Implementing the Oxfordshire Food Strategy and Food Action Plans

Roadmap and Learnings from a Place-Based Approach

This report outlines Oxfordshire's experience in developing a comprehensive food strategy, action plans, and relevant metrics. Our goal is to offer a transparent account of the process, highlighting what worked well and what could be improved, to guide others embarking on a similar journey.

In addition to providing insight into the process, we hope this report complements resources like the Sustainable Food Places's SFP Toolkit, offering a realistic view of the challenges and complexities involved in turning theory into action.

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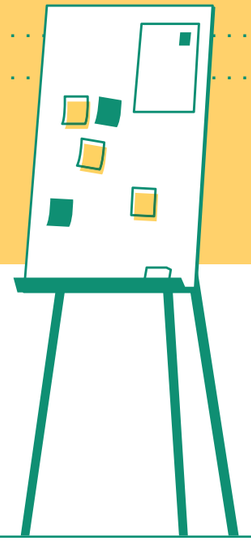


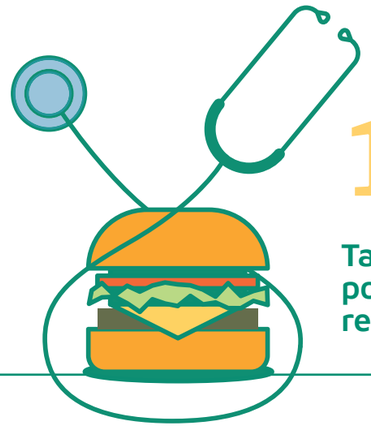
Part 1

The Oxfordshire Food Strategy Outputs, Process and Learnings

The Oxfordshire Food Strategy is centred around a vision where everyone in the county has access to the healthy and sustainable food they need, every day.

Food Strategy Ambitions

Five priority areas for action:



1. Tackle food poverty and diet-related ill-health

2. Grow the local good food economy through enterprise, local jobs, and local wealth generation

3. Build vibrant food communities with the capacity and skills to enjoy food together

4. Strengthen short, transparent local food supply chains

5. Improve the health and sustainability of institutional catering

Ambitions to achieve this vision:

Strategy and Planning Roadmap

Part 1: Food Strategy

1. GFO County Steering Group Commission Food Strategy

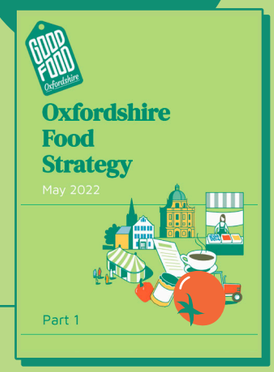
2. Consultation with Stakeholders

3. Develop Theory of Change

4. Refine, Test, and Iterate with Stakeholders

5. Food Strategy Approved by Steering Group

6. Food Strategy Endorsed by County, District, and City Councils



September 2021

February 2022

May 2022

Part 2: Food Action Plans

January 2023

June 2023

7. Local Food Action Plans Commissioned for Districts, City, and County

8. 4 Food Action Working Groups Formed (FAWGs)

- Terms of Reference

9. Develop Theory of Change

6-8 Meetings Held

- Draft Food Action Plans

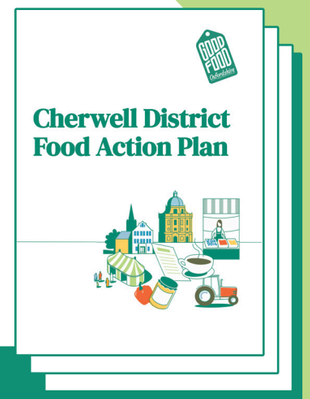
10. Food Summits (Wider Consultation, Test Ideas and Identify Gaps)

11. Iterate, Refine, and Define Metrics and Agree Ownership

12. Agree Process for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

13. Launch Food Action Plans

March 2024



Part 3: Metrics

Food Strategy

Core metrics enable consistent, county-wide comparisions and measures

TOC informs → **Outcome** → **Measurement Tool** → **Measure/ Standard**

Initially, we are measuring just 2 county-wide metrics:

1. Food insecurity using the Priority Places for Food Index
2. Diet-related ill-health using Public Health data for reception, year 6, and adults

