



OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

VICE-PRESIDENTS GROUP

Discussion Note

Achieving OCS Aim 3 – “Co-operate with Oxford’s resident’s associations, and civic societies nationally, to develop – and campaign for – community led solutions to shared problems”

1. Background

1. Vice-President’s Group discussions to date have focused on how the OCS can make progress towards achieving its Aim 3. Ideas were put forward in the initial Vice President’s meeting, in the ‘Action Plan’ meeting on November 3rd and were refined in the meeting of November 30th.
2. This Discussion Note synthesises the findings of the previous discussions and introduces the findings of subsequent research¹. The Discussion Note concludes with a recommended series of initiatives for OCS in 2021 and beyond.

2. Discussion Note

2.1. Introduction

3. The OCS needs to consolidate links with Oxford’s communities. This could include one or more of these types of community: (i) Communities of Place; (ii) Communities of Identity; and (iii) Communities of Interest.
4. Of these types, the two of particular interest to the VPs were Communities of Identity, especially youth, and Communities of Place, especially East Oxford. It was noted that OCS already has Communities of Interest links, with, as examples, climate change groups and cycling and pedestrian groups. Specific ideas put forward and discussed included:
 - Developing Young Civics. A number of ‘ways-in’ to this were identified²:
 - We could consider engaging in matters concerning the provision of green space, sport and youth.
 - In East Oxford, we could consider a young people’s leadership programme (in partnership with local schools), that attracts successful people from diverse backgrounds, who can share their stories of success and failure, and connect with young BAME people.
 - In terms of broader engagement, we could consider listening events that invite conversation with local East Oxford communities.

¹ Undertaken by the OCS Chairman

² See notes of Vice President’s meeting November 3rd 2020

5. Whatever we decide to do it was agreed that we will need financial resources and we'll need to seek sponsorships.

2.2. OCS strengths and weaknesses

6. These ideas were examined by reference to the strengths and weakness of the OCS: (i) the rare strengths of OCS are its city (and city-region) and multi-sector perspective and capacity to influence policy across a range of decision-making bodies; (ii) OCS has limited recent experience of activities at local level and, possibly, limited numbers of active members willing and able to undertake local activities; (iii) there are many very willing and able organisations undertaking local activities.³ The conclusion is that the OCS should make use of its strengths and not venture quickly into activities for which it may not be adequately prepared and capable.

2.2.1. Building on strengths

7. A key relevant strength of OCS is its active engagement in the Oxford Strategic Partnership and in particular the recent work of the Partnership in developing an 'Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy' initiative⁴.

8. After a significant amount of research and discussion⁵, the Partnership has identified priority areas to pursue for an inclusive economy in Oxfordshire. It is possible that OCS could achieve its Aim 3 by contributing effectively in these, or some of these, priority areas. Ways in which OCS could contribute are discussed under each priority area heading:

- **Linking social/community outcomes and benefits as part of infrastructure investments** – extensive investment of circa £700m is planned in Oxfordshire's infrastructure which will improve connectivity between local communities and economic opportunities. An example is the Cowley Branch line as a potential infrastructure project that must ensure that new rail services will benefit existing local residents and not lead to gentrification. This will require explicit goals, metrics and commitments to achieve benefits for the community and existing residents beyond infrastructure delivery.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 01 - This should be very much within the scope of the OCS Oxfordshire Futures, Planning and Transport Groups. The OFG could lead.

- **Enhancing access to affordable commercial property and workspace** – helping to incubate and grow local start-up businesses (including social enterprises) requires having access to affordable workspace. This could be pursued through 'meanwhile use' programmes, leveraging public sector ownership of land and buildings, partnering with anchor institutions that own substantial property, and other initiatives.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 02 - OCS is currently the beneficiary of the 'meanwhile use' approach, with our shop-window in the High Street, the anchor institution in this case being Lincoln College. OCS

³ Richard and Monawar described activities with which they have been associated (or led) and attention is also drawn to the work of the Community Impact Zone which is project managed by Oxford Hub, a centre for social action and collaboration in Oxford City. It is led by Sara Fernandez (who recently spoke about Oxford Hub in an OCS Talk).

⁴ The Organisation for Economy Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines inclusive growth as "economic growth that creates opportunity for all segments of the population and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society."

