



COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING REPORT NOVEMBER 2024



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This report aims to represent the journey, experiences and learning of the social entrepreneurs who founded and lead food-related enterprises within the OX4 Food Crew in Oxford City.

Through sharing these experiences and consolidating their learnings it aims to inform other enterprises embarking on a similar journey. Furthermore, this report presents ideas from these social entrepreneurs about support, policies and programmes that would nurture a flourishing community wealth building environment for food-related social enterprises.

This work has been funded by **Oxford City Council**'s Community Impact Fund as part of their 'Big Ideas' grant programme. Our thanks go to the people who gave generously of their time and who openly shared their stories to help shape this report:

- Nuha from **Damascus Rose**
- Annie, Pippa, Musti and Helen from **Flo's Place in the Park**
- Ella and Katie from **No Vice Ice**
- Hassan from **OCA Kitchen**
- Sandra and Marie from **Waste2Taste**

Watch this short [video](#), which showcases the work of these amazing social entrepreneurs – please do share widely!

Aims of this study

- Framing of what we mean by community wealth building and how it relates to the context of food-related enterprise
- A better understanding of **community wealth building** factors that have contributed to the success and growth of food-related enterprises from the OX4 Food Crew.
- A better understanding of the barriers to community wealth building that the OX4 Food Crew social enterprises have experienced and how they overcame/are handling them.
- Identification of common themes that may be relevant to a broad range of food-related social enterprises.
- Explore ways to enable the conditions that support community wealth building through policy and programmatic interventions.
- Contribute to the wider community wealth building movement in Oxford and support the work of the OwnedByOxford Project by hearing the voices of more social entrepreneurs.¹

Research Questions

- What community wealth building factors have contributed to the success and growth of food-related social enterprises in the OX4 Food Crew?
- What barriers have hindered community wealth building through food-related social enterprise in the OX4 Food Crew?
- What is needed to support more food-related social enterprises through a community wealth building approach?

WHO'S WHO ?

THE PEOPLE & ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

'**OX4 Food Crew** is a partnership of 9 small grassroots organisations in Oxford's OX4 postcode collectively responding to the growing crisis of food insecurity in their neighbourhoods.

The partnership originally emerged as a response to emergency food needs during Covid-19 and has subsequently developed and expanded (responding to diverse needs and a shift of emphasis and beginning to build community-led recovery and resilience).

Working with more local organisations and learning from wider networks such as Good Food Oxfordshire, OX4 Food Crew has begun to work towards a system change in how we think about food and eating well and addressing the food inequalities that exist within their community.

The groups' shared mission is working together to ensure that "everyone in OX4 has enough good food, is well nourished and can thrive".² Five of the 9 organisations working towards this shared goal at OX4 Food Crew are featured here.'



5

OX4-BASED, FOOD-RELATED
SOCIAL ENTERPRISES
WERE CONSULTED
FOR THIS STUDY

1



Waste2Taste

Started by two local women Sandra and Marie who are passionate food activists, community workers and exceptional chefs. Through their catering business, that uses surplus food from Oxford Food Hub, they not only reduce food waste, but generate income to support their community activities working with homeless people, providing hot meals, cooking classes and volunteer opportunities for work experience and skill development.

3

Oxford Community Action



Oxford Community Action was founded by Hassan, Mujahid and Nigel to tackle and overcome barriers created by structural inequalities (e.g. labour market and ethnic health inequalities) that prevent Black and Minoritised Individuals and Communities from reaching their full potential and enjoying equal representation and participation as active citizens within UK institutions and wider civil society.

OCA have been supporting over 500 families with vital food supplies on a weekly basis. In 2023, OCA kitchen was established to create sustainable revenue for their ongoing social outreach work through catering services offered to local businesses and institutions.

5

No Vice Ice



No Vice Ice is an ice lolly social enterprise founded to support people with long term invisible health conditions/disabilities. They offer a highly successful range of healthy sustainable ice lollies, made from surplus fruit and juice wherever possible. No Vice Ice gives local people not in work due to long term health conditions paid training and employment, (re)introducing them to a work environment.

