becket Street, one of which is for women only. We heard about Housing First, which is managed by [Connection Support](#). As the name suggests, the service works by arranging housing first and then support for people to work on the other issues, typically mental ill health. Connection also manage the [Homeless Pathway](#), which provides accommodation and support across the county. Interestingly both schemes can involve people moving out of the city. Homelessness services can also move people into the area. The [Oxfordshire Out of Hospital Care Team](#) will sometimes find accommodation in the area for homeless people being discharged from general or psychiatric hospitals.

Homeless people continue to arrive in the area under their own steam. People will often sleep rough in the surrounding parks and green/blue spaces, many of which are served by the City Council's Green Space Officers. They liaise with Oxford Direct Services which maintains the spaces physically, and will try to connect people with the Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (OxSPOT) before issuing evictions. OxSPOT is run by [St.](#)

[Mungo's](#), which also operates 16 short-stay beds locally. They will 'verify' rough sleepers and try to plug them into the network of supports and housing options.

As well as places people can access directly from the streets, there are many other services focussed on homelessness operating in the area, including [homelessness prevention](#), services for [survivors of childhood sexual exploitation](#) and women escaping domestic abuse, schemes aimed at encouraging landlords to support social lettings at a fair rent, and peer support for people moving off the streets. There are also some community-based supports in the area. Christians Against Poverty offers professional, free advice about debt. 7 local churches operate a [Winter Night Shelter](#) which offer overnight accommodation on a rotational night-by-night basis between January and March, and a 'living room' for washing and showering. There is a chaplain to the homeless who spearheads this work. Some businesses in the area are also supportive. The Jolly Farmers pub will allow people to use the toilets and to fill their water bottles as long as they don't 'use or deal' on the premises. Many of the food projects listed under 4.6 below are well-used by homeless people.

Mostly the relationship between the many providers is collegiate and staff seem to get along well with each other. This may be partly due to forums such as the [Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance](#), where commissioners and providers can come together, inter-agency collaborations such as the Out of Hospital Care Team, and contracting arrangements that clarify the roles and responsibilities of different organisation. We were told, though, that the focus is now on getting the best value from a fixed amount of money while demand is increasing. Larger numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers are becoming homeless, as are couples and families losing their homes through 'no fault' evictions. This has inevitably led to gaps in provision, communications breakdowns about individual clients, disruption when services are reconfigured, and anxiety about the future among staff and people using services.

Other housing

We did not talk to many people renting privately or who own their own homes locally, and where we did exchanges were often brief. We were contacted by SENDRA, the Saint Ebbes New Development Residents Association, which has been active in the area for over 40 years. Anecdotally, members are clustered between Trinity Street and Oxpens Meadow. As well as keeping abreast of developments in the area, SENDRA co-ordinates social activities for residents. Owner-occupiers were the greatest proportion of people answering housing-related questions in our online survey. Three highlighted affordable housing as the thing that would most improve the health and wellbeing of people in the area.

Suggestions:

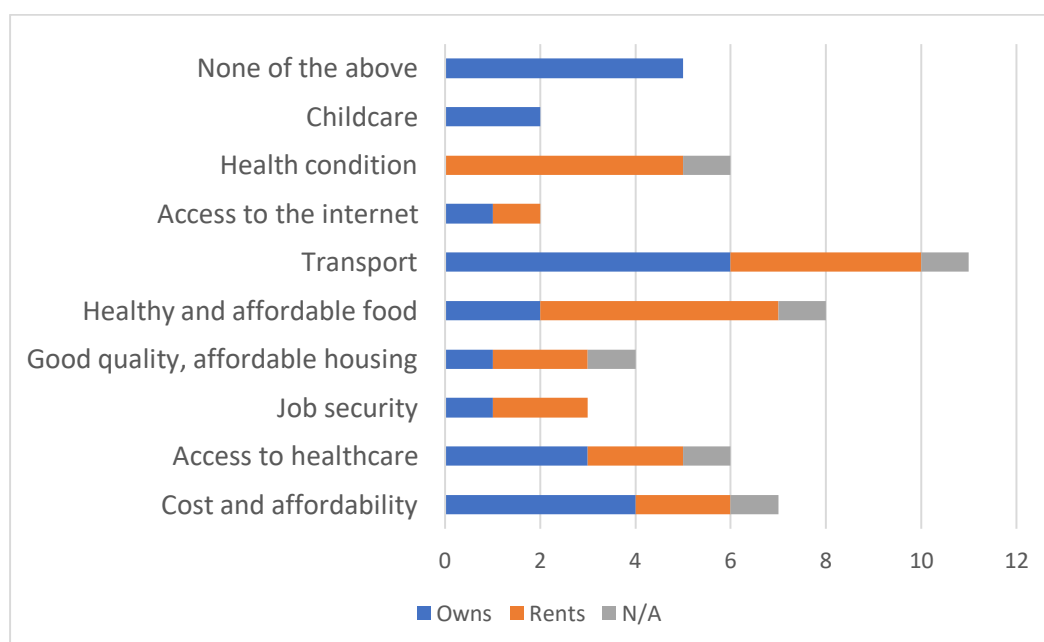
It is clear that affordability and scarcity of housing are linked issues that also impact on the provision of support for homeless people. There is a widely shared perception that the gap between the very rich and those experiencing hardship is growing, a trend that should not be allowed to continue.

- While large-scale facilities such as Lucy Faithful House and Simon House have been knocked down, homeless organisations have pursued short-term lets and fair rents among local landowners. Some have highlighted that Oxford University and the constituent colleges could do more, particularly if (as we have been told) demand for student accommodation has reduced since the pandemic. More could be done to find short-term lets, and held those projects currently using them to obtain longer-term arrangements.
- There is also a need for more long-term social housing, particularly for people with connections to the area, including those in shelters who will not 'move on' to independent living.
- The possible re-development of O'Hanlon House perhaps presents opportunities as well as challenges. While retaining capacity in the city centre is essential in our view a mixed-use site with social housing and day services would help meet needs that are currently not being met.
- The women-only house run by Aspire on Becket Street is clearly a success, and Homeless Oxfordshire also run some single sex provision on Botley Road and in East Oxford in partnership with Turning Point. While these are welcome, there appears to be a need for more single sex support.
- Relationships between tenants and social landlords in the area are clearly at a low ebb. Some sort of outreach work, perhaps combined with the collective meetings, might help to surface issues more effectively. This could be supported by e.g. a tenants association or less formal semi-social meetings that HOs/TMOs could attend.

5.5 Food & nutrition

Food was an issue identified by both residents and those agencies providing support in the area.

Figure 4 What barriers have you experienced in looking after yourself?



Shopping

We also asked people where they used the following facilities:

Table 3: Food sources used by people responding to online survey

	Corner shop/newsagents (small items)	Larger shops (bulk buy or specialist)	Restaurant or take-away
Mostly in the area	10	4	6
Partly in the area	8	4	5
Outside the area	1	10	8
Not at all	2	2	2

This picture was largely the same for the residents we spoke to. Price was often an issue, with some people being prepared to travel further to save money.

People shopping locally typically purchased food from the two Sainsbury supermarkets in Frideswide Square and in the Westgate Centre, or at the Tesco Local at the top of Speedwell Street. Some noted that other more 'highbrow' outlets sometimes had bargains. Home delivery services had become more popular with residents of Friars Wharf.

When people travelled further for larger shops, transport was often a barrier. Some who used to shop at Aldi on Botley Road were no longer able to because of the bridge closures. One was concerned that the proposed bus gates would prevent him from doing his weekly shop on the ring road.

Free and low-cost food

We found out about many free or low-cost food projects in or near to the area. Some of these had food and nutrition as their main focus, while others were aiming to reduce food waste. Both provided significant benefits.

West Oxford Community Association hosts a [community larder project](#) with [SOFEA](#) and [Fairshare](#) accessible to all residents in the city. For a fixed weekly subscription, people can arrive on Friday afternoon and collect a bag of food. They used to have a budget that would allow them to discreetly provide free memberships to people who were financially disadvantaged, but the funding ran out. Anecdotally, many people who received the subsidies no longer attend. SOFEA were also involved in a [Community Kitchen](#) that operated in St. Frideswide Church on a Friday afternoon. They produced 75 meals that people could eat on the premises or take away. Recent regulatory problems caused a temporary closure, but the scheme should have re-started by the time this report is published (late December). SOCC operates a [Community Fridge](#) that provides free ingredients on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12.00-2.00pm. They also provide a community café, but the staffing resource is currently stretched and both services would benefit from additional volunteers. There is a 'money behind the bar' scheme so that better off residents can pay for a meal for someone on a reduced income.

In the city centre the church is involved in several food schemes. [St. Matthews Church](#) provides a drop-in lunch, while St Ebbe's apparently run a 'sit and knit' group for older adults at which food is also available.

[Hogacre Common](#) hosts the [OxGrow](#) community garden, which has the potential to provide more local people with the opportunity to grow, or learn to grow, low-cost food.

Suggestions:

- OxGrow, and schemes on the periphery of our area, are happy to be involved in some sort of outreach to promote themselves to residents. This seems like a good idea, although we heard from two homeless couples who prefer the schemes on the periphery because of the 'soup kitchen' stigma.
- The discreet funding of community larder membership seemed to work better than schemes that require people to self-identify as 'poor' to gain access. This approach could be reinstated and expanded.
- There seems to be a lot of 'churn' in the organisations providing food and meals, with some schemes apparently capping demand by relying on word of mouth rather than publicity. At least one service we came across had been affected by food and hygiene regulations, which might be another explanation why some schemes keep a lower profile. Some sort of central project for supporting compliance and co-ordinating publicity might be helpful. In other parts of the city and county co-ordinating food provision has created a springboard for other community initiatives (see e.g. the [OX4 Food Crew](#)).
- Subject to the identification of a suitable community space or spaces, a community larder/fridge scheme could be established more locally.

5.6 Transport and access

Transport and access into and out of the area were issues we knew would be of interest. Changes to the infrastructure across the city have been a hot topic in local news media for the last two years, and anyone regularly moving between West Oxford and the city centre will be acutely aware of the closure of the railway bridge and its impact.

One of the ways we sought to investigate the issue further was via two questions in our online survey. We asked people how easy they found it to move about within the area, and between the area and other parts of the city. 26 people answered these questions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people generally did find it easier to get around inside the area than to visit other parts of the city, but typically not by much. Only 5 people found it much easier (more than 1 'standard deviation') compared to 21 who found it similar. None of this group reported having a disability or long-term illness.

Our online survey also asked people about barriers to wellbeing. 11 of 31 people responding identified transport as a barrier, and five of these did report having a disability or long-term illness.