Food Action Plans use programme-level metrics to assess the impact of programmes targeting a population or place

Outcome → **Measurement Tool** → **Measure/ Standard**

Process to Develop Strategy

What		Who/How	Learnings
1.	**GFO County Steering Group commission Food Strategy**	We initiated a multi-stakeholder Food Strategy, which was guided by a steering group that included representatives from food and farming businesses, communities, institutions, and local councils.	Leadership and funding support from the County Council were critical. Collaboration between County, District, and City councils helped build credibility. Authenticity was maintained through Good Food Oxfordshire's (GFO) independent role as a 'critical friend.'
2.	**Consultation with stakeholders**	The Steering Group adopted a 'constellation approach' to stakeholder engagement, listening to a wide range of organisations and influencers across the county. We listened to organisations, groups, and enterprises through 35 forums, events and workshops reaching over 500 people. 1:1 interviews and consultations engaged a further 280 people.	Focus on high-impact stakeholders who can engage and influence others. The right influencers can give their backing and support to a Food Strategy and raise the profile and importance of this work. Build relationships with local authorities, including champions at various levels of power. Use existing networks and meetings to reduce the 'meeting burden' and avoid consultation fatigue.
3.	**Develop Theory of Change (TOC)**	Ideas and priorities from consultations were integrated into a TOC model, which focused thinking on priorities and forced rigour about what initiatives and actions will deliver the changes we want to see. The core strategy team, including academic partners, refined the model and suggested metrics to measure impact.	Implementing a TOC with a broad group proved challenging, so we adopted a more pragmatic approach by gathering ideas from constellation events and then allowing a core team to refine and iterate on the model. Testing and refining this model through multiple feedback loops helped shape a more practical and effective strategy.
4.	**Refine, test, and iterate with stakeholders**	Proposed initiatives were mapped onto existing local policies, programs, and strategic agendas to demonstrate how the strategy aligned with and supported broader goals. We included specific examples of excellence that were already happening, as well as identifying any gaps. The emerging Food Strategy was presented back to contributors.	This mapping not only demonstrated relevance, but it also made a stronger case of support for new proposals. Showcasing what is already happening celebrates success, wins hearts and minds (and fosters cross-sector collaboration), which in turn makes the next step seem achievable.
5.	**Food Strategy approved by Steering Group**	Final iterations and refinements were made then presented to the Steering Group for approval.	
6.	**Food Strategy endorsed by County, District, and City councils**	Our key sponsors (council officers) within each council presented the Food Strategy to the Cabinet for endorsement by Council members.	The Steering Group engaged with the Council officers who were aligned with key Councilors who we needed to support the motion. Communicated with councilors about how it aligned with their existing priorities and how it would benefit their communities was key. The Council Officers from across the Districts and City worked collaboratively – supporting each other, sharing ideas, and learnings to ensure that each had the best opportunity for their council members to approve the strategy.

Part 2

Food Action Plan Process and Learnings

	What	Who/How	Learnings
7.	**Local Food Action Plans commissioned for Districts, City, and County**	District, City and County councils commissioned GFO to support a participatory process in local areas to develop Food Action Plans.	Buy-in from the councils was key to demonstrating political commitment to change.
8.	**4 Food Action Working Groups formed (multi-stakeholder FAWGs)**	Multi-stakeholder FAWGs were established in each District and the City to create Food Action Plans aligned with the Food Strategy but focused on the specific needs and ambitions of their area. Representatives included food and farming businesses, communities, institutions and local councils. Each FAWG had 8-10 core members.	A place-based approach allowed us to tailor strategies to local contexts e.g. for rural areas, there might be more focus on agriculture and rural access to healthy food, whereas urban areas might focus on food justice and equitable access to healthy food and growing spaces. Used existing networks to reach more businesses and community groups (business owners are often too busy to participate). Engaged with business networks was more effective and provided access to a range of opinions e.g. Independent Oxford, OSEP, and NE Cotswold Farming Cluster. Community groups, foodbanks and larders were engaged via our existing Community Food Networks.
9.	**6-8 meetings of each FAWG**	The series of meetings started with a TOC and then took a thematic approach to the 5 key issues outlined in the Food Strategy. Each meeting focused on a key issue, and we used post-it notes to gather as many ideas as possible. We refined the ideas then tested them against our TOC and asked ourselves 'will this idea help to deliver the change that we want to see?'.	Kept participants interested and engaged after inviting them to events focused on specific areas of the Food Strategy and Food Action Plan relevant to them. (Best not to get everyone to look at everything!) Offered a range of meeting formats (online and IRL, as well as various venues, and times). Offer honorarium for participants and refreshments if you can. The use of post-its in meetings provided an energetic and chaotic engagement but important in generating a breadth of ideas and for building enthusiasm and buy-in. After the meetings, GFO spent time refining the post-its – aggregating similar ideas and starting to prioritise based on impact and ability to deliver. At this stage the plans were a 'long list' of actions – we refined to a manageable number later on.