2



Flo's the Place in the Park

...is a community-run social enterprise hub formed in 2018 in a decommissioned children's centre. It is run by People Place and Participation Ltd, a charitable community benefit society managed by local people for local people. Their community cafe not only offers a warm and welcoming community space with affordable options and pay as you feel meals but also generates income to support community activities through the hub. Flo's also offer incubator support to emerging social enterprises at 'The Hub'.

4

Damascus Rose Kitchen



Damascus Rose Kitchen is led by Nuha Abdu, a refugee social worker who originally formed the Syrian Sisters community group to support other refugee women to learn English.

With support from Flo's they set up as a CIC and launched their catering service out of Flo's community kitchen. They have since re-located, running the kitchen at the Old Fire Station and now employ X refugee women. They continue their commitment to refugee communities through offering community meals, celebrating cultural events and building connections over food.

OUR APPROACH

In 2023-2024 Fiona Steel from Good Food Oxfordshire, the facilitator of this report, was engaged in a series of conversations with the organisations' founders and leaders.

These conversations explored the journey of the organisation and the team from inception to today; the motivations of the people involved; the learning and growth of the organisation's leaders; the barriers that they faced and who or what helped them.

Spending time working in the kitchens and cafes at the heart of these the organisations, seeing their operations, hearing from staff, volunteers and customers in an informal way enabled Fiona to get a sense of the ethos and feel of the organisations.

Peer learning sessions between the leaders of the OX4 FC social enterprises provided opportunities to share reflections on their journeys; explore ways that they could learn from and support each other, and to focus their collective voice reach a wider audience including other social enterprises and policy makers through this report.

Through this process participants determined that they wanted to tell their story and share their insights through this short report and an accompanying video.

Context: Inequality and Food Insecurity in OX4

In a city acclaimed for its wealth, huge inequality exists – OX4 includes four of the 10-20% most deprived wards nationally with 80.4% of residents of Blackbird Leys living in the most deprived 20% of areas in England.³

Income deprivation is the biggest driver of food insecurity in OX4

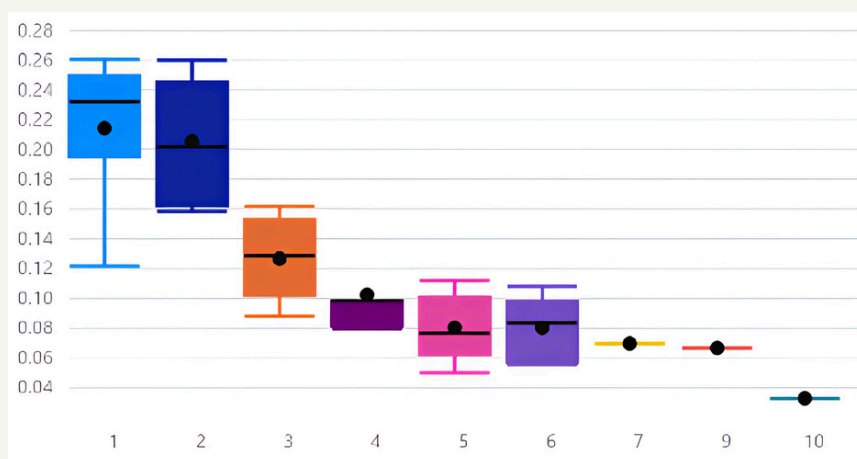
Nearly 4,000 households, almost one in five, are in the highest priority area for food insecurity risk, as measured by the Priority Places for Food Index.⁴ These highest risk households are across a number of Wards: Blackbird Leys, Northfield Brook, Iffley Fields, Rose Hill & Iffley, Littlemore. Blackbird Leys MSOA has the lowest life expectancy for males – 75.4 years compared with the Oxfordshire average of 81.5 years.

Figure 1 shows that the main factors associated with food insecurity in OX4 are income deprivation and electricity pre-payment. Factors such as access and distance to supermarket are less relevant than socio-economic indicators in OX4.⁵

The Priority Places for Food Index (PPFI) is a composite index of food insecurity, based on a number of economic and socio-demographic factors. In OX4, economic factors show high positive correlation with food insecurity, whereas socio-demographic factors are less influential.

