



Photo: Community First Oxfordshire office garden - February 2025

Winter Newsletter 2025

Winter at Community First Oxfordshire has been busy! With new Neighbourhood Plan commissions, community hall events, climate engagement pathways, and community insight research into health, our staff are continuing to engage communities in shaping their places. We've also been busy with internal structure, as our 4-year strategy is being updated and a new website and design are underway - keep an eye out for our new logo in the next newsletter!

In this month's newsletter....



We'll update on some **projects** we've been involved in, including a Blue Badge initiative, Stop Smoking outreach and the Well Together Programme.



We'll also welcome a new **staff member**, share a **resource** on our work in health, and information about a **funding opportunity**.



We've also put together some **reflections** on our work with halls and parish councils, as well as the current housing crisis.



As always, if you have any questions or ideas for future newsletters, do let us know.



Inside a Parish Council: A Conversation with Watlington Parish Councillors

Last week, I heard from Karyn and Nicky about their work in Watlington Parish Council. They showed me how much passionate parish councillors are doing for their communities, but also some of the difficulties they face.

Click [here](#) for the full article.



Blue Badge Assessment Day Trial - December 2024



“It was very successful, efficient and very friendly. So nice to be part of something which actually works!”

~ Garsington GNS



Community First Oxfordshire worked with Oxfordshire County Council to trial an in-person Blue Badge Assessment day for people that needed Blue Badges but had not been able to apply for one because they struggled to get all the documents they needed or didn't know how to apply.

We wouldn't have known this was an issue if it wasn't for the feedback from voluntary community transport schemes. It was also down to these volunteer schemes that nearly 20 people were able to get to the County Hall and go through the whole assessment process. The County Council staff couldn't have been any friendlier and helpful - it was lovely to see such warmth in the room. It really was a successful day, so here's to more (accessible and friendly) assessment days in 2025!

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Stop Smoking Community Outreach Project

Community First Oxfordshire has teamed up with Oxfordshire County Council Public Health Team to offer a new service to help people stop smoking. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable ill health and death in the UK and despite falling rates over the last decade, an estimated 10% of adults in Oxfordshire are smokers.

We know that traditional ways of reaching people may not have been working and new methods are needed. That's why our Outreach Worker is available to give information, advice and support, tailored to people's needs, in their local community. This includes raising awareness of the [Stop for Life Oxon](#) service and how to access it.

Over the coming months we will be visiting local groups, activities and events around the county, working in partnership with local community connectors. Please get in touch if you would like a visit or know someone who might benefit by emailing:
stopsmoking@communityfirstoxon.org

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£1 million awarded to Oxfordshire community groups to tackle health inequalities

Over 130 activities in ten priority areas across Oxfordshire have received a boost after being awarded Well Together funding.



The Well Together programme offers grassroots groups financial and community development support to strengthen the work they are doing in helping people to make healthier choices for themselves and their families. A wide range of activities are taking place across the county that will benefit children, young people and adults.

A small team of Community Capacity Builders (CCBs) have been raising awareness of Well Together over the last year and supporting groups through the application process. The team are building on their strong community connections to help groups monitor and measure the impact of the work as well as providing infrastructure support.

Well Together funding has been distributed on a rolling basis, so all groups are at different stages of offering their activities. For some who received a grant earlier in 2024, their activities are now well underway. Some of these include:



[Rose Hill Junior Youth Club](#) who are delivering sessions for ages 5-16 focused on improving wellbeing and building friendships through nature, cooking and art activities. [Oxford Wood Recycling](#) are holding Community Shed sessions, encouraging residents from nearby Caldecott to meet their neighbours while making, creating or dabbling with wood.

[South Oxford Community Centre](#) hosts seated exercise classes with the opportunity to make friends in the community café afterwards. [Banbury Young Homeless Project](#) have been running sessions for 16–25-year-olds to promote mental wellbeing. [UCARE](#) are providing expert advice on urological cancers to other groups funded through the programme.



A parent attending the [PEEP](#) baby group in Littlemore explained how these activities support wellbeing:

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“Prior to attending this group, I didn’t know anyone in our local community. Now I feel a part of the community and regularly see other individuals from the group out and about. This has had a very positive impact on my mental health as I adjusted to becoming a mum.”

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**well
together**

Well Together is delivered in partnership by [OCVA](#) and Community First Oxfordshire, and funded by the NHS BOB Integrated Care Board.

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How does Community First Oxfordshire’s work feed into health and wellbeing across the county?

Health is more than just ‘not being ill’. As the WHO explains: “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” and staying well in daily life can help prevent illness.

There are lots of things which impact health, much more than just medical care (though this is crucial). Whether it’s a community dance class or a footpath to a nature reserve, our social and physical surroundings influence our wellbeing. If we are connected to people, encouraged to exercise, comfortable in our homes, and able to access healthcare, we are generally happier and healthier. Here’s how our work links to health:

<https://www.communityfirstoxon.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Community-First-Oxfordshire-supporting-healthy-communities.pdf>



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Pop up Pubs, Renovations, & Hire Space: How the Hall is a Cornerstone for Community

In December, I got the chance to visit Tackley village hall with Community First Oxfordshire’s Halls Advisor, Tessa. I heard about the great initiatives there, some of the difficulties they’re facing, and how Tessa offers them support.