People with mobility difficulties

Encouragingly, we did not have contact with anyone who was unable to leave their homes, although of course the people we spoke to were a 'self-selecting sample' and may not be representative of the wider community in the area. The area is generally flat, with good access to the city centre, and the railway station and bus stops.

"I take the scooter to the parks and around the river."

Disabled Women

The barriers they told us about typically related to:

- Poor maintenance of paving, which also makes it difficult to get to the railway station and bus stops.
- The price of taxis, which many people use.
- The difficulty of getting under the railway bridge with a mobility aid (although one person did report being escorted).
- Limited 'blue badge' parking places in the city centre.
- Concern about the new transport schemes and how they would be affected (particularly the Zero Emissions Zone).
- Use of 'disabled' parking spaces in flats by people looking for free parking (which also blocks carers, who often use the spaces when providing domiciliary care to residents).
- People with mental health or addiction issues frequently do not have free bus passes, which makes it hard for them to access supports in other parts of the city such as East Oxford, where many are now based.

Cycling

People were usually positive about cycling. Some residents were concerned that delivery services on cycles (and scooters) went too fast and posed a danger to pedestrians. As in the wider population, the issue of segregated cycle lanes was popular among some people (presumably cyclists). Some cited pro-bike policies as a reason for living in the area. One suggested a need for more bicycle parking in the area.

"Cyclists do not obey the rules".

"It is a cycling city"

Buses

People were generally positive about the availability of buses. One older man was very happy he could still take his dog for walks in his old haunts by taking it on the bus. One suggestion was for better bus routes across the city, instead of the radial in-and-out model that requires people to take two journeys.

"There are buses to everywhere."

Trains

Again, people were typically happy to be so close to a railway station, although some complained of noise, particularly at night.

Motoring

As well as the new transport policies, motorists reported concerns about the heavy traffic on the Abingdon Road, and limited parking in the area.

New transport policies

People were concerned about the new policies (Zero Emissions Zone, Ultra-Low Emissions Zone and Bus Gates) and how they would be affected. As with the wider population, opinions were divided, with some very much in favour with others facing longer commutes and more stress. One commented that the new systems had been designed 'in reverse' (i.e. for people working in the city but living in the suburbs, not vice versa). Another was concerned that the driving restrictions were being put in place before the necessary changes to improve cycle lanes and bus routes. These concerns were shared by staff in some agencies servicing the area, who were worried that driving restrictions would add time to journeys from bases in other parts of the county and city, effectively reducing the level of service.

Bridge closures

This was the access issue that came up most frequently in discussions with residents. The gas pipe foot bridge connecting Friars Wharf and Grandpont has apparently been closed for about two years, making it difficult for residents on one side to access services and supports on the other. People have pointed out that although alternatives are available, they may not be practical with young children, or might add so much time that the journey is no longer 'worth it'. Some were reluctant to use alternatives (like the old gasworks rail bridge) because of safety concerns.

"...the biggest inconvenience you could ever ask for."

Suggestions:

- Repairs to the various bridges are in hand, although flagging their significance to policy-makers might expedite matters.
- Similarly repairs to pavements are a well-known issue that should already be a priority.
- One resident who used to work on the railways suggested that it might be possible to get buses closer by using a little-known gate on the station site.

5.7 Child education & childcare

We did not make any attempt to meet directly with children, and instead spoke to parents and others providing them with care and support. The area is serviced by two primary schools - [St. Ebbe's](#) (a grant-aided Church of England Primary School) and [New Hinksey](#) (another C of E school) on the far side of Hinksey Park. There are no secondary schools in the area, the nearest being [Greyfriars Catholic School](#) (formerly St Gregory the Great) and [Oxford Spires Academy](#), both in East Oxford. On the edge of the area is [Grandpont](#), a nursery school for 3-5 year-olds with government funded 15 and 30 hour places.

"... Grandpont Nursery School provided an excellent preschool education for my son with a heavy focus on outdoor play".

Pre-school

Grandpont Nursery School backs onto the [South Oxford Family Room](#) (SOFR). This is well-used by parents from around the city, but is not commonly used by parents living north of the river in St Ebbe's and Friars Wharf. People from both sides of the river told us that there is something of a cultural barrier, which is something SOFR are keen to address. When we visited, parents were enthusiastic, particularly about the role it played in socially orienting their children after the COVID-19 lockdown. The project opened after the statutory children's centres were closed and is entirely dependent on donations. This makes outreach work difficult.

"...an amazing, supportive environment."

During the pandemic SOFR used to have access to a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), but the cost could apparently no longer be justified. This was an important asset for parents locally. All the parents we spoke to praised the project highly. One noted gleefully that there were no parenting classes, which were perceived as patronising. Parents clearly valued the peer support as well as the more formal sessions.

"I'd rather go somewhere you can get a cup of tea."

We were surprised at how many of the parents came from other parts of the city, and even the surrounding towns. Most drove, though some used buses but complained of the frequent need to make 2 journeys – one into Oxford, and another to get out again. Many seemed to value places where they could go for a whole day, rather than moving from one session to another. There seemed to be a wealth of knowledge about other pre-school opportunities in the city. People mentioned that:

- [WOCA](#) is good. It has a cafe and a playground.

- One parent used to use the one(preschool?) at the Kings Centre in Osney before it closed.
- Another uses [Cutteslowe Community Centre](#) on Thursdays.
- There is a resource called [Botley Bridges](#) that provides services for children around the Botley area. They are based in the children's centre next to Botley school.

There are apparently child minders available in the area, although parents living in social housing told us they were unaffordable. Some used the [Community Café](#) at SOCC which was perceived as supportive to parents of young children. The Ice Rink runs parent and Toddler 'Skate Tots' sessions on Monday mornings. We were told these are very good value and very popular - £5.20 for parent and child.

School

Both local Primary schools seem to enjoy good reputations with parents. St Ebbe's was perceived to have strong focus on emotional development, and has a home-school link worker who is especially valuable. Children with disabilities get picked up by minibus. One person told us that parents with disabled children now often struggle to get help from social services. We spoke to parents whose children had attended a range of different secondary schools within the city. The County Council provide [free travel](#) to the nearest available school where children are eligible for places.

Youth projects

There is apparently no youth provision in the city centre geared at young people from the area, and no 'officially designated' space for them to congregate. We were told that young people are using Frideswide Square to gather and skate because there is nowhere else to go. It was also suggested that they could be hanging out in the fields and green spaces on the other side of the river. As their friendship groups may have formed at secondary schools, all of which are in other parts of the city, it seems equally plausible they could be socialising with them or using facilities there.

We heard about several projects with wider geographical remits that young people in the area could access. Oxford City Council runs a scheme called 'Youth Ambition'. The Oxford Hub runs a project called [Schools Plus](#) that aims to tackle educational inequality in Oxford by providing free tutoring and academic support for local pupils aged 7-18.

Play areas and sports

For younger children, there is a play area in Friars Wharf. There is a South Oxford Adventure Playground ([SOAP](#)), which is managed by a local charity that also runs an after school club for accompanied and unaccompanied over 7s on Thursdays and Fridays. Based in Whitehouse Road, it is very close to [Hinksey Park Football Club](#), which has teams for boys and girls of all ages.

Figure 5 Images of play areas at South Oxford Adventure Playground



Active Oxfordshire hosts a number of services aimed at children and young people. Project PT is a subsidised community-based fitness scheme that operates out of Magdalene Road Gym in East Oxford. Oxfordshire County Council's Targeted Youth Support Service grew out of COVID-19, but now has teams of workers running three fixed-term projects. Ice Rink Junior (under 17) sessions cost £10.40 including skate hire. There is a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) in Grandpont, close to the nursery and SOFR.

"They use it [the MUGA] to store the equipment for repairing the pipe bridge. That's about the only use [young people in the area] get out of it."

Youth Worker

Spaces for exercise are not always defined by age group. Spaces for adults (which might also be accessible to children and young people) are described in 4.10 below.

Other supports

St. Ebbe's Church runs a number of activities for children:

- After School Music Club – 6 regulars, around 10 in total have attended. Ages 7-15.
- Photography Club – running in the holidays, ages 10-15.
- Bouncy Castle at the summer event.
- Hogacre Common has a Forest School site used by St Ebbes, New Hinksey and West Oxford Primary schools during term-time.

Demographic changes

There were some indications that the numbers of children and young people in the area were dropping, particularly on the north side of the river. In our online survey, only 3 of 31 people responding experienced a lack of childcare facilities or schools as a barrier to their wellbeing. The following table shows the answers to the question "How do you use nurseries or schools for your child/children?".

Table 4: Responses to question "How do you use nurseries or schools for your child/children?"

Mostly in the area	4
Partly in the area	1
Outside the area	1
Not at all	14
No answer	11

We were repeatedly told about the cultural barriers that prevented children and young people in the area from north of the river from accessing the facilities in Hinksey Park and up the Abingdon Road, but their apparent under-representation could also be partly due to there being fewer of them. We were told that one of the local schools was likely to 'lose' a class if numbers didn't pick up, while another was running at a deficit. With the proportion of social housing in the area reducing and the fraction of owner-occupiers increasing, the number of families with young children may be reducing. One of the local homelessness services told us that while there were many young mothers in the area, very few had 'care' of their children. With children of secondary school age forming their peer groups in other areas and very limited affordable private rentals, it seems that the pressure will be for them to move away.

Suggestions:

- Discussions with the NHS about provision of a Speech and Language Therapist to SOFR might be productive.
- Co-ordinated volunteer recruitment from the St. Ebbe's/Friars Wharf area might help to reduce some of the cultural differences across the river.
- Small grants might enable more outreach.
- It would be helpful to have a physical space that young people can call/make their own.
- We were advised that establishing a Detached Youth Work service would take 2-3 years, but might be worthwhile. This could support some of the young people to participate in activities from which they currently feel excluded.
- There were discussions about low cost or free activities at the Ice Rink specifically aimed at children and young people in the area.

5.8 Crime, safety and nuisance

In our individual and group conversations with residents, we often talked to them about their perceptions of safety and security in the area. These ranged from concerns about violence at one end of the spectrum through to perceptions of the physical environment – dirt and dilapidation – at the other. In our online survey we asked people to compare their perceptions of safety at night and during the day.

Figure 6 Perceptions of safety among people responding to online survey



Among this group, though, very few people felt unsafe, especially during the day. The sample of people completing the survey is not representative of the wider population so no conclusions can be drawn about how people in the area feel in general. The people we spoke to face-to-face also reported feelings on a spectrum between being safe and unsafe. Rather than trying to quantify these perceptions, the commentary below attempts to capture the things that made people feel unsafe and make suggestions about what could be done to improve them.