FIG. 1 INCOME DEPRIVATION

Income deprivation is a significant factor in PPFI ranking/Food Insecurity in OX4...



+20%

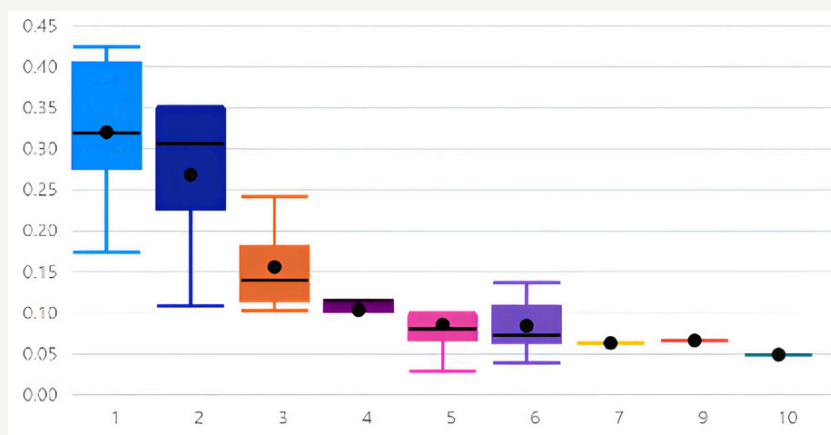
of households in the bottom fifth of the PPFI are classified as income-deprived

8%

of households in the top half of the PPFI are income-deprived

FIG. 2 ELECTRICITY PREPAYMENT

Electricity prepayment is as a factor in PPFI ranking/Food Insecurity in OX4...



+30%

of households in the bottom fifth of the PPFI pre-pay their electricity, which is more expensive

<8%

of households in the top half of the PPFI pre-pay their electricity



WHAT DOES COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING MEAN?

*'Community wealth building is a **progressive approach** to economics and economic development...*

Community wealth building is a new **people-centred** approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the **hands of local people**.

*'It seeks to change the way that our economies have come to function by aiming to retain **more wealth and opportunity** for the benefit of local people'.⁶*

This involves getting local 'anchor institutions' – councils, universities, hospitals – to spend and invest locally meaning more **money circulates locally** and does not flow out to corporate headquarters of large multi-nationals elsewhere.

*'Anchor Institutions can encourage the use of local suppliers in procurement, employ local people on **fair wages**, make decisions on land and assets that factor socially valuable ends alongside commercial considerations, invest in locally purposeful organisations, and provide space and support to **incubate new initiatives**'*

As a result, small and diverse **enterprises flourish**; wages are fair; enterprises are connected to the needs of the community; profits are spent and reinvested by local people in the local area.⁵

SHARED LEARNINGS



Peer reflection sessions allowed sharing of experiences and shared themes emerged...

What community wealth building factors have contributed to the success and growth of food-related social enterprises in the OX4 Food Crew?

VISION AND LEADERSHIP

Being community-led

'Being community led embeds wellbeing at the heart of what we do – food that nourishes and supports people' **Annie, Flo's**

Shared vision that mattered to people involved

'A community petition engaged people to express their support ... and a constellation session brought together a community coalition with shared vision around a space for nature, community and wellbeing' **Annie, Flo's**

Having a mission that aligned with our customers and to help them to achieve their goals (win:win)

'The Refill Shop is guided by strong ethics around zero waste, reducing single-use plastics, slow shopping, nurturing the social aspect of shopping in a community space not an anonymous space, as well as the quality of produce – organic, healthy and sustainable' **Helen, Flo's**

TIMELY, TAILORED, HEARTFELT SUPPORT

Support from other similar/ more experienced organisations

'The support from Oxford Food Hub and their flexibility in working with us to find a solution around the issue of us not being a charity was invaluable. They didn't tie us into complicated contracts – they trusted in us and our mission' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