With a brilliant pop up pub serving over 200 customers a night in summer, and a fully booked venue most weeks, Tackley village hall is a wonderful example of how halls can be a key hub for communities.

Tessa - our Halls Advisor - runs a support service for halls which makes sure all the governance, licensing, funding, and volunteers are in place to allow a hall to thrive.



This year, she is excited for village halls week celebrating the work of volunteers (save the date March 17th-23rd!), and to continue linking up halls across Oxfordshire.



**celebrating,
encouraging
& supporting
volunteers**
17-23 March 2025



**Village
Halls
Week**

Read the full blog post here:

<https://www.communityfirstoxon.org/visit-to-tackley-village-hall-pop-up-pubs-renovations-and-hire-space-how-the-hall-is-a-cornerstone-for-community/>

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Village Halls Week Events: 17-23rd March

This year's Village Halls Week is just around the corner. It is a chance to celebrate the many trustees who run our village halls and **THANK THEM** for all the hard work that they do to keep our halls going on a daily basis and also for improving them for future use.

Community First Oxfordshire is putting on two events during this week, the first of which is being held at the **Stewart Hall Brightwell Cum-Sotwell in South Oxfordshire on Tuesday 18th March from 2.30pm until 4.30pm**. At this event, you will hear about the large refurbishment project that the trustees are embarking on, followed by some tips and ideas on how to attract new volunteers to your hall committee from Tessa Hall (Community First Oxfordshire). Afterwards, there will be a chance to chat with volunteers from other halls over cups of tea and delicious locally made cake. If you fancy it you could visit the lovely community shop behind the hall too.

The second event will take place on **Saturday 22nd March at Duns Tew Village Hall in Cherwell**, where you can build a website for your hall with 'Hugo Fox', a leading provider of community websites. This is a free event and is from **10.30 am until 12 noon**. There are still a few available spaces.

A celebratory buffet lunch will take place at Duns Tew Hall from **1.00pm until 2.30pm**. The wonderful Middle Eastern food will be provided by the DAMASCUS ROSE KITCHEN, a community enterprise supporting refugee women in our community

<https://damascusrosekitchen.org/>.

You are invited to arrive from 12.30pm. Handouts and tips about getting more volunteers to step forward to join your committees will be provided and this will be a chance to have a good

chat with other hall trustees and celebrate all your hard work together.

Contact Tessa Hall email tessa@communityfirstoxon.org if you have not done so already, so that I know how much food to order.



1.5 million homes – or will they just be more houses?



For the last few decades, governments have promoted housebuilding through private developers, suggesting that this will solve our housing crisis. The planning system has been steadily weakened with the justification that this will drive growth. But where does this leave communities? Our Community Planning Officer Stephen explains our current context, and how communities can regain power in developments.

Click [here](#) for the full article.



Does your community group have a project or a great idea to bring people together? This year's Communities Fund is still open for applications! It supports grassroots projects that:

- ☀ Create opportunities for older people 50+ and adults with additional needs
- ☀ Promote socialising and building meaningful connections in the community
- ☀ Boost local activities in categories such as: Community Based Socialising, Health & Wellbeing, Arts, Culture & Creative, Green/Environmental & Outdoor Activities, New Skills Learning

Up to £5,000 per project is available for communities to develop and expand activities in their local community that help to achieve the countywide ambition of creating places that support

the people of Oxfordshire to live well, reduce isolation, remain fit, live independently and remain healthy for as long as possible in their community. How to apply:

1. Check the full eligibility criteria <https://ocva.org.uk/connected-communities-fund/>
2. Submit a simple Expression of Interest form
3. Receive support from OCVA and Community First Oxfordshire
4. Applications reviewed on a rolling basis

Funded by Oxfordshire County Council (Adult Social Care) and delivered in partnership with OCVA and Community First Oxfordshire.

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Community First Membership 2025-26

Thanks to the many of you that supported our organisation in 2024/25. Your continued support through our membership is key to helping us continue to support Oxfordshire's communities.

We can confirm that the membership **fees for 2025-26 will remain the same as last year:**

☰ Parish Meeting £25

☰ Parish Council (population below 300) £35

☰ Parish Council (population between 301-1000) £55

☰ Parish Council (population between 1001 – 5000) £70

☰ Town/Parish Council (population over 5001) £85

☰ Other £30

We hope you will consider becoming a Community First member, so that we can continue to provide vital help and support to our communities!

For more information, please contact Gemma - gemma@communityfirstoxon.org

Our next newsletter will be sent out in April, but in the meantime if you have any questions/comments, please do not hesitate to contact our **team**.

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