Safety outdoors

The concerns people had about safety typically related to outdoor places, often at night. People spoke to us about the Churchyard in St Thomas, Oxpens Meadow and the nature reserve at Grandpont.

Older adults seemed to feel less safe than younger people. When asked about safety, many reported that they would not go out in the evenings anyway.

The closure of the pipe footbridge across the river removed a safe route of access. Some people explained that there were too many wooded areas either side of the larger old gasworks rail bridge. There was a general perception that the nature reserve didn't feel safe at night, partly because of a lack of lighting, and partly because of the tree cover. We were told that the area was often used by rough sleepers, some who were 'regulars' and others who for example might have been out late at night and missed the train home. We spoke to the Green Spaces Officer, who said he would arrange for the canopy to be raised.

Some locals complained about cyclists travelling too fast along the towpath, and about kids hanging about on Oxpens Meadow. People also linked this to noise and litter.

Drug dealing and open drug use

People often reported drug dealing. Our perception was that in many cases this was regarded more as a nuisance than as a direct threat. One worker in a residential project

explained that it was a big problem for her clients, many of whom were trying to get ‘clean’ and were triggered by the proximity of drug use. Other people from homelessness and drug/alcohol services explained that the area was relatively ‘quiet’ in terms of drug-related activity, and could make a good place for their clients to manage a recovery from addiction.

Homeless people and rough sleeping

Perceptions of safety linked to homelessness go in both directions. From the perspective of people walking in the area, large numbers of homeless people can feel threatening, and rough sleepers in the undergrowth can make an area intimidating to walk through. But from the perspective of rough sleepers themselves being able to discretely remove themselves from view increased their sense of security.

We were told by one official concerned with managing rough sleeping that rough sleepers aren’t usually a nuisance and tend to be discrete. A worker in a local homelessness agency said that she felt their clients were more likely to be the victims of violence than perpetrators. Many of the agencies run supports that directly or indirectly help to manage the risks. For example, Aspire runs a service called ‘Through the Gate’ that provides support for prisoners for up to six weeks after release from prison. The Homelessness Oxfordshire summer bonanza provided a great opportunity for local people, including Councillors, to get a different view of homeless people as members of the local community rather than a threat to it.

Public drunkenness and revelry

There were some general concerns about drunkenness and anti-social behaviour, but these were typically focussed on specific areas (e.g. at the bottom of Park End Street and Frideswide Square) and at specific times of day (late evenings and at the weekends).

Road safety

Some people complained about ‘boy racers’ in the area, particularly at night.

“What we need here is either an LTN or pedestrianisation, but I have been told the latter is impossible because of the need for emergency vehicles’.

As with other issues opinion about the benefits and drawbacks of pedestrianisation was split.

Physical environment

Since the 1970s and the emergence of the ‘broken windows’ theory, planners have understood the links between people’s subjective sense of safety and the general repair of the physical environment^{xiii}. We have discussed the issues with refuse and maintenance under Housing and homelessness (above), but people also made some specific points about the way untidiness, rats, littering and unkempt verges and borders impacted on their sense of wellbeing.

Some residents suggested that more/improved lighting would make footpaths more accessible. However, others raised concerns about light pollution, for example security lights shining through their windows and interrupting sleep.

Policing

Several people spoke to us about the police and policing, but we were unable to make direct contact with Police Officers or Police and Community Support Officers PCSOs in the area. The Council Green Spaces Officer said that communications with local police were good, often enabling a co-ordinated response where necessary. SOCC hosts a 'Coffee with Cops' with local PCSOs. On the other side of the coin, some people told us that police were slow to respond to calls about drug dealing, and seemed to be 'thin on the ground'.

Suggestions:

- Several professionals commented that reduced resources had put a strain on inter-agency co-operation, and face-to-face meetings with local workers concerned with crime and disorder had become rare. These could be reinstated.
- Some people wanted more pedestrianisation.
- One worker stated that the signage for Public Safety Protection Orders was still up, and that this made homeless people feel threatened and unwelcome.
- Many people in local social housing wanted outdoor 'community spaces' on their premises, but some were concerned that these could be colonised by drug users or dealers. Managing this arguably needs the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders.

5.9 Community

Community is a notoriously difficult topic to investigate, because it means different things to different people. In particular, people have different ideas of what they should do for one another because they belong to the same community – ideas that vary with age, gender and ethnic background. The American sociologist Robert Putnam describes community in terms of 'norms of reciprocity', and the socially beneficial consequences of these norms^{xiv}. Similarly, communities can be of different types. Clearly this insight report is interested principally in communities of place, but we have also tried to consider communities of interest (particularly among homeless people living locally) and communities of identity (for example people from different ethnic groups or social classes).

A common way of conceptualising the strength and cohesion of communities is through the idea of 'social capital', which is often loosely thought of as the links or networks between individuals and groups^{xv}. Social capital can be conceived as imaginary 'wires' connecting people to one another, and other forms of capital (such as money, culture and education) as the 'electricity' that can then flow along them^{xvi}. At a community level, social capital can be sub-divided into bonding capital (which connects community members to one another) and bridging social capital (which connects communities to one another). For this insight report we looked at the links people had to others within the geographical area, and also their connections to different areas, particularly other parts of the city.

It is widely understood that bonding and linking social capital are important social determinants of health, particularly during health emergencies like pandemics^{xvii}. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many community resources were developed as a part of the city's response. Some have now redefined their roles more broadly, and are considering how they can meet the wider needs of communities. We are interested in the 'bridging' social capital between these groups and what can be done to develop it.

Geographical communities

We were asked to look specifically at three discrete areas within the city. We asked everyone we met about the names they used for the parts of the city they lived in. These varied widely. People responding to our online survey used variants of the following terms:

Table 5: Terms used to describe the areas in which they lived used by people responding to online survey

Grandpont (inc. North Grandpont)	13
St Ebbe's	2
City Centre	2
St Thomas's	2
[The specific building]	1
New Hinksey	1
Folly Bridge	1
Osney (inc. Osney Lane, Osney Island)	3
Did not respond	6

We came to conceptualise the area as something of a continuity, but with two axes of division. Interestingly the river led people in Friars Wharf and Grandpont to think of themselves as separate from one another, whereas other physical barriers such as the Oxpens Road and City of Oxford College did not seem to have the same effect. The other divide was between owner-occupiers and people living in social housing, with different developments being clearly demarcated even though no physical barriers existed.

When we asked people about their connection to the area, we heard a lot of different answers. The following story is illustrative, though not representative, of their diversity.

Two older women participated in a focus group they hosted. Both had moved to Oxford from other parts of the country. One had moved back with her husband. Both had applied for social housing, one on bereavement and the other on retiring from her job, which had come with accommodation. The applications were different – one had gone through a housing association for properties for older adults and been offered a flat within 6 months, while the other had applied through the City Council and waited for 6 years until a property she liked became available. Both were active organisers in their respective properties, with one hosting a regular coffee morning and the other active in one of the local churches. Interestingly, both women described how people in their

respective communities had become more reluctant to socialise. This was linked to loneliness, and was something we heard repeatedly from older adults.

In section 4.5 above we explained how people often moved into social housing in the area through the vagaries of property allocations systems rather than deliberately, and yet many described it as a strong community. When we asked about this apparent contradiction, community members described their efforts to welcome new members.

Our online survey attempted to map the relative strength of people's connections to the area and to other parts of the city using a 'slider' (effectively a sliding pair of number from 0-100) to represent each. When we removed partial or anomalous data, 18 people included both sets of answers. We know that our sample is not representative of local people, and it is likely that those not answering this question are not 'randomly distributed', so it is not appropriate to draw general conclusions about people in our area from this data. In 11 cases, answers were very close to each other (less than 1 standard deviation), suggesting that for them, their connections inside and outside the area were equally strong. In the other 7 cases, 6 showed stronger preferences for connections within our area.

Communities of interest

People who were at different stages of homelessness were the most obvious category of people with shared interests. To some extent this community intersected with people living in social housing. We have described their situation and support networks in 4.5 above. Some liked the area because it was less 'busy' than other parts of the city, such as East Oxford and Cowley. This made it easier, for example, for people to avoid drug dealers, or in the case of some women, men who had sexually abused or exploited them. It is interesting that organisations such as Aspire are developing approaches to peer support, which will hopefully help to develop the bonding social capital within this group.

Parents perhaps form another community of interest, although we made limited contact. As we reported in 4.8, there are only 2 primary schools in the area, with attendances dropping. It seems likely that the number of children in the area are being pressurised in two directions – the price of ownership and renting privately (which pushes out younger parents who cannot yet afford to live here), and priorities for social housing (which perhaps reflect the ageing demographic of the total population). Bonding social capital within this group is limited by the reducing numbers of people who have contact with one another.

Older adults form another community of interest, and there are several 'blocks' dedicated to providing accommodation to them within our area. Though the churches, social landlords and community associations provide opportunities for older people to socialise with one another, people told us that many were reluctant to do so, despite in many cases feeling lonely. On a more positive note, some of the same people obviously longed for some of the organisations providing support to create more opportunities. "They need a rocket ..." said one.

Communities of identity

Social class is another quality that is difficult to measure. The consensus among social geographers that income and occupation are the best measures of social class has slipped over the past decade, and many are embracing diverse concepts (including social and cultural capital, precarity of employment, property ownership and savings) as a way of widening their understanding^{xviii}. It may be that the old working class culture of ‘Tomrags’ and ‘Friars’ is preserved to some extent in the culture of the area, and perhaps something of the superiority of the better-off communities on the other side of the bridge.

We made no attempt to measure social class in our online survey or interview questions, but we were interested in the cultural barriers to wellbeing. It was clear that some people would not use services because they didn’t feel welcome. For example, one woman told us how much she enjoyed walking on Christchurch meadow, but described how the botanical gardens at the other end were ‘too far’. At the other end of the support relationship, many providers told us that they wanted to engage more effectively with people from disadvantaged backgrounds. [South Oxford Family Room](#) was aware that they did not attract people from the other side of the river (Friars Wharf) and was aiming to overcome this by recruiting more volunteers from the area. However, they did not have capacity to move this work forwards. One parent told us about an attempt at another children’s centre to overcome class differences between parents from different income groups by running forest school activities targeting both groups.