⁵ Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Initiative – Summary Report Findings, Oxford Strategic Partnership and Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership, 2020

could assume a role here too – is there an inventory of available spaces? Is a survey of anchor institutions needed to gauge their willingness to engage and conditions to do so?

- **Addressing housing affordability in innovative communities** – with the combination of housing growth, infrastructure delivery, and institutional partnership, there should be opportunities to use innovation and experimentation to try new models for housing that more quickly and directly address affordability, including potential housing discounts, and new forms of ownership.

AIM3 OCS INITIATIVE 03 - Is this one for the OCS Housing Group? Could the Group gather examples of good practice elsewhere and convene OCS talks or debates?

- **More targeted investment in better educational attainment, skills-based training, and access to jobs in the new economy** – talent development and the ability to empower local residents to gain the skills needed to compete and access new forms of employment are critical to opening up opportunities. Support at every stage of learning, including early education interventions, with an effective pathway into employment requires a more dynamic skills and education system with more engaged business leadership. There is a challenge to develop awareness of opportunities in new sectors for young people – whether that be technology or services. This should consider targeted initiatives to help people excluded from the workforce to overcome barriers to jobs.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 04 - This resonates with Monawar’s suggestion of a young people’s leadership programme (in partnership with local schools), that attracts successful people from diverse backgrounds, who can share their stories of success and failure, and connect with young BAME people. OCS could develop this approach in association with relevant schools and experienced community development associations and subsequently could coordinate a programme of events.

- **Place based programmes / investment to targeted areas (e.g., high deprivation)** – there is an acknowledged reality that deprivation and inequality of opportunity is concentrated in particular areas of Oxfordshire, and that place-based programmes and investment that combine hard and soft infrastructure can be shaped to retain more economic benefits locally. These benefits can include enhancing the skills of local residents, creating pathways for work, and opportunities in new businesses. For example, this can follow current neighbourhood initiatives to include a business support function to start-up businesses, investment in community facilities, enhanced skills training, alongside the emerging community and education impact zones.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 05 - The impact zones are well-supported already through, for example, Oxford Hub. OCS role could be to help to ensure that this work is better understood publicly and promoted widely.

- **Encourage more socially and environmentally responsible businesses** – more can be done to increase the number of socially and environmentally responsible businesses through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), best practices, alternative forms of ownership, etc. This initiative could be linked to procurement to give priority status on spending decisions to suppliers that earn recognition for socially responsible actions (e.g., paying all employees a living wage).

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 06 - Promoting this would be a high impact activity of OCS. Exploration of this with the new CEO of Oxfordshire Community Foundation may lead to initiatives which are manageable for OCS. (Hugo is Patron of the Oxfordshire Community Foundation).

- **Increasing local spend and enhancing local businesses through procurement** – learning from the experiences of other UK cities, Oxfordshire can look to boost local spend and economic capture through procurement strategies of anchor institutions such as local authorities, universities and colleges, the health sector and major local businesses. The benefits of this will be to add to the sustainability of local businesses and foster opportunities for local business set up, who often employ local residents. This could include: a) initiatives to boost the capacity of local small and medium sized businesses, and socially purposeful enterprises to be competitive suppliers; and b) creating more clarity on priority criteria to generate social value.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 07 - OCS could contribute by promoting these strategies in its OCS Talks, and in identifying opportunities on both the demand and supply sides of the strategies at community level. This would make a good discussion topic with local businesses and community organisations, with OCS acting as interlocutor between the local communities and, as examples, anchor institutions.

2.2.2. Economic impact of COVID-19 and implications for inclusive economy

9. The Oxford Strategic Partnership Report also notes that the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 are, and will continue to be, profound. It will affect the livelihoods and jobs of thousands of local people in Oxfordshire. For example, the RSA recently estimated that 22,000 jobs are at risk in Oxford (18% of the total) with other researchers suggesting unemployment rates over 10% nationally.

10. Evidence and early data research points to the COVID-19 pandemic having the largest impact on the people who were already economically deprived before this new crisis. This means that for a city like Oxford, with one of the highest levels of income inequality in England, the effects are likely to be geographically concentrated in lower income communities with higher pre-existing levels of deprivation. This also means effects will be larger for many less-skilled workers (not able to safely remote work from home) and BAME groups employed disproportionately in lower paid sectors.