"Aspire – [a successful social enterprise supporting employment and housing since 1998] acted as a host organisation for our initial bid... Paul provided invaluable expertise with the bid writing and process' **Annie, Flo's**

Generosity of time and skills – Hands-on support from experienced people

'We had amazing support from Pippa at Flo's who gave us loads of specific advice on setting up a café and catering business. She helped us with menu planning, knowing how to order the right amounts, managing our stock, reducing our waste, setting up our ordering systems' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

Working with other local partners and businesses who go the extra mile and believe in us

'If I didn't have Velocity working with me I couldn't operate... I couldn't go and deliver... No-one can circulate in the City...Velocity have also enabled us to expand to places like Didcot and Abingdon... It's about having the right partners who we can work closely with' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Peer support

'We benefitted from peer support from No Vice Ice who were also setting up at the same time as us and working out of Flo's. Although their business is different they were at the same stage as us and it meant it was ok to say that we didn't know what we were doing or we were struggling' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

'Being alongside Damascus Rose and being at a similar stage in our social enterprise journeys really helped – we could share our problems and they were just such positive great people to have around' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

'Our partnership with the rest of the OX4 Food Crew provided peer support from like-minded organisations and, as a collective, we were successful in a bid for National Lottery funding to expand our community work' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Getting unique pieces of 1 on 1 attention at the right time

'Flo's supported gave us people who could sit alongside us and help us on a day to day basis – writing funding applications, understanding the real (big and small) problems that we were dealing with and helping us to navigate them on a real-time basis... You need people that really believe in you, who spend one on one time with you particularly if you've never done social enterprise before... And a physical place where you can go to and not have to do everything remotely' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Access to physical infrastructure (Flo's)

'Use of premises at Flo's and some paid time via the National Lottery grant gave us enough momentum to get things off the ground in the early days and helped us to buy our initial lolly machine so that was critical – game-changing' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Availability of start-up funding (COVID grants)

'COVID seemed like a barrier but it was also a window of opportunity as there was more grant funding and business support available that enabled lots of businesses to diversify – I am not sure that we would've got started without that initial funding' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

What barriers have hindered community wealth building through food-related social enterprise in the OX4 food Crew?

BALANCING COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL

Tension between commercial and social ambitions

'There is a constant tension between generating income to support other activities and keeping prices affordable for the community. Do we become a food destination and compete with 'higher end' Oxford cafes which might generate more money but at the potential exclusion of our community, or do we appeal more to our local community, keeping prices lower but generating less money for other charitable activities?' **Annie, Flo's**

'Our lollies are high quality, ethically produced, use sustainable ingredients and produced in small batches – it's really difficult to compete on price... We need to keep differentiating ourselves on the quality of our product and our social mission. We want the produce to be available to a wide range of people so need to compete on price but at the same time we need it to be profitable so we can continue with our training programmes.' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Different views on how social impact is achieved

'We have a lot of debates about whether social impact is achieved through offering a professional training model for staff and volunteers, providing employment opportunities and the prospect of career progression for people who might otherwise struggle to access mainstream employment or whether social impact is articulated as providing the space and breadth for different types of staff members to develop according to their own needs' **Annie, Flo's**

'I believe we will do more to help our young staff team and our local community if we are in a strong financial position with high standards – we need compassionate rigor around staff expectations and standards so that they are well placed to seek further opportunities in the hospitality business plus with better finances we can do more around free holiday meals for kids, and pay as you feel menus' **Pippa, Flo's**

'We need to invest more in our staff and reduce the pressure on them, enabling them to work more flexibly according to their own needs – if you invest in people, genuinely money will come to you in my opinion' **Musti, Flo's**

MISSING THE RIGHT SUPPORT AT THE RIGHT TIME

Lack of in-depth and timely knowledge/ information on legal and governance options

'We got this wrong at the start and with hindsight we would've set up differently if we had known more (we are now a CIC but it took us time to convert to that). The help we got from OXLEP was useful but we needed more support - it didn't get us to a point of clarity where we knew what to do.' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Support offered not always at the right time or format

'We got some initial support from OSEP through some boot camps – they were useful later on but in the early days you just need someone to sit down with you and hold your hand. If you learn how to write a budget but then don't need to do that for another 3 months you've forgotten it. In those early days you just need someone to sit alongside you.' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

POWER IMBALANCES

Working with Anchor Institutions

'...lots of bureaucracy, lack of proportionality for the size of the supplier.'