Overall, we had limited contact with people from minority ethnic backgrounds, both in our survey (see Appendix 3) and in our individual and group conversation. Importantly, we failed to make contact with any individuals or organisations that saw themselves as representing ethnic groups within the area. We heard from other community workers that engaging diverse ethnic groups within the area had been challenging. One told us the one event that all the Asian families got involved in was the international evening at the school, which was very successful - “the highlight of the year” – but they still couldn’t be persuaded to join in meetings. In his view building trust was a long-term project, perhaps at odds with the fixed-term nature and rapidly changing roles of community workers in the area.

Sexual identity is clearly a personal issue that would be inappropriate to raise directly in interviews, but a representative of the Jolly Farmers pub was able to tell us something about issues for the various LGBTQIA+ groups locally. The pub itself is the centre for a lot of local activism (for example planning the annual [Pride](#) event), and hosts a number of other organisations, some of which have welfare as well as social functions. However, there was a feeling that the community has setbacks in the area, for example the closure of other pubs and the Northgate Hall. One person who spoke to us was particularly concerned about the absence of spaces for younger people to meet in.

“They’d be very welcome to sit in here [Jolly Postboys pub] and have a lemonade, but they wouldn’t want to.”

Bonding within the community

For bonds to develop within communities, and for people to develop stronger connections with a place, there must be opportunities for this to happen. Many of the agencies we spoke to were acutely aware of this and had plans to try and meet them. Bonding in this sense also relates to loneliness, which can be seen as people losing their links to others and being unable to replace them.

Places to meet

Many residents and project workers described the absence of a community centre or similar space people could use to get going with the ideas mentioned above. The closure of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre removed one of the few genuinely accessible social spaces in the area. We identified some spaces within the area that can be used for meetings and social events. The [Jolly Farmers](#) has a downstairs room that up to 20 people can use by arrangement. The [Ice Rink](#) have conference rooms which can be rented fairly cheaply. Makespace Oxford has a project on Frideswide Square called [The Community Works](#). As well as at Lula's café, there is a small meeting room (which we used for many of the small group and individual meetings for this project). There is a longer-term aspiration to develop a community space within St Thomas' Church. There are also spaces in the city centre and down the Abingdon and Botley Roads, but these are often not perceived as accessible (for example because of transport or cultural differences).

There are still pubs and cafes in the area, though many have closed.

"The Adventurer" [Closed in 2018 – previously the Honey Pot] was run by a lovely couple that lived locally. I used to go there. Then it was taken over by developers who had more money and now it's not being used. It used to have a pool table - that's where I met other local people. These spaces bring neighbours together, to get to know each other."

Local resident

While some individual blocks of housing had their own meeting spaces, others did not. In both Friars Wharf and Richard Gray Court, residents had improvised their own spaces and furniture from pallets (though it had been necessary to padlock it to stop the maintenance crews from removing it). There are accessible places, like the playground on Friars Wharf, though we heard that many parents don't feel they can let younger children play there unsupervised because of the river.

Places just to be

Many people we spoke to, probably the majority, mentioned the parks, green spaces and river walks as among the most important supports for their wellbeing. Some expressed concerns about their safety in Grandpont nature reserve, particularly after dark. On the whole though they were very much valued. People expressed concern about the proposed development and its potential impact on Oxpens Meadow.

Things to do

Many people complained that there was nothing to do in the area. This was a particular issue for older adults, and parents of young children. Both needed things that were free or low-cost, rather than targeted at tourist's businesses with deeper pockets. Some people knew about [Broken Spoke](#) bicycle co-op and [OVADA Warehouse](#), but were not aware of any specific projects aimed at the local community. The Ice Rink was valued by some local people, but many thought it was too expensive to use regularly. As well as the 'assets' described above, older adults also talked about Town Hall groups such as Tea and Talk, Movers and Shakers, topic-based talks run by the City Museum and the Central Library Book Club. They knew of these because of flyers.

"There's something to do nearly every day if you're prepared to look for it."

Figure 7 Images of Oxford Ice Rink



Photos provided by Oxford City Council

Links with other communities and between community groups

Many of the projects we spoke to on the periphery of the area were keen to do a better job of providing support. Both the local community centres – WOCA and SOCC – expressed an interest in improving their outreach to the area and working collaboratively to develop new projects, while citing capacity and funding as barriers.

Suggestions:

People made a huge range of suggestions for how to improve the environment and the sense of community. Space precludes listing all of them, so we have included this summary under the headings above.

Places to meet

- Many people mentioned the need for a local community centre, or at least designated spaces for local people.
- People mentioned the proposed Z Hotel that is being built on the site of the old Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre, and suggested it should have a community space as well as a live music space that is apparently a condition of planning permission.
- Better paving on the side streets to be more accessible for people using walking aids, wheelchairs and scooters.

"It would be nice to have a community centre which is not overpriced".

"Why don't they join up the big developments that are happening in the area with what's needed by the local residents?"

Places just to be

"They should put the terraces back"

"Can we have Oxford in Bloom reinstated?"

"The green spaces in Oxford don't often have somewhere comfortable to sit. They've removed the benches to make it hard for homeless people."

"Another thing that's important for people's health and well-being is the height of the buildings and the new developments. No one wants to live next to a huge glass building and have that in their back garden."

"The two benches on the way to the Gasworks Rail Bridge used to have great views of the river – would be great if the canopy/undergrowth could be trimmed back. Would also be great if there were a couple more benches facing upstream".

Things to do

- Several people suggested an outdoor Gym in one of the nearby green spaces.

"Cheap cafes and bars."

"Inclusive recreation areas for all ages groups and abilities."

"Open the outdoor swimming pool 12 months of the year."

“Water based activities, would be good. A pontoon under the white bridge so boats could pull up, and we can access the river easier. Clean river water.”

“It would be good to have more facilities [on Oxpens Meadow] like tennis courts, a multi-use games area.”

Connections to other communities

- Nearly everyone we spoke to from church and community groups expressed a willingness in principle to help new projects get off the ground. Many residents had visited SOCC or WOCA: Some had gone to events in other community centres around the city. Organised trips might make this more popular.

“WOCA has been and is so vital for us because it draws in people from all over and further than their very local community. We feel a part of that community.”

- [Hogacre Common](#) is keen to make its projects more accessible to people in the area, but lacks capacity for concerted outreach. The lack of supports for older men could be addressed by developing a [Men’s Sheds](#) intergenerational project, perhaps in partnership with Hogacre Common.
- The need for more outreach and a co-ordinated approach to recruiting volunteers from the area was an objective for several organisations we spoke to.
- Several people spoke about the need for community and multi-use space in any new developments in the area, particularly the [proposed new development](#) on ‘Waste Ground’ at the back of the Ice Rink.

6 Recommendations by themes

The following is a summary list of the recommendations from the different sections of this report, grouped by the themes outlined in section 2 of this report.

6.1 Community Advocacy

- Increased provision of health and social care services
- Improving affordability of and access to housing
- Better transport infrastructure and public transport
- Re-establishing liaison between agencies responsible for public safety
- Provision of Speech and Language Therapy locally
- Repairs to pavements and bridges that connect the area to West Oxfordshire
- Reviewing refuse collection arrangements

6.2 Coordination

- Improving coordination and sharing of resources between local groups and organisations around schemes timings, promotion and publicity, outreach of activities and volunteering
- Improved grant funding for development work
- Improvements to local enterprise support
- Availability of local and low-cost activities for people unable to work because of age or disability
- Improved money and welfare advice
- Coordination of the many projects aimed at reducing food poverty and food waste in the area
- Improved provision of leisure and outdoor pursuits for children and young people
- Use of volunteering to increase capacity for existing projects and as a strategy for improving accessibility of projects by diverse communities
- Using Local Area Coordination and Social prescribing to link people to informal support sources

6.3 New initiatives and development

- Bringing social housing tenants together to unite different elements of the community and to surface common issues
- Development of social spaces and recreation areas on the sites of some blocks of social housing
- Developing a community space for residents own use
- Support for local organisations to increase outreach and satellite projects
- Exploration of availability of vacant spaces owned by Oxford University for community use

Appendix 1 History of St Thomas, St Ebbe's, and Grandpont

St Thomas and St Ebbe's have long been known as busy areas of commerce and industry, as well as very poor areas. There were fierce rivalries as well as bonds between the two districts, and a strong sense of community spirit. Grandpont, south of the river, had a different character, partly from being in a different county until the late 19th century (we have been told by a local that students used to cross Folly Bridge for a 'late pint', as the licensing laws were different in Berkshire).

In the 20th century, both St Thomas and St Ebbes were subject to major redevelopment (in St Ebbes' case it was pretty much razed to the ground) to make way for a vision of the future based on the needs of motorists and shoppers, with scant attention to the wishes of the local population. This is all very much within living memory, and a sense of mistrust and hopelessness lingers among poorer local residents. The recent redevelopment of the Westgate and the proposed [Oxpens developments](#) are often greeted with scepticism. However, there are also strong echoes of an earlier community spirit, when "....the communities of St Thomas's and St Ebbe's were close-knit and residents helped each other out whenever they could."^{xix}

In contrast, Grandpont has retained much of the older housing stock that was in any case of higher quality, and has become a more affluent area (albeit with areas of poverty).

The city centre location has always been a magnet for those seeking employment and fortune, and from the many cheap private lodging houses to the development of homelessness services in the later 20th century, the area has been a source of shelter for those lacking secure housing. The last ten years or so have seen major cuts to homelessness services, with a major impact on the hostels in St Ebbes.

St Thomas and St Ebbe's

The 'Friars' of St Ebbes and the 'Tomrags' of St Thomas were very distinct, rival groups. Olive Gibbs, who was born in St Thomas and later became a Labour City Councillor and founder of CND, recalled that "We always thought of the Friars kids as untouchables – a vastly inferior social class from ourselves – and I was amazed to discover, years later, that they regarded us in exactly the same way."^{xx}

Both areas shared a strong sense of mutual help "People never locked their doors in the Friars, as no-one feared being robbed, and if someone needed help, you could always get in to them"^{xxi}

The parish of St Thomas, with its early links to Osney Abbey, used to encompass Jericho, Osney and the area around the castle. However, it is now limited to the quadrant west of the Westgate Shopping Centre from Frideswide Square round to the City of Oxford College, boundaried by the river. The area was known in the 20th century as one of the, if not the poorest area of Oxford.