What		Who/How	Learnings
10.	**Food Summits – wider consultation, test ideas, and identify gaps**	Food Summits in each District and City engaged a wider range of stakeholders including members of the public – 84 people in total attended the 3 Food Summits.	The draft plans were discussed in a 'world cafe style' with participants rotating around tables, each of which was focused on one of the 5 key themes. This provided a really positive setting for taking the Food Action Plans further.
11.	**Iterate, refine, and define metrics and agree ownership**	Additional points that surfaced during the Food Summits were considered and plans were altered as needed. FAWG meeting members refined and agreed the final actions included in the Food Action Plan based on impact and the ability to deliver (we wanted a balance of quick wins and ambitious stretch targets!). We assigned ownership and metrics for each action. In the Food Action Plans, we agreed that metrics would typically be at the intervention or the programme-level. Therefore, we focused on indicating the impact of specific interventions rather than overall population level changes.	Balanced pragmatism with ambition and ensured we had some quick wins as well as 'game-changing' actions. Thought about ability to deliver: linking actions to political issues of the day and how best to integrate with different teams and agendas was important. For example, we needed to spend time thinking how best to get food into Oxfordshire's 'Healthy place shaping' agenda. Some smaller community groups wanted to be involved in actions but lacked capacity to take ownership of the action. Therefore, in some instances a larger organisation, e.g. the Council or GFO, took ownership and the smaller organisations were named as a 'Supporting Organisation'. It was often hard to get people to think about outcomes rather than outputs. People preferred to measure on the numbers of attendees etc but we pushed hard to get them to focus on impact measures, which wasn't always possible. We continued to take a pragmatic approach knowing it was best to do something rather than nothing. In some cases, the metrics were difficult to define, particularly where there was no baseline. In these instances, the Year 1 target was to define the baseline and set targets for subsequent years. This felt a bit weak and we tried to avoid this as far as possible, but we also recognised that this is a long-term process that will be iterated and refined as we learn more and build a more robust dataset.
12.	**Agree process for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting**	Annual reporting against the Food Action Plans and Food Strategy was agreed. The plans and metrics were refined at this point (reflecting learnings). GFO facilitated the monitoring and reporting process.	Aligned timings with other key county reports and data processes e.g. Health Improvement Board and reporting of Healthy Weight data. Managed stakeholders!
13.	**Launch plans**	The final Food Action Plans were submitted to the cabinet, and endorsed by City and District Councils. GFO and Councils published the plans.	Checked process and timings for endorsement and who needs to be involved in decision making. Ensured that there is a communications plan for launching and celebrating the new plans!

Part 3

Measuring Impact

Core Metrics

Key metrics were established based on the Theory of Change and used to track progress toward achieving our vision for food systems change in Oxfordshire.

Through the Theory of Change process, we recognised that we needed a small number of core metrics that we monitored at a county level as well as programme specific metrics that would be monitored at a more local level:

Having identified a raft of things that we wanted to track and measure, we took a pragmatic approach and considered not only what we wanted to measure, but also what was achievable based on available and robust data sets.

Initially, we focused on measuring the Phase 1 Core Metrics identified below. We also identified Phase 2 Core Metrics (see page 20) that will enable us to track our performance in the other priority areas of action at a later date.