11. These more recent impacts and events increase the importance of implementing inclusive economy initiatives, with particular emphasis on:

- **Increased community participation in setting inclusive economy priorities and actions** - there is a growing awareness that we need much greater participation and leadership from a wider-range of community leaders and representatives. In short, early work of the Inclusive Economy Commission and City Council must include proactive methods of engaging a wider set of residents and community stakeholders, which can leverage existing community service area efforts by Districts as well as social enterprises, educators, and community services in local areas.

AIM 3 OCS INITIATIVE 05+ - to directly address the challenge, activities in Aim 3 Initiative 05 would need to go beyond informing and promoting. It would need to include identifying ways in which communities engage with the councils, social enterprises, educators and community services. Back to Community Forums? This should be within the scope of OCS and would be a very valuable contribution.

- **Helping people get back to work** - substantial numbers of workers have already been furloughed and many will lose their jobs permanently. Some promising regional initiatives to help redeploy workers who lost their job into a position with near-term opportunity (e.g., grocery stores/delivery) likely will need to be scaled-up to mitigate against the negative effects of long-term unemployment. But much more will be needed, such as upskilling, increased apprenticeships, and the idea of partnering with industry to tailor fast-paced training programs to meet their

upcoming hiring needs. And it is critical that effective community employment plans (CEPs) are put in place for major construction projects to retain local jobs for local residents. In OxLEP's Oxfordshire Investment Plan, the People Pillar outlines a need to create a 'responsive skills system which can provide the talent which businesses need to thrive and grow' which is critical to recovery. The People pillar is structured around the Oxfordshire 'Social Contract', an innovative programme (with relevance for other areas of the UK) anchored in inclusive growth and levelling-up economic opportunities across the County.

AIM 3 INITIATIVE 08 – is simply for OCS to better understand the 'Social Contract' innovative programme and to gauge how OCS could usefully contribute.

- **Place-Based Inclusive Economy / Neighbourhood Regeneration** - we think that addressing income inequalities and geographically concentrated COVID-19 impacts will need to take on a stronger place-based emphasis, with targeted community-level interventions around skills training and small business support (for example), as the economic impacts are generally being felt most acutely in lower income neighbourhoods. Initial ideas currently being piloted and explored include:
 - Establishing Town Teams to develop community-led recovery plans for specific areas.
 - Scoping out the potential for empty (or soon to be empty) estate shops to be used for community-led activities/businesses and social enterprises.
 - Working with Activate Learning, OxLEP, Aspire etc. to explore the use of community centres for renewed focus as places of skills training, job redeployment, and enterprise support, with particular emphasis on supporting younger people and those on furlough or made redundant.
 - Seeking community wealth building and ownership as part of current and future regeneration and development projects.

AIM 3 INITIATIVE 09 – OCS should be engaged in the exploration of the ideas and pilots, and ensuring that the ideas are explored publicly and additional ideas encouraged. OCS should also be in a position to monitor the effectiveness of neighbourhood regeneration and to ensure that lessons learned are made known widely.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

12. There are clearly many community oriented initiatives identified which are well researched, current and which link to our Aim 3. We need to engage in ways which make best use of our strengths, in particular, the rare strengths of OCS as a community organization, of having a city (and city-region) wide and cross-sector view and the capacity to influence a wide range of decision-makers. Linking directly to the recommendations of the Oxford Strategic Partnership for an inclusive economy would mainstream the work of OCS and as its activities would be aimed at well researched targets would be more likely to be effective.

3.1. OCS Aim 3 Activities

13. Following-up with Aim 3 Initiatives 1-9 will enable us to broadly cooperate with residents' associations (and other communities of place and identity) and to facilitate community-led solutions to shared problems – the OCS would be working towards achieving its aim. Most of the recommended initiatives do not require OCS to provide active members willing and able to undertake local activities and OCS would be working with the very many willing and able organisations already undertaking local activities – OCS activities would be efficient.