Henry Cummings described St Thomas's of the 1920s as:

"...a tough but full-blooded area, a close-knit community within the city, full of pubs, barbers, saddlers, chemists, bakers, grocers, corn merchants, butchers, cold meat stores, common lodging-houses and tenements with communal yards, washing lines and toilets, but no baths... At evening time, especially at weekends, the streets were patrolled by police, two by two, street fighting and drunkenness not infrequently going hand-in-hand." He went on "Children were everywhere, some down at heel, faces not too clean, at time with boils, scab, ringworm, nits, the lot: but they were a lively, riotous, God-fearing crowd, who knew the Ten Commandments off by heart and broke them just the same."^{xxii}

Parts of St Thomas' High Street, along with the Hamel and Christchurch Old Buildings, have survived, and a very few people born in the area remain. Nearby Paradise Square also survives – though with only a few older buildings. When it was developed, in the mid 19th century, it was intended to be a middle-class area, but it "never quite achieved fashionable status"^{xxiii}.

St Ebbe's is also known as 'The Friars', referring to the Blackfriars (Dominicans who arrived in the 13th Century) and the Franciscan Greyfriars who were also based in St Thomas – (Paradise Square being named after 'Paradise Gardens' which the Greyfriars cultivated). In amongst the 20th century redevelopment, small pockets of older buildings remain around St Ebbes Street, Pennyfarthing Place, Littlegate Street. The former Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre, itself currently under redevelopment, incorporates the site of a mediaeval gateway into the site of Blackfriars.

Always a poor area, developers in the 19th century "showed little concern for adequate drainage and sanitary conditions, and St Ebbe's suffered several cholera outbreaks in the later nineteenth century"^{xxiv}.

St Ebbe's and St Thomas have long been a centre of trade in the city. In the earlier part of the 20th century, there were many smaller shops as well as major stores and employers such as Coopers (producers of 'The Original City Dustpan', and at the time largest ironmongery store in Britain), and F. Cape and Co.

Other big employers included Frank Coopers Marmalade Factory; the Post Office Sorting Office in Becket St.; Bennett's City Laundry; the Lion, Eagle and the Swan (late Hall's) Breweries; the Cattle Market, a slaughterhouse, the railways (two rival lines and stations at one time), and earlier the canal and Castle Mill.

"Towards Folly Bridge, a series of wharves, timber yards, a saw mill and (until 1856) the city waterworks, contributed to the area's industrial character."^{xxv}

The gasworks was a major employer of local people (nearly 300 worked there in 1928). The area had been manufacturing gas since the early nineteenth century. The skyline was

dominated by the gas holders of the gasworks either side of the river. The last gas holder was demolished in 1968.

The area offered many opportunities for socialising to young and old: younger people had the Balliol Boys' Club, the Girl Guides, Cub Scouts, and the Holy Trinity Girls Club, as well as more informal meeting places like the 'rec' in St Thomas (now covered by the City of Oxford College). Other groups included the Mothers' Union, the Holy Trinity Choir, and football clubs, and there were many regular outings organised by the local churches, works, and pubs. Pubs were a key part of community life – at one time there almost 50 in St Thomas and St Ebbe's. While the Royal Blenheim, Jolly Farmers, Castle Inn and The Lighthouse (formerly the Queens Arms) have survived and continue to thrive, most have disappeared entirely, or like The Wharf House, been converted into housing.

Some of the housing in St Thomas's and St Ebbe's was of poor quality and badly-maintained. There were inadequate water, drainage, and sewerage systems. Much of St Thomas' 17th-19th century housing was cleared in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of St Ebbe's made way for the Westgate Development in the 1960s and 1970s.

The 20th century development obliterated the good and the bad: "The new development overrode the old St Ebbe's, almost as though it had never existed. The dense network of streets disappeared under a huge car park, highways and a shopping arcade. Two small developments of maisonettes and houses created a tenuous link with the old St Ebbe's, but they were isolated from the city by fast roads and the river."^{xxvi}

The gradual destruction of St Ebbe's happened over a period of around 40 years, from the 1930s to the 1970s:

"The replanning of St Ebbe's was complicated by uncertainties over the route of a proposed inner relief road; the residents, mostly tenants, had no say, and anyway they were divided: most loved the area, but some probably agreed with one who said that her new house in Barton *"was like heaven after what we've been used to"*."^{xxvii}

The inner relief road proposal was highly controversial:

"The road would entail the demolition of hundreds of houses and result in eight miles of 'urban motorway' within the city. The long drawn-out argument over the best route led to serious 'planning blight', with rows of empty houses boarded up and desolate, awaiting demolition if and when the road scheme was accepted...The scheme was finally killed off in 1972, but in the meantime the clearance of St Ebbe's went ahead. Eventually over 900 properties were demolished, the last (84 Blackfriars Road) in 1978. Many streets were wiped from the map and only a handful of buildings survived...Some redevelopment did occur: new flats and maisonettes were completed on Preacher's Lane (formerly Gas Street) and Friars Wharf in 1962, and the Oxford College of Further Education (now the City of Oxford College) was established on the

eastern side of Oxpens Road in the mid-1960s, on what had been a recreation ground and a car park. Oxpens Road was linked to St Aldate's with a new road – Thames Street – cutting across the old grid pattern of Victorian streets... The demolition of St Ebbe's resulted in the break-up of a once close-knit community and in what writer Bill Bryson described as "the bleak sweep of Oxpens Road, with its tyre and exhaust centres and pathetically under-landscaped ice rink and car parks"^{xxviii}

The dispersal of the community was the result of deliberate neglect or displacement of residents in the eyes of many local people. Residents moved out to the council estates around Oxford: better quality houses perhaps, with modern facilities, but they still saw themselves as 'Friars' or 'Tom Rags'. One, Ted Newell, commented

"The council was very fly about it. They said to people down there "Oh we've got a nice new house with a bathroom." 'Cause they didn't have bathrooms down there see. And of course the people took it up. They did have an association going on down there trying to stop the council from putting the comp purchase order on. And the council bought a lot of them little houses up for £50 a time. A lot of the houses were owned by private people who bought them to have the rent as collateral over the years. And that's why they had a job getting any work done on them. Because they would say 'we'll sort it out and sort it out' and it went on for months and years and never got done. That's why some of them got a bit dilapidated. It was exactly the same in Jericho. People bought them up. And you can't buy them for love nor money now. It would have been exactly the same down the Friars. There were a thousand families down the Friars." ^{xxix}

Residents had little or no say in what happened to their neighbourhood: "For those who had spent their lives in St Ebbe's, raising their families, building up livelihoods and businesses the suburbs were not the ideal place to be. Unfortunately, decisions were made at a high level and the idea was imposed top down with the flattening of St Ebbe's seen as a convenient solution to managing traffic and parking for the City."^{xxx}

Ted Newell again:

"Well there was 110 houses in our street and 110 next door in Friars street. And that's two big streets and there was all the little streets off there and we called Speedwell Street part of the Friars and all round there. Before they ever talked to the people. They had all these meetings and I went to a couple of them. And you might as well have sat at home. There was no point in going. It was already thought out and made up beforehand."^{xxxi}

Local resident Janice Stewart: "My mother didn't want to go to Blackbird Leys. She wanted to stay."^{xxxii} Another local, "Les Sloper remarked '...to my way of thinking, the Friars are one of the finest families that ever existed in England; the comradeship was unique, and there was nothing to compare with it outside of the East End of London.'"^{xxxiii}

People continued to get together, despite their dispersal around the city. ‘Friars Reunions’ and ‘Tom Rags Reunions’ continued after people had been moved to other areas, the last in 1983. For some people, there was no going back:

“Nothing against it, but [my mother] didn’t want to go to that area because a lot of people had gone. They offered us a place in St Ebbes in Preachers Lane but the community had gone. And she wanted to move away. Years later on they offered my mother and father to move back, but she said you could never re-create what had been. It was such a community.”^{xxxiv}

However, when new housing around Faulkner Street and Thames Street was built in the 1980s, some people did return. One, Vi King, said “I’m over the moon, it’s lovely just to hear the trains go by”.^{xxxv}

Grandpont

Being outside the city until the late 1880s, Grandpont had a different trajectory from St Thomas and St Ebbe’s. Less of a commercial area, it did boast the first railway and railway station in Oxford (opened in 1844, but then superseded by those in St Thomas in the later 19th century). The waterworks and gasworks were other major employers, along with Salters Steamers and the riverside wharves.

Unlike St Thomas and St Ebbe’s, Grandpont’s 19th century housing development survived to the present day. When the gasworks site was cleared in the mid-20th century, most of it on the Grandpont side eventually developed into a nature reserve, much valued locally. The ‘Social Housing’ at Riverside Court and Salter Close was developed on the part of the gasworks site between the nature reserve and Marlborough Road, so no residents were ‘cleared’ in the way that happened north of the river.

Recent Cuts to Homelessness Services

Historically, St Thomas had numerous beer-houses and lodgings providing “cheap accommodation for the many people who came to Oxford seeking employment. Many foreigners, ‘homeless and destitute, settled in St Thomas’s parish, which earned the reputation of being a somewhat rowdy area where the local police always patrolled in pairs.”^{xxxvi}

St Thomas and St Ebbes continued to provide accommodation for the homeless. By the late 20th century it had developed several hostels run by the voluntary sector, including O’Hanlon House (formerly ‘The Night Shelter’, in the grounds of South Oxford Middle School); Simon House Hostel (on the corner of Paradise Street and Castle Street); Lucy Faithfull House (on Speedwell Street), and Skene House mother and baby hostel (in Clark’s Row); as well as additional support offered by local churches.

Between 2010/11 and 2017/18 central government funding for the county council’s day-to-day revenue budget fell by 39 per cent – or £96m^{xxxvii}. Without a statutory requirement to provide homeless services, in 2016 the County Council decided to cut its contribution to homeless services by £500,000 a year over three years, leading to the closure of Simon House Hostel (run by A2Dominion) and Julian Housing (run by Oxford Homeless Pathways)

closing by April 2018, with the loss of more than 200 beds. This after the closing of Lucy Faithfull House (run by Two Saints) in January 2016, which had 61 beds, with spaces provided in other areas of the county.^{xxxviii}

O'Hanlon House survives, and there are smaller residential supports in the area provided by St Mungo's and Aspire Oxfordshire, as well as continuing church-based supports. However, the local homelessness population continues to increase: The number of rough sleepers in Oxford has increased by over 400% since 2012.^{xxxix}

Appendix 2 Summary of Assets

Work and employment	Aspire provide a range of training and employment projects, disadvantaged people with complex needs including those transitioning from prison.	Offices on Osney Lane.
Work-related skills and training	City of Oxford College Further Education college providing vocational training to 14-16 year-olds, plus a range of courses aimed at 16-18 year-olds and beyond. Places for all eligible students.	Oxpens Road (on edge of area).
	CIMPSPA work with City of Oxford College to offer training and apprenticeships	For young people where leisure/fitness is seen as a viable career
	Crisis Skylight Lead workers provide support in all areas that support people in obtaining and retaining accommodation	People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Based in George Street (out of area)
	Emmaus "...provides accommodation, work experience, training and support to people who have experienced homelessness"	Based in Cowley Centre (out of area).
Money and poverty Benefits, money and welfare advice	The City Council's Residents Advice service and Citizens Advice have now moved out of St. Aldate's and are meeting with people in a room in the Westgate Library	All local residents. Queen Street. On edge of area
	Christians Against Poverty	National group active locally
	St Matthews Church on Marlborough Road offers debt advice, signposting and befriending.	All local residents. Marlborough Road. Borders the area.
	Anchor Housing offers a group called 'Be Wise' which includes financial advice and support with benefits.	Residents of Jackson Cole House. In the area.
Cheap shops and activities	Home Bargains and Aldi on the Botley Road and Primark in the Westgate Centre	Budget shopping for any customer. None are in the area.