Phase 1 Core Metrics

Tackle food poverty and diet-related ill-health

Outcome	Core Metric	Measurement Tool
Fewer people experience food poverty and levels of food poverty are less severe	Numbers of people experiencing and severity of food insecurity Variance between wards	Priority Places for Food Index score improves over time prioritypla ces.cdrc.ac.uk
Fewer people experience diet-related ill-health and incidences of diet-related ill-health are less severe	Numbers of reception and year 6 children overweight and obese	Overweight and obese decreases over time (Public Health reported data)

Programme-Level Metrics

The Local Food Action Plans for the county, districts and city used programme-level metrics to assess the impact of programmes targeting a population or place. These are not necessarily comparable across areas and it can be difficult to connect programme-level impact to an overall theory of change. However, they provide valuable place/population-based evidence that can be used to assess whether to stop/start/continue interventions.

Example of a programme level metric:

Healthy Start campaign with health professionals to increase awareness of Healthy Start

Outcome	Core Metric	Measurement Tool
More health professionals are aware of and feel confident to support people to apply for Healthy Start	Numbers of health professionals aware of/ confident to support on Healthy Start applications	Healthy Start Data from NHS Business Services Authority
More eligible people are claiming Healthy Start	Numbers of eligible people claiming Healthy Start by ward increases over time	

Conclusion

The hard work and effort put into the Food Strategy and Food Action Plans have provided living roadmaps for a better food future for Oxfordshire. Through collaboration, commitment, and clear action, we have been able to transform ideas into tangible change – ensuring that every resident can access healthy, sustainable food.

This journey has reinforced the power of partnership, the importance of adaptability, and the need for bold, practical, and implementable solutions.

Good Food Oxfordshire would like to recognise the huge commitment of each stakeholder, from Councilors to businesses and community groups to food producers.

Their experience and contributions were essential to the development of this work. The actions contained in this report are now able to give us clear guidance regarding our work and how best to come together to bring about real food systems change.

The process of working collaboratively and iteratively, and across sectors, has been instrumental in bringing a wealth of voices, and experiences together.

For anyone looking to replicate this roadmap in their area, please use these plans and learnings to engage your communities with the local food system.

We hope this plan will uplift the incredible work of all the many organisations who are working to change the food system across Oxfordshire. We look forward to continuing to work with Oxfordshire County Council and other lead organisations to deliver these actions and help achieve the vision set out in the Oxfordshire Food Strategy and Food Action Plans.

We look forward to delivering the results, tracking the progress and continuously learning. By staying committed to this vision and continuing to work together, we can make Oxfordshire a leader in healthy, fair, and sustainable food for all.

Useful Context

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change was a central tool in both the Food Strategy and the development of the Food Action Plans. It helped us articulate the desired outcomes and map them to relevant actions and interventions.

Impacts	Outcomes	Outputs	Oxfordshire-wide activities to achieve these	SDGs
People are healthier and health and wellbeing disparities between areas reduce because of better diets	Fewer people experience food poverty and diet-related ill-health and levels of food poverty/ diet related ill-health is less severe	Incidence and severity of food insecurity as measured by the PPFI: Reduces the disparity between areas, reduces incidence (new cases) and prevalence (total number) of diet-related ill-health conditions	Cash and in-kind support targeted at people experiencing food insecurity e.g., community larders, foodbanks, sharing schemes Healthy eating support available in priority areas e.g., cooking and growing programmes Planning and business support for affordable healthy options in local shops in priority areas Promote existing schemes to improve uptake e.g., Healthy Start, Holiday Activities and Food programme, etc	No Poverty Good Health and Wellbeing Reduced Inequality
Community connection and cohesion are supported through a vibrant food culture	Oxfordshire is home to vibrant food communities where the growing, preparation, celebration, and enjoyment of good food is central to community life	Communities access cooking and growing opportunities tailored to local needs and preferences More community volunteering linked to food Communities celebrate and enjoy food together through events, festivals, and campaigns	Support for communities and individuals to find, set up, and run cooking activities and growing spaces Sharing of volunteering opportunities across a wide range of networks Sharing of food-related events and campaigns and support for communities to engage with these	Good Health and Wellbeing Sustainable Cities and Communities
Better jobs, livelihoods and places supported by the Good Food Economy	Local good food economy contributes more value to Oxfordshire - measured by economic, health, social, and environmental metrics	More people are employed in locally owned food businesses More food businesses pay wages that are reflective of local living costs	Anchor institutions use their procurement power to support local food enterprises Planning and economy teams support local food enterprises including social enterprises	Decent Work and Economic Growth No Poverty Reduced Inequality
The food that we produce and consume has less negative impact on the planet, and supports local livelihoods	Sustainable farming practices, a circular economy and local food resilience are supported via short, transparent local food supply chains	More sustainably produced food is produced, bought and consumed locally	More sustainably produced food is produced, bought, and consumed locally Support for and investment in infrastructure for local sustainable producers and short local supply chains Anchor institutions commit to procurement via short local supply chains	Decent Work and Economic Growth Responsible Production and Consumption Life on Land; Climate Action
Institutions lead the way using their buying power to support healthy and sustainable production and consumption that is accessible to more people and becomes the 'norm'	More people can access healthy and sustainable food through institutional catering benefitting health, the planet and the local economy	More institutions serve healthy and sustainable food and measure their progress e.g., via accreditation schemes More institutions support the local food economy	Institutions set and achieve sustainability targets around food	Good Health and Wellbeing Responsible Production and Consumption