3.2. OCS Resources for Aim 3 Activities

3.2.1. Financial Resources

14. Initiatives 1-9 make very limited demands on OCS financial resources. A contingency is suggested for 2021 (£1,000) for expenditure which may arise (especially Initiative 03).

3.2.2. Human Resources

15. The main demand is on human resources, as follows:

Initiative	Resource needed	Action
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 01 - OCS could contribute by promoting these strategies in its OCS Talks, and in identifying opportunities on both the demand and supply sides of the strategies at community level. This would make a good discussion topic with local businesses and community organisations, with OCS acting as interlocutor between the local communities and, as examples, anchor institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Group management of talks – possible speaker fees. • An active member to coordinate the activities of the initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify relevant talks in the 2021 programme • Seek volunteer to coordinate the initiative
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 02 - The impact zones are well-supported already through, for example, Oxford Hub. OCS role could be to help to ensure that this work is better understood publicly and promoted widely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Group management of talks – possible speaker fees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify relevant talks in the 2021 programme
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 02+ - to directly address the challenge, activities in Aim 3 Initiative 02 would need to go beyond informing and promoting. It would need to include identifying ways in which communities engage with the councils, social enterprises, educators and community services. Back to Community Forums? This should be within the scope of OCS and would be a very valuable contribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A research resource could be useful (perhaps the University Consultancy organised by the University Careers Office) • An initiative coordinator is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify initiative coordinator
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 03 - This resonates with Monawar's suggestion of a young people's leadership programme (in partnership with local schools), that attracts successful people from diverse backgrounds, who can share their stories of success and failure, and connect with young BAME people. OCS could develop this approach in association with relevant schools and experienced community development associations and subsequently could coordinate a programme of events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An active member to coordinate the activities of the initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek volunteer to coordinate the initiative
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 04 - This should be very much within the scope of the OCS Oxfordshire Futures, Planning and Transport Groups. The OFG could lead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFG to lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put on the OFG agenda
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 05 - OCS is currently the beneficiary of the 'meanwhile use' approach, with our shop-window in the High Street, the anchor institution in this case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An active member to coordinate the activities of the initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek volunteer to coordinate the initiative – possibly

being Lincoln College. OCS could assume a role here too – is there an inventory of available spaces? Is a survey of anchor institutions needed to gauge their willingness to engage and conditions to do so?		from the Planning Group?
AIM3 INITIATIVE 06 - Is this one for the OCS Housing Group? Could the Group gather examples of good practice elsewhere and convene OCS talks or debates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Group to take this on as a special activity leading to a report and talks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask Housing Group to take this on as a special activity
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 07 - Promoting this would be a high impact activity of OCS. Exploration of this with the new CEO of Oxfordshire Community Foundation may lead to initiatives which are manageable for OCS. (Hugo is Patron of the Oxfordshire Community Foundation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IG to follow up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IG to follow up with CEO of Oxfordshire Community Organisation
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 08 – is simply for OCS to better understand the ‘Social Contract’ innovative programme and to gauge how OCS could usefully contribute.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IG to follow up 	
AIM 3 INITIATIVE 09 – OCS should be engaged in the exploration of the ideas and pilots, and ensuring that the ideas are explored publicly and additional ideas encouraged. OCS should also be in a position to monitor the effectiveness of neighbourhood regeneration and to ensure that lessons learned are made known widely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IG to lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCS to follow-up through the Oxford City Centre Strategy Task Force and Oxford Strategic Partnership – IG to lead.

16. A more general point is that a Trustee (existing or to be appointed in 2021) could be assigned the task of overall coordination of the achievement of Aim 3.

17. A similar arrangement could be organised for the other OCS Aims? Can we fill in the following Table?

AIM	Title	Trustee / other	Linked VP
AIM 1	Influence the development of Oxford as a city where people enjoy living, working and visiting;	??	??
AIM 2	Inform its members – and others – about Oxford; its key qualities, as well as its problems, with constructive and soundly based proposals for its further improvement	Hilary	??
AIM 3	Co-operate with Oxford’s residents’ associations and civic	??	??

	societies nationally to develop – and campaign for – community-led solutions to shared problems;		
AIM 4	Learn from other cities, in both the UK and abroad, where creative strategies might be helpful to Oxford.	??	??

IG 28/12/20