Access to Health and Social Care	Go to www.nhs.uk for an up-to-date list of primary care and other NHS services close to any postcode	
NHS Primary Care Services	Beaumont Elms Practice (formerly 19 Beaumont Street)	GP Practice serving people living in the area (Surgery is out of area).
	Luther Street Medical Centre	Specialist practice for homeless people.
	St Bartholemew's Medical Centre on Lake Street	Newly re-opened practice off the Abingdon Road. Out of area.
Social services	Oxfordshire County Council's Children's Services	Social care for children and families
	Oxfordshire County Council Adult Social Care Services	Information about local supports and statutory assessments.
Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)	Elmore Community Support provides range of services	People with mental health and complex needs. Peripatetic.
	St. Mungo's	Services for people affected by homelessness including with health and addictions. Peripatetic with base on Floyds Row (edge of area).
	Homeless Oxfordshire provides residential and other supports.	Rough sleepers and other homeless groups. Runs O'Hanlon House (Cromwell Street, in area).
	Lived Experience Advisory Forum (LEAF) An initiative that makes homeless provision in Oxfordshire more effective by consulting people with lived experience	Homeless adults. Peripatetic.
	Oxfordshire Mind Local mental health charity.	No face-to-face services in the area, but available to residents. They also provide a comprehensive guide to mental health services available locally.
	Turning Point National charity for people affected by substance use and addiction.	Base off the Cowley Road (out of area)
	St. Matthews Church Runs a health and wellbeing course	Open to people who aren't part of the congregation. On Marlborough Road (on edge of area).

	Terrence Higgins Trust offers sexual health advice	Operates from premises on Rectory Road, but also on a sessional basis in the downstairs room at the Jolly Farmers pub on Paradise Street.
Housing and Homelessness Social Housing	The County Council maintains this site about social housing and homelessness.	Visit this site to find out how to join the affordable housing register for Oxford City.
	Most of the social landlords seemed to offer some sort of additional support to their residents.	These included: A2Dominion , Anchor Housing , Green Square Accord , and Peabody
Homelessness	Housing First, which is managed by Connection Support	Provides immediate access to housing for small numbers of homeless people. Locations unknown.
	Connection also manage the Homeless Pathway	Provides accommodation and support across the county. Locations unknown.
	Oxfordshire Out of Hospital Care Team is an inter-agency collaboration.	Will sometimes find accommodation in the area for homeless people being discharged from general or psychiatric hospitals.
	Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (OxSPOT) run by St. Mungo's	They will 'verify' rough sleepers and try and plug them into the network of supports and housing options. Also have 16 beds locally.
	Homelessness prevention support is available from Aspire and Citizens Advice	Anyone at risk of homelessness. Peripatetic.
	Christians Against Poverty operates a Winter Night Shelter	7 local churches offer overnight accommodation on a rotational night-by-night basis between January and March, and a 'living room' for washing and showering. City centre, some in area.
Food & nutrition	West Oxford Community Association hosts a community larder project with SOFEA and Fairshare	Accessible to all residents in the city. Subscription £3.50 or £7/week. Not in area

	SOFEA were also involved in a Community Kitchen that operates in St. Frideswide Church on a Friday afternoon 4-6 pm	Free to everyone. Out of area
	SOCC operates a Community Fridge with free ingredients on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12.00-2.00pm	Out of area
	St. Matthews Church Drop-in lunch	Marlborough Road, edge of area.
	St Ebbe's Church Runs a 'sit and knit' group for older adults at which food is also available	In area.
	Hogacre Common hosts the OxGrow community garden.	In area.
Transport and access People with mobility difficulties	Oxfordshire Transport and Action Group have recently joined with local charity Oxfordshire Unlimited .	Membership group for anyone with a physical or sensory disability. No base.
	List of approved taxi firms maintained by Oxford City Council	
Cycling	Oxford City Council maintains this page of cycling routes in the city	
	Broken Spoke Bike Co-op offers cycle training, mechanics courses, and workshops for people who want to fix their bikes	Based on Osney Lane (in area).
	Cycling Oxfordshire hosts this extensive list of cycling groups and resources in the county	
Buses	Oxford Bus Company	Operate most regular bus routes from, to and within the city
	Stagecoach Oxfordshire	
	Thames Travel	
Trains	National Rail Enquiries	Train timetables, prices and bookings.
Child education & childcare Pre-school	Grandpoint Nursery School and Childcare Centre	For children over 3, with government-funded places for 15 & 30 hours. Whitehouse Road in Grandpont.

	South Oxford Family Room (SOFR). A community-run centre for babies, young children, and families in South Oxford.	Free/donations. Backs onto Grandpont Nursery School.
	Botley Bridges is a similar scheme to SOFR	Next to Botley school (out of the area)
	WOCA has a cafe and a playground.	At the top of the Botley Road (out of the area).
	The Community Café at SOCC is supportive to parents of young children	On Lake Street (out of the area).
	The Oxford Ice Rink runs parent and Toddler ' Skate Tots ' sessions on Monday mornings.	£5.20 for parent and child, coach. Oxpens Road
Primary Schools	St Ebbe's CofE (Aided) Primary School	On Whitehouse Road in Grandpont
	New Hinksey (another C of E school)	On the far side of Hinsey Park (out of area)
Secondary schools	There are no secondary schools in the area. The County Council provide free travel to the nearest available school where children are eligible for places.	
	The nearest secondary schools are Greyfriars Catholic School (formerly St Gregory the Great) and Oxford Spires Academy	Both in East Oxford (out of area)
Further Education	City of Oxford College Further Education college providing vocational training to 14-16 year-olds, plus a range of courses aimed at 16-18 year-olds and beyond.	Places for all eligible students. Oxpens Road
Youth projects	Oxford City Council runs a scheme called ' Youth Ambition ' for disadvantaged young people aged 11-19 years old, (or up to 25 if they have physical or learning difficulties), who are from Oxford's regeneration areas.	Local location unknown

	The Oxford Hub runs a project called Schools Plus that provides free tutoring and academic support for local pupils aged 7-18.	Over Zoom
Play areas and sports	Oxford City Council maintains this map of play areas in Oxford	
	For younger children, there is a play area in Friars Wharf	In area, public access
	There is a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) in Grandpont, close to the nursery and SOFR	In area, public access
	South Oxford Adventure Playground (SOAP), which is managed by a local charity that also runs an after school club for accompanied and unaccompanied over 7s on Thursdays and Fridays	Whitehouse Road (in area).
	to Hinksey Park Football Club , which has teams for boys and girls of all ages.	Hinksey Park
	Active Oxfordshire hosts a number of services aimed at children and young people.	Multiple locations (not known).
	Project PT is a subsidised community-based fitness scheme that	Operates out of Magdalene Road Gym in East Oxford. Out of area.
Other supports	<p>St. Ebbe's Church runs a number of activities for children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After School Music Club – 6 regulars, around 10 in total have attended. Ages 7-15. • Photography Club – running in the holidays, ages 10-15. <p>Bouncy Castle at the summer event.</p>	In area

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hogacre Common has a Forest School site used by St Ebbes, New Hinksey and West Oxford Primary schools during term-time. 	In area
Crime, safety and nuisance	Oxford City Council manage Parks and Green Spaces in the area	Peripatetic
	Thames valley Police Oxford Central Team operate out of St. Aldate's Police Station	On edge of area
	South Oxford Community Centre runs a Coffee with Cops session	Out of area
Community Places to meet	The Jolly Farmers has a downstairs room that up to 20 people can use by arrangement	Paradise Street (in area)
	The Ice Rink have conference rooms which can be rented fairly cheaply.	Oxpens Road (in area)
	Makespace Oxford has a project called The Community Works.	On Frideswide Square (in area)
Places just to be	Oxford City Council maintains this map of parks and green spaces in the City Centre. Grandpont Nature Reserve, Oxpens Meadow, Christchurch Meadow and the tow path along the Thames/Isis were all well used by local people.	
Things to do	<i>As well as the activities already listed, we heard about:</i>	
	OVADA Warehouse , but were not aware of any specific projects aimed at the local community	Osney Lane (in area). Some free events.
	Oxford Ice Rink	Oxpens Road (in area). Prices by event.
	Oxford City Museum Runs free events and talks including Tea and Talk for older adults.	St. Aldate's (out of area)

	Oxford Town Hall provides a space for publicly accessible events, some of which are free. Tea dances are popular with older adults.	St. Aldate's (out of area)
	The Westgate Library offers spaces for people to run book clubs and runs a series of events for children and young people	Queen Street (out of area)

Sources:

Appendix 3 Data Framework and Topic Lists

Topic List for Organisations and groups

Opening question:

Purpose of the project, Q&A

Bridging question:

Information about your group/organisation (e.g. i. Name, type (charity, social enterprise, community group etc.), any explicit social purpose to organisational remit, resources/supports provided.

Main questions:

- i. The strengths of this area
- ii. What are the barriers that affect local people the most.
- iii. How could these be overcome.

Possible prompts:

- What has been your experience of collaborating with other groups/ charities/ agencies?
- For community-based projects and initiatives – what are the ingredients for success in the long term?
- What are the key challenges you face as a community-based organisation/ what are the main challenges you think community-based organisations face – what would help solve them?
- What lessons need to be learned from the pandemic, or what needs to be put in place, to ensure the community is better equipped to deal with the impacts next time round?
- How do you connect with the local community/communities? Do you have any special techniques or strategies?
- Do you have any other observations about health and wellbeing in this area and how it could be improved?

Topic list for informal groups and individuals

Opening question:

See checklist for participants. Answer questions

Bridging question:

Tell us a bit about your connection with the area?