Appendices

Phase 2 Core Metrics

We are currently focusing on measuring the Phase 1 Core Metrics (see Part 3 of this document). We have also identified Phase 2 Core Metrics below, that will enable us to track our performance in the other priority areas of action at a later date.

Tackle food poverty and diet-related ill-health

Outcome	Metric	Measurement Tool/ Timescales
Fewer people experience food poverty and levels of food poverty are less severe	Severity of food insecurity, as determined by Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)	FIES: use sampling strategy to enable extrapolation across Oxfordshire – implement and define standards when resource available FIES score decreases over time prioritypla ces.cdrc.ac.uk

Grow the local food economy

Outcome	Metric	Measurement Tool/ Timescales
Local food economy contributes more value to Oxfordshire measured by economic, social, health, and environmental metrics	Number of people employed in small and medium food businesses registered in Oxfordshire	Number increases over time (employment, employees of VAT and/ or PAYE based small and medium enterprises [(SME]) in Oxfordshire for UK SIC 2007 classes in the food industry) Year 1: baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement.ac.uk
	Turnover of small and medium food businesses registered in Oxfordshire	Value increases over time (turnover of VAT and/or PAYE based small and medium enterprises [(SME]) in Oxfordshire for UK SIC 2007 classes in the food industry) Year 1: baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement
	Number of local food stores classified as healthy retailers in priority areas	Number of healthy retailers increases over time. Priority areas (based on composite score of reception and year 6 overweight and obese and IMD) are: • Blackbird Leys • Greater Leys • Banbury Ruscote • Banbury Neithrop • Witney Central • Carterton North • Didcot South East • Abingdon South Year 1: baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement
	Number of training opportunities in hospitality and sustainable agriculture	Number increases over time Year 1: baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement

Strengthen short, transparent local food supply chains

Outcome	Metric	Measurement Tool/ Timescales
Local economy is supported through sustainable local food supply chains	Economic value of sustainably and locally produced food sold locally. Disaggregate by: • Primary production • Secondary production	Increase in value (turnover and profit to local farmers) Increase in employment Year 1: baseline Year-on-year improvement
	Economic value of sustainably and locally produced food sold via short local supply chain pilot project	Increase in value (turnover and profit to local farmers) Increase in employment Year 1/2 baseline Year-on-year improvement
Short local supply chain contributes to environmental improvements	Environmental value of sustainably and locally produced food sold locally	Increase in value Year 1: establish metrics, baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement
	Environmental value of sustainably and locally produced food sold via short local supply chain pilot project	Increase in value Year 1: establish metrics, baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement
	Amount of land dedicated to sustainable agriculture	Amount of land increases over time: Year 1/2 baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement
	Number of farming enterprises adopting sustainable agriculture practices	Number increases over time: Year 1: baseline and confirm standards Year-on-year improvement