'When we applied to become a preferred supplier to the University this was a very involved and complicated process for an organisation like us – small and with no experience of how business works in this country... We had a lovely lady who from the University who helped us with the forms but it just shouldn't be so complicated for small businesses' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

FINANCES

Pricing of sustainable/ethical vs competitors

'Our lollies are high quality, ethically produced and use sustainable ingredients – it's really difficult to compete on price... We need to keep differentiating ourselves on the quality of our product and social mission. We want the produce to be available to a wide range of people so we need to compete on price but at the same time we need to be profitable so we can continue to fund our training programmes [for people with hidden health conditions]' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Access to appropriate funding and support to take the next step

'Our scale-up plan involves a 'step change' as we have to buy a new machine which would increase production capacity ten-fold but then we need to have big enough contracts in place to make it worth the investment and we need the cash to make the upfront purchase... It feels like a really big step for us' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

PEOPLE

Imposter syndrome

'... lack of self-belief'

'It's hard to be taken seriously when you're just a person with an idea that wants to try something out... the imposter syndrome was big' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Recruiting the right people... socially motivated and skilled

'We also really struggle recruiting the right people who have the right kitchen skills and who have compassion and empathy for our customers. To work in a place like this ...you need to be able to sit down with that person and understand why that person is asking you for food....it is a big step for a person to come to us and say, I have no food to feed my family...so we need to have some compassion for the ones that are asking for that as well...there aren't many people with the skills that we need to work with us' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Time and resource needed to support vulnerable employees

'This isn't like running a normal business... these people they are vulnerable, you don't want to upset them, you don't want to let them down and they need a lot of training, and you always need to follow up with them' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

PREMISES

Finding and accessing the right premises and infrastructure

'When the Children's Center at Florence Park was set to close the County Council invited expressions of interest to take on the space. I had a vision for a community owned and led hub that created a shared space for nature, community and well-being... We were bidding against a lot of private enterprises and it was only through the backing of other established social enterprises (Aspire), a proactive Board and our 'Be The change' petition to demonstrate community support that we were successful... It was a lot of work to shift people from their traditional models of thinking and contracting on how assets should be used' **Annie, Flo's**

'...We really struggled to find a suitable kitchen – we were outgrowing our home kitchens – we took on Ark T but quickly outgrew this space. We were so fortunate to find our space at Shotover Heights' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

What is needed to support more food-related social enterprises through a community wealth building approach?

EXPERT ADVICE

Training or coaching from other social entrepreneurs

'We are so grateful for the support that we had from places like CAG (Community Action Groups) who helped with our business plan; Aspire who gave us encouragement and most importantly our first order! Oxford Food Hub – who were flexible and worked alongside us to find solutions.

'Some sort of coaching to help with self-belief in what you are doing – that would've given me the confidence to tell my story so that we could sell our business idea and attract grants' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

'Because of my personal journey it would've helped to be able to practice my story with a coach so that I could tell it dispassionately in a professional context... People don't want to see you processing your lack of sanity during the conversation' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Time and space to reflect on our direction and growth plan

'I'm doing everything, I'm doing finance, I'm doing funding applications, I'm running the businesses, cooking in the café, and organising food and supplies... Because we spend so much time running the business we don't have the time (or expertise) to figure out the best way to go from here' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Basic overview training of setting up a social enterprise

'At the start you 'don't know what you don't know' – it would be good to have an overview and then have experts that you can reach out to in particular areas at the time when you need it' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

Tailored training and templates for different legal and governance structures and organisation processes

'We really didn't know what we were doing at the outset and even now I see other organisations struggling with the same issues – there needs to be more support out there... We were really, really naïve... I remember talking to lots of different organisations about what we should do but we just didn't know where we fitted into the whole thing or what we should be' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR START-UP AND SCALE-UP