Main questions:

- i. The strengths of this area
- ii. What are the barriers that affect you most
- iii. How could these be overcome

Possible prompts:

- What do you value about Osney/Hinksey/ St Thomas as a community?
- What do you do, to keep healthy?
- What kinds of things are most challenging for you living in Osney/Hinksey/ St Thomas that impact on health and wellbeing?

(Not worrying about money; Job security; Good quality, affordable housing; Healthy and affordable food; Good local schools; Adult education and training opportunities; Good, locally-available services; Access to the internet; Getting exercise (walking, cycling or playing sport))

- Do you feel safe in the community?
- What local groups, services, organisations, community spaces etc. do you find particularly helpful or useful to your health and well-being?
- What are the other local strengths and resources that support community health and wellbeing (such as community spirit, individual skills, passions, knowledge, green spaces etc.)?
- What do you think helps you/your family maintain healthy habits around food and eating and getting out and about, or what would help you?
- Do you think you and the local community would benefit from additional initiatives to support health and well-being?
- Would you be interested in joining with others (perhaps in a community group or project) to work on projects to support health and well-being?
- What do you think would encourage more local people to create or take part in health and wellbeing initiatives?

Demographic questions:

- Explain purpose (to compare participants as a group with info. about local residents)
- Stress optional

Demographic questions for individual interviewees (use highlighter or red biro)

Unique reference number (all private individuals)	
---	--

What type of accommodation do you live in?

- A whole house or bungalow
- A flat, maisonette or apartment

A mobile or temporary structure

- Other (please specify)

Does your household rent or own this accommodation?

- Owns outright
- Owns with a mortgage or loan
- Part owns and part rents (shared ownership)
- Rents (with or without housing benefit)
- Lives here rent free
- Not applicable

If you rent, who is your landlord?

- Housing association, housing co-operative, charitable trust, registered social landlord
- Council or local authority
- Private landlord or letting agency
- Employer of a household member
- Relative of a household member
- Other

What is your ethnic group or background?

White	Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	Asian/Asian British	Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British
Other ethnic group			

Which age group do you belong to (Highlight the box. No respondents under 16 years of age)

16-19	20-24	25-34	35-46
50-64	65-74	75-84	85+

What is your sex?

- Female
- Male
- I prefer not to say

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No

15. If you answered 'yes', do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- Not at all

Framework for Analysis

- a)** Strengths and assets in the area that support and enable residents' health and wellbeing
- b)** Challenges to their health and wellbeing (inc. cost of living)
- c)** What they think would help to address these.

	A. Strengths/Assets	B. Weaknesses/Barriers	C. Possible improvements
1. Employment opportunities inc. precarity			
2. Work-related skills/training			
3. Money and poverty			
4. Access to health & social care inc. VCSE			
5. Housing inc. affordability			
6. Food & nutrition			
7. Transport and access			
8. Child education & childcare			
9. Crime, safety and nuisance			
10. Community – internal sense of			
11. Community – connections to others			

On your notes of the meeting code:

- S** Summary of what participant was saying (bullet point)
- Q** Direct quotes
- T** Your thoughts/insights about what it might mean

When transcribing your notes of the meeting, include the correct code or codes, e.g.:

- Q** “They’ve built loads of flats over the road, but none of them are available at a social rent.”5B
- T** Maybe the Council could impose requirements for more social housing on developers?

COMMUNITY GLUE

Community Insight Project, September/October 2023

A. Background

We are a small non-profit company working alongside local people, and we have been asked by Oxford City Council to find out how life is for people in St Ebbes, St Thomas and Grandpont, how it affects their health and well being, and to hear people's ideas about how it could be improved. There will be some grant funding available to make improvements in the areas we identify.

The Survey

Please help us by completing this short survey. The information you give us will help build up a picture of what is important to the people living in the area, to create a publicly available report called a Community Insight Profile. You can see some examples created by other organisations here. These are used to plan local supports and services.

If you would rather complete this survey online, you can do it by following this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/229SPVM>

This survey is anonymous. We will not record your name.

1. Your permission

If you are happy to go ahead, please tick 'yes'.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

When you have completed this survey, please place it in the envelope provided and give it to:

B. Your connection to the Osney/ Hinksey/ St Thomas area

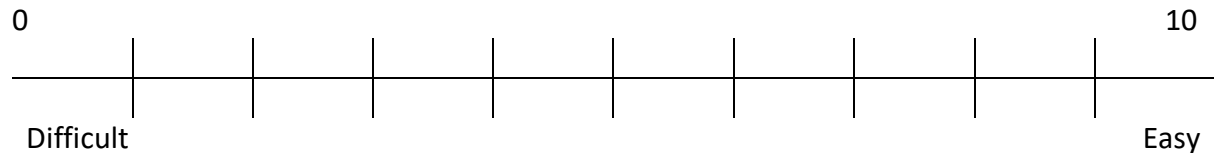
2. You and the community

Please tick the box that best describes your strongest connection to the area.

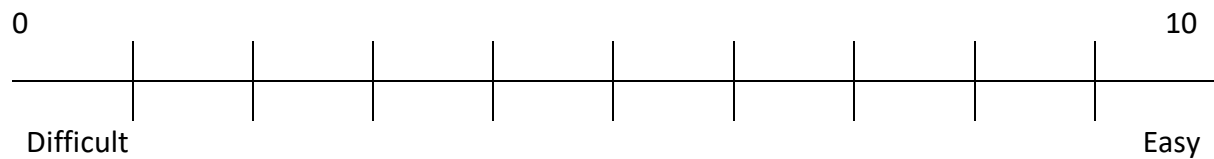
- ☐ I live in the area
☐ I live on the edge of the area
☐ I have family or friends who live in the area

- ☐ I work in the area
- ☐ I study in the area
- ☐ I work for an organisation that supports people in the area.

3. How easy do you find it to get from Osney/ Hinksey/ St Thomas to other parts of the city?



4. How easy do you find it to get around in Osney/ Hinksey/ St Thomas?



C. Where you live

5. What is the name you use for the area you live in? (e.g. St. Ebbes, Friars Wharf, City Centre, Carfax etc.)

6. What type of accommodation do you live in?

- ☐ A whole house or bungalow
- ☐ A flat, maisonette or apartment
- ☐ A mobile or temporary structure
- ☐ Other (please specify)

7. Does your household rent or own this accommodation?

- ☐ Owns outright
- ☐ Owns with a mortgage or loan
- ☐ Part owns and part rents (shared ownership)
- ☐ Rents (with or without housing benefit)
- ☐ Lives here rent free
- ☐ Not applicable

8. If you rent, who is your landlord?

- ☐ Housing association, housing co-operative, charitable trust, registered social landlord
- ☐ Council or local authority

- ☐ Private landlord or letting agency
- ☐ Employer of a household member
- ☐ Relative of a household member
- ☐ Other

9. How satisfied do you feel with your housing?

0 10

| | | | | | | | | |

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied

10. Overall, how satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live

0 10

| | | | | | | | | |

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied

D. About you

This information will help us to compare the group of people who take this survey with other groups.

11. How old are you? (circle one)

16-19	20-24	25-34	35-46
50-64	65-74	75-84	85+

12. What is your ethnic group or background?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple ethnic group
- ☐ Asian/Asian British
- ☐ Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British
- ☐ Other ethnic group

13. What is your sex?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ I prefer not to say

E. Health & Wellbeing

14. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15. If you answered 'yes', do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- ☐ Yes, a lot
- ☐ Yes, a little
- ☐ Not at all

16. What barriers have you experienced in looking after yourself? (Please tick all that apply to you)

- ☐ Cost and affordability
- ☐ Access to healthcare
- ☐ Job security
- ☐ Good quality, affordable housing
- ☐ Healthy and affordable food
- ☐ Transport
- ☐ Access to the internet
- ☐ Health condition
- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ None of the above

Other (please specify)

--

17. What do you feel would improve the health and wellbeing of people in the area?

--

F. About the area

18. Safety

How safe do you feel at night

- ☐ Very safe
- ☐ Fairly safe
- ☐ Neither safe nor unsafe
- ☐ Fairly unsafe
- ☐ Very unsafe
- ☐ Don't know

How safe do you feel during the day

- ☐ Very safe
- ☐ Fairly safe
- ☐ Neither safe nor unsafe
- ☐ Fairly unsafe
- ☐ Very unsafe
- ☐ Don't know

19. Do you use these services/facilities? (please tick)

	Mainly in the area	Mainly outside the area	Not at all
General Practitioner/NHS			
Nursery or schools for your child/children			
Community Centre or church/village hall			
Corner shop/newsagents (small items)			
Larger shops (bulk buy or specialist)			
Training or education for yourself			
Parks and green spaces			
Public transport (bus stop/train station)			
Restaurant or take- away			

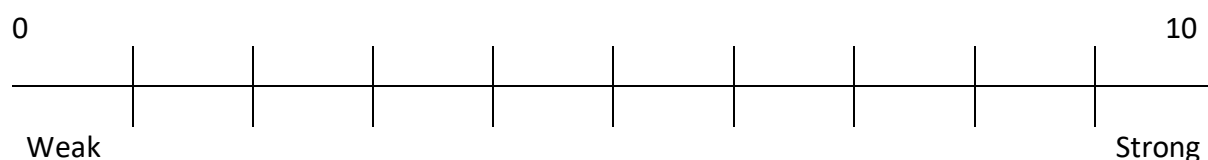
Other (please specify)

20. Work and training/education. Pick the answer that best describes you.

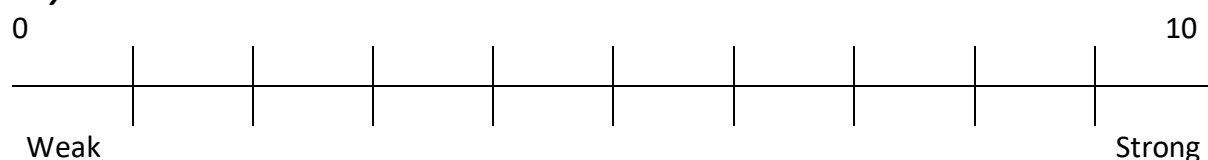
- ☐ I have the skills and/or qualifications to find employment
- ☐ There are local opportunities to learn new skills and/or gain qualifications
- ☐ I feel able to access local opportunities to learn new skills and/or gain qualifications
- ☐ None of the above