Improve the health and sustainability of institutional catering

Outcome	Metric	Measurement Tool/ Timescales
More healthy and sustainable food is consumed via institutions	Number of institutions (and meals/people served by these) signed up to relevant accreditation schemes	Define relevant accreditation schemes for different settings e.g., Government Buying Standards, Food for Life, Sustainable Restaurant Association, SUGARSMART Numbers of people/meals/institutions Year 1/2: baseline and confirm standard Year-on-year improvement
	Number of settings (and meals/people) eating Food for Life menus in schools (starting with OCC catered schools)	Food for Life Accredited Schools Numbers of people served/meals taken Year 1 baseline and confirm standard Year-on-year improvement from baseline
	Planetary impact of food consumed in target institutions:	Year 1: baseline and confirm standards and target settings e.g., schools, universities, hospitals Year-on-year improvement (% meat decreases and % veg/pulses increase)
	% of meat/veg/pulses served in institutional meals (short-term proxy measure until point above is refined)	Year 1: baseline and confirm standards and target settings e.g., schools, universities, hospitals Year-on-year improvement (% meat decreases and % veg/pulses increase)
	% of meat/veg/ pulses served in OCC catered school meals OR % of vegetarian meals served	Year 1: baseline and confirm standards and metrics Year-on-year improvement (% meat decreases and % veg/pulses increase)

Good food movement: building community around food

No core metrics.

Food Action Plans:

Supporting Policy Goals

Priority Area: Build vibrant food communities with the capacity and skills to enjoy food together

- Stronger communities through sharing and participation in food-related activities
- More people can ac
- People have better

Activity
Clear signposting plan to share GF online directory of cooking, growi community food activities and faci across Cherwell District, to ensure is widely utilised. Clear plan for maintenance and ex of map to ensure correct details. Expand on map categories and pro include community kitchens, comm growing spaces, gleaning activities box schemes, neighbourhood surp schemes, village fairs and events a the district.
Encourage and support new and e cooking opportunities, through pro resources, and signposting.
Create Supplementary Planning Document/good practice guideline planning teams to ensure that grov spaces (allotments/ community ga are considered in all new developm

Priority Area: Tackle food poverty and diet-related ill-health

- Fewer people experience food poverty and diet-related ill-health
- Levels of food poverty and diet-related ill-health are less severe

Activity	Output	Outcome	Metric	Organisation/Group
Build and refine a city-wide map of food insecurity using the Priority Places Index Map and local knowledge.	Guidelines developed for incorporating appropriate restrictions on hot food takeaways and fast food outlets in local planning policies. Consultations with planning teams and relevant stakeholders to gather input and feedback on the proposed restrictions.	Better understanding of the drivers of food insecurity at a hyper-local level enables targeted interventions and reduction in food insecurity.	Year 1: PPI index is ground-truthed with local knowledge and local drivers of insecurity understood Year 2: A case and funding for targeted interventions in 5 priority neighbourhoods in place Year 3: Interventions are happening and evaluation demonstrates a positive impact	Lead: GFO
Work with the Priority Places Index team to identify and map links between food insecurity and diet-related ill-health in Oxford City.	Evidence to support links between food insecurity and health	Policy, plans and programmes work in a more joined up way to target food insecurity as a key lever for health outcomes. More funding can be accessed and targeted because of evidence base.	Year 1: Hotspots showing links between food insecurity and health outcomes are identified Year 2: Interventions/ resource/ funding targeted to tackle hotspots Year 3: Impact of intervention/ resources/ funding evidenced	Lead: GFO
Review and update commitments in the Food Poverty Action Plan, focused on 3 stage model: • Emergency Provision • Building resilience • Preventing food poverty	Updated Food Poverty Action Plan	Food insecurity is reduced across the City as a whole with a 'levelling up' effect in worst performing areas.	Year 1: 5 new organisations make commitments and 5 organisations renew existing commitments with a growing focus on resilience and prevention Year 2: 10 organisations renew commitments with a growing focus on resilience and prevention Year 3: 10 organisations renew commitments with a growing focus on resilience and prevention.	Lead: GFO
Work collaboratively to promote the new Healthy Start Marketing Campaign (developed by public health) and resources to priority groups in City.	Attendance at the Healthy Start Working group.	increased awareness and engagement with families and frontline professionals/volunteers.	Year 1: 65% uptake (July 2023 for City was 67%) Year 2: 75% uptake Year 3: 85% uptake	Lead: Oxford City Council

Find all 4 Food Action Plans here

Thanks to participating organisations

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Oxfordshire