Access to redundant spaces

'We found our kitchen space by luck... We received an email from one of the local councilors saying there's an amazing community space available... When we saw the space we just had a gut feeling that it would be amazing and perfect to move here... Having a more coordinated and comprehensive view of what space is available would be fantastic' **Sandra, Waste2Taste**

Funding for start-up and scale-up

'We were lucky with COVID grants that helped get us started... Finding funding for the next step of scale-up is scary' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

Support and collaborations to scale-up and take the next Big Step

'We had an opportunity to bid for the catering contract at the Blavatnik School of Government but that was just too big for us to take on... If we had an incubator or a collective of food related enterprises with our own space that can collectively bid for bigger contracts, with a shared space and a pool of skilled experts... That would be the dream' **Nuha, Damascus Rose**

'Figuring out more ways for helpful collaboration with peers when everyone is so busy with the day to day... If we were working in a shared space on a day to day basis collaborations would be more obvious' **Ella, No Vice Ice**

'We need a shared space, a hub with kitchens that organisations can hire for events catering, or batch production where we can collaborate and that gives access to resources and facilities that none of us could afford on our own' **Pippa, Flo's**



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The stories of the OX4 Food Crew social enterprises and their founders reflect true resilience, withstanding a range of internal and external pressures. These social enterprises operate in unique contexts that traditional funding and support frameworks often overlook. Their experiences highlight the need for more adaptable, community-centred financial and operational support structures to enable sustainable, values-based businesses to thrive.



The Big Vision

The OX4 Food Crew envisions a social enterprise 'foodie hub' designed to fuel collaboration and growth for values-driven food businesses. This hub would provide:

- **Flexible Kitchen and Event Space:** Affordable and adaptable facilities for catering, retail, and events.
- **'Alongside' Expert Support:** Access to finance, governance, marketing, and operations guidance tailored to the needs of social enterprises.
- **Collaborative Opportunities:** Day-to-day peer interactions to foster trust, enabling joint ventures, resource sharing, and pooled staff.
- **Peer Support Network:** Access to a community of experienced peers for mentorship and guidance.
- **Talent and Profile Building:** A vibrant environment that attracts skilled workers and elevates the profile of careers in social enterprise.
- **Anchor Institution Access:** A direct pathway for larger organisations to engage with and support smaller, values-based enterprises – a 'one-stop shop'.
- **Appropriate Funding:** Start-up and growth funding that values social impact and understands social business models.

THE BIG VISION





IMMEDIATE ACTIONS FOR SUPPORTING FOOD-RELATED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

To advance our **Big Vision**, these immediate actions can provide essential support to social enterprises with minimal investment:

- **Strengthen support and funding for OSEP to co-ordinate support for social enterprises:** An Oxfordshire-wide co-ordinator of support, finance and resources for social enterprises. Work with existing infrastructure organisations to collaborate across sectors and co-ordinate more effective use of resources.
- **Hands-On Expert Support:** Increase access to practical, collaborative support in finance, governance, marketing, and operations to help social enterprises thrive. This could include building on existing schemes such as Oxford City Council's 'Match My Project'.⁷
- **Appropriate Funding:** Establish small, accessible start-up and growth funding sources that can make an immediate difference. Build on the work by co-op futures to create a local social investment fund for Oxfordshire.⁸
- **Anchor Institution Partnerships:** Strengthen connections with Anchor Institutions to foster partnerships where social enterprises can provide services that align with these institutions' social goals, creating mutual benefits. Provide easy access points for Anchor Institutions to engage with social enterprises.

These actions would bridge current gaps, empowering social enterprises to grow while building stronger community impact.

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THANK YOU
TO THE PARTICIPATING OX4 FOOD CREW
SOCIAL ENTERPRISES



**OX4
FOOD
CREW**



**OXFORD
CITY
COUNCIL**

**Learn more about the social enterprises involved in
this report by watching this promo film:**



www.ox4foodcrew.co.uk/catering