G. Your Community

21. How much do you feel a sense of community with other people in Osney/ Hinksey/ St Thomas



22. How much do you feel a sense of community with people in other parts of the City?



23. What is the best thing about living, studying or working in the area?

Appendix 5 Characteristics of 31 People Participating in Online Survey

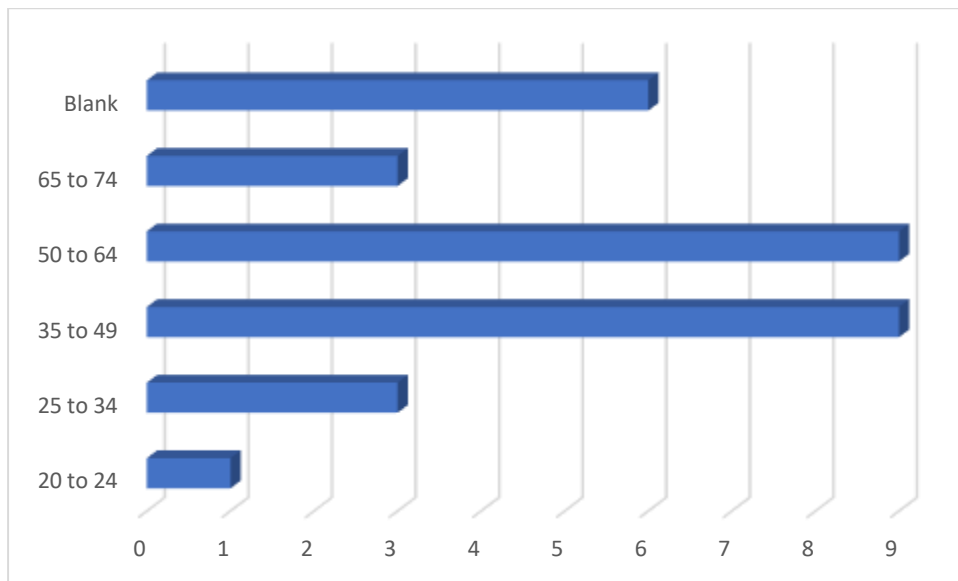


Figure 6: Age Group of Respondents

White	22
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	0
Asian/Asian British	0
Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British	2
Other ethnic group	1
Did not answer	6

Table 4. Answers to 'What is your ethnic group or background?'

I prefer not to say	3
Female	14
Male	8
Did not answer	6

Table 5: Answers to 'What is your sex?'

Appendix 6 Summary recommendations by topic area

Work and employment

One of the local business owners suggested some sort of mentoring or group support for people, particularly young people wanting to start businesses in the area. This could potentially link with the [Aspire Enterprise Hub](#) and also the wider [Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership](#).

Work-related skills and training

Many people suggested that lists of meaningful activities, including but not limited to vocational training, would be helpful. Many of these had an educational element (e.g. gardening, cooking).

Money and poverty

- In conversation with [Hogacre Common](#), it was suggested that South Oxford Farmers Market could run a Repair Shop – repair rather than buy new (which would be cheaper, and you learn a skill)
- [WOCA](#) host an IT surgery that would probably get more footfall and therefore be better used at Frideswide Square.
- The agencies offering welfare/benefits advice could be better co-ordinated, with shared publicity. Additional capacity (perhaps in the form of trained volunteers) might also be helpful.
- The City Council have recently produced a leaflet of free things to do in the area. This could be developed and expanded.

Access to Health and Social Care

- The obvious suggestions made by many people related to more help being available, and more accessible. In particular, open access mental health support close to the city centre was thought to be important.
- Additional locally-based training for staff working for social landlords would help them develop a picture of local issues and the supports that area available.
- One volunteer at South Oxford Community Centre (SOCC) would like to start offering reminiscence therapy via Age UK locally – currently people have to travel to dementia cafe in Cowley. More could be done to support the development of these kind of initiatives and sustain them subsequently.
- Two people suggested more support to help people improve their wellbeing through activities like gardening and dog-walking. We are aware of social prescribing services in the area, but this could also be improved if Local Area Co-ordination is introduced, which is being piloted in the County Council's draft wellbeing strategy.

Housing and Homelessness

- Affordability and scarcity of housing are linked issues that also impact on the provision of support for homeless people. There is a widely shared perception that the gap between the very rich and those experiencing hardship is growing, a trend that should not be allowed to continue.

- While large-scale facilities such as Lucy Faithful House and Simon House have been knocked down, homeless organisations have pursued short-term lets and fair rents among local landowners. Some have highlighted that Oxford University and the constituent colleges could do more, particularly if (as we have been told) demand for student accommodation has reduced since the pandemic. More could be done to find short-term lets, and held those projects currently using them to obtain longer-term arrangements.
- There is also a need for more long-term social housing, particularly for people with connections to the area, including those in shelters who will not 'move on' to independent living.
- The possible re-development of O'Hanlon House perhaps presents opportunities as well as challenges. While retaining capacity in the city centre is essential in our view a mixed-use site with social housing and day services would help meet needs that are currently not being met.
- The women-only house run by Aspire on Becket Street is clearly a success, and Homeless Oxfordshire also run some single sex provision on Botley Road and in East Oxford in partnership with Turning Point. While these are welcome, there appears to be a need for more single sex support.
- Relationships between tenants and social landlords in the area are clearly at a low ebb. Some sort of outreach work, perhaps combined with the collective meetings, might help to surface issues more effectively. This could be supported by e.g. a tenants association or less formal semi-social meetings that HOs/TMOs could attend.

Food & nutrition

- OxGrow, and schemes on the periphery of our area, are happy to be involved in some sort of outreach to promote themselves to residents. This seems like a good idea, although we heard from two homeless couples who prefer the schemes on the periphery because of the 'soup kitchen' stigma.
- The discreet funding of community larder membership seemed to work better than schemes that require people to self-identify as 'poor' to gain access. This approach could be reinstated and expanded.
- There seems to be a lot of 'churn' in the organisations providing food and meals, with some schemes apparently capping demand by relying on word of mouth rather than publicity. At least one service we came across had been affected by food and hygiene regulations, which might be another explanation why some schemes keep a lower profile. Some sort of central project for supporting compliance and co-ordinating publicity might be helpful. In other parts of the city and county co-ordinating food provision has created a springboard for other community initiatives (see e.g. the [OX4 Food Crew](#)).
- Subject to the identification of a suitable community space or spaces, a community larder/fridge scheme could be established more locally.

Transport and access

- Repairs to the various bridges are in hand, although flagging their significance to policy-makers might expedite matters.
- Similarly repairs to pavements are a well-known issue that should already be a priority.
- One resident who used to work on the railways suggested that it might be possible to get buses closer by using a little-known gate on the station site.

Child education and childcare

- Discussions with the NHS about provision of a Speech and Language Therapist to SOFR might be productive.
- Co-ordinated volunteer recruitment from the St. Ebbe's/Friars Wharf area might help to reduce some of the cultural differences across the river.
- Small grants might enable more outreach.
- It would be helpful to have a physical space that young people can call/make their own.
- We were advised that establishing a Detached Youth Work service would take 2-3 years, but might be worthwhile. This could support some of the young people to participate in activities from which they currently feel excluded.
- There were discussions about low cost or free activities at the Ice Rink specifically aimed at children and young people in the area.

Crime, safety and nuisance

- Several professionals commented that reduced resources had put a strain on inter-agency co-operation, and face-to-face meetings with local workers concerned with crime and disorder had become rare. These could be reinstated.
- Some people wanted more pedestrianisation.
- One worker stated that the signage for Public Safety Protection Orders was still up, and that this made homeless people feel threatened and unwelcome.
- Many people in local social housing wanted outdoor 'community spaces' on their premises, but some were concerned that these could be colonised by drug users or dealers. Managing this arguably needs the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders.

Community

People made a huge range of suggestions for how to improve the environment and the sense of community. Space precludes listing all of them, so we have included this summary under the headings above.

Places to meet

- Many people mentioned the need for a local community centre, or at least designated spaces for local people. "It would be nice to have a community centre which is not overpriced".
- People mentioned the proposed Z Hotel that is being built on the site of the old Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre, and suggested it should have a community space as well as a live music space that is apparently a condition of planning permission.
- "Why don't they join up the big developments that are happening in the area with what's needed by the local residents?"

- Better paving on the side streets to be more accessible for people using walking aids, wheelchairs and scooters.

Places just to be

- "Can we have Oxford in Bloom reinstated?"
- "The two benches on the way to the Gasworks Rail Bridge used to have great views of the river – would be great if the canopy/undergrowth could be trimmed back. Would also be great if there were a couple more benches facing upstream".
- "Another thing that's important for people's health and well-being is the height of the buildings and the new developments. No one wants to live next to a huge glass building and have that in their back garden."
- "They should put the terraces back."
- "The green spaces in Oxford don't often have somewhere comfortable to sit. They've removed the benches to make it hard for homeless people."

Things to do

- "Cheap cafes and bars."
- "Open the outdoor swimming pool open 12 months of the year."
- Several people suggested an outdoor Gym in one of the nearby green spaces.
- "Inclusive recreation areas for all ages groups and abilities."
- "Water based activities, would be good. A pontoon under the white bridge so boats could pull up, and we can access the river easier. Clean river water."
- "It would be good to have more facilities [on Oxpens Meadow] like tennis courts, a multi-use games area."

Connections to other communities

- Nearly everyone we spoke to from church and community groups expressed a willingness in principle to help new projects get off the ground. Many residents had visited SOCC or WOCA: "WOCA has been and is so vital for us because it draws in people from all over and further than their very local community. We feel a part of that community." Some had gone to events in other community centres around the city. Organised trips might make this more popular.
- [Hogacre Common](#) is keen to make its projects more accessible to people in the area, but lacks capacity for concerted outreach. The lack of supports for older men could be addressed by developing a [Men's Sheds](#) intergenerational project, perhaps in partnership with Hogacre Common.
- The need for more outreach and a co-ordinated approach to recruiting volunteers from the area was an objective for several organisations we spoke to.
- Several people spoke about the need for community and multi-use space in any new developments in the area, particularly the [proposed new development](#) on 'Waste Ground' at the back of the Ice Rink

Appendix 7 Support Organisations Participating

This list contains only those organisations and individuals agreeing to be identified. In many cases, we spoke to more than one individual from the relevant organisation.

Anchor Housing
Aspire
Elmore Community Services
Fusion Lifestyle
GreenSquare Accord
Hogacre Common
Homeless Oxfordshire
Jolly Farmers Pub
Makespace
Oxford City Council
 City Councillors
 Health and Housing Services
 Leisure & Wellbeing Support
 Leisure Centres and Ice Rink
 Out of Hospital Care Group
 Parks and Green Spaces
 Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project
Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance
South Oxford Community Centre
South Oxford Faily Room
St. Barnabas Church
St. Ebbes Church
St. Frideswide Church
St. Matthew's Church
St. Mungo's
St. Thomas Church
West Oxford Community Centre
Oxfordshire Youth

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