

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING



Oxford City Council/Owned by Oxford

Growing an Inclusive Cooperative Economy

Oxford City Council and partners led on delivering a test and learn pilot between summer and the end of 2021 on co-operative mapping.

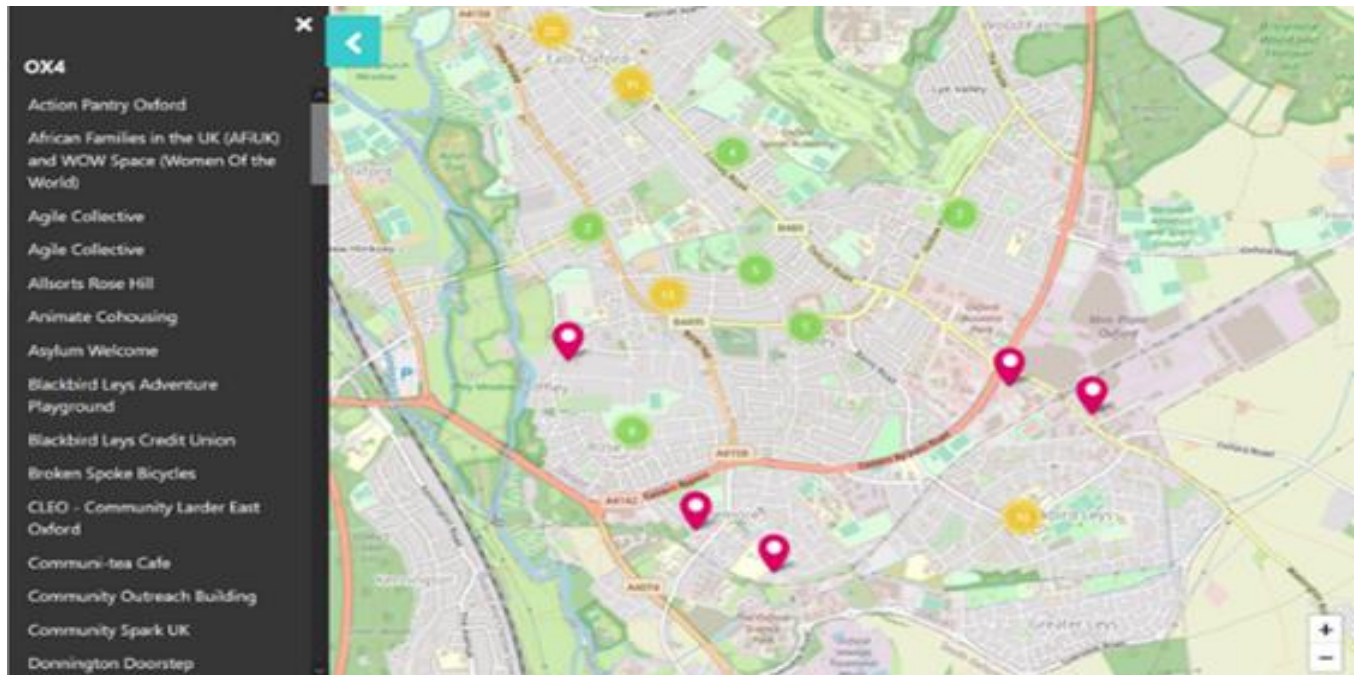
Aim of project

- To create a directory of purposeful businesses delivering in Oxford's areas of deprivation that can be disseminated to procurement teams in local authority, anchor institutions and large employers in order to prioritise their tenders to promote social value, community wealth building and inclusive growth.

Outputs:

- To produce a 'Social Value Suppliers' directory
- To disseminate the directory to procurement teams in target anchor institutions, including large employers, local authorities
- To trial the directory as a 'test/learn' pilot as part of a 'Growing an Inclusive Cooperative Economy' Policy Lab

The initial aim was to create a directory of purposeful businesses delivering in Oxford's areas of deprivation, 'a 'Social Value Suppliers' directory' to then disseminate to procurement teams in target anchor institutions, including large employers, local authorities and others. The directory would also act as a pilot, 'early intervention' on behalf of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership's 'Social Value and



Procurement working group’. However, after a directory of co-operatives in the cities’ areas of deprivation was produced in draft it became clear that it would go quickly out of date and other more interactive ways of bringing together suppliers and procurers could be developed. With these considerations in mind two local initiatives were identified that shared many of our objectives, namely ‘Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership’ and ‘Owned by Oxford’. The test and learn pilot pivoted to support these initiatives, which has given us an opportunity to document some of their early learnings about the challenges of mapping cooperatives as well.

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP)

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is a countywide partnership of organisations from public, private and community & voluntary sectors who have come together to develop an inclusive economy agenda countywide. Relunched alongside the Policy Lab project, the Oxfordshire inclusive economy partnership consists of a steering group led by Baroness Jan Royall of Somerville College and the University of Oxford’s Conference of Colleges and Jeremy Long of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) with oversight from Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly Oxfordshire Growth Board) and a series of working groups and work streams.

The Partnership contains four interrelated working groups, focusing on:

- 1. Educational attainment**
- 2. Inclusive employment**
- 3. Social value and procurement and**
- 4. Place based interventions**

Case Study: The OIEP Social Value & Procurement Working Group

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership includes a working group with an objective to maximise the social value delivered through procurement activity in the county. The working group sees contracting for services through local, purposeful organisations as one way to add social value, either through direct delivery, through subcontracting opportunities, or through additional. There is currently no explicit reference within the procurement policies of partners to increase spend with cooperatives or other forms of democratic enterprise. The partnership is developing a locally specific OXTOMs social value framework which can be used to assess the relative social value that will be delivered through different tender

responses. This will provide a robust and easily understood set of measures on social value, which could indirectly lead towards more commissioning through cooperatives and democratic enterprise. There may be future opportunities to incorporate a subset of measures which speak directly to the distinct forms of social value provided by these organisational types. The working group is also carrying out analysis of the procurement pipelines of partners and their associated supply chains, in part to identify future opportunities to contract with local purposeful businesses. This process will also identify gaps in these supply chains which could provide opportunities to incubate new entities to meet these needs

In addition, The Oxfordshire inclusive economy charter will be launched in 2022 and is a statement of our shared commitment to creating a more inclusive local economy, reflects the emergent ambitions of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, informed by learning from Stevenage that was contributed as part of the Policy Lab.

Owned by Oxford (OBO)

Alongside the Inclusive Economy Partnership, Oxford City Council is a key partner in an 18 month Community Wealth Building project called Owned by Oxford, which launched at a similar time. Owned by Oxford is led by the Community Action Group Oxfordshire and includes Makespace, Aspire, Oxford City Council, and the Solidarity Economy Association (SEA) as founding partners. Owned by Oxford's work is overseen by a Steering Group made up of these five partnership organisations and representatives from five grass-roots community projects in the City – African Families in the UK, Syrian Sisters, Oxford Community Action, Mothers for Justice Ubuntu, and Transition Lighthouse.

The project takes an assets-based approach to community development, looking to be led by the energy on the ground but seeking to mobilise the resources, purchasing power, assets, and skills of the partners to support the development of grass-roots community enterprise. The ultimate objective of the project is to stimulate the development of democratic and community-owned enterprises in areas of disadvantage within Oxford.

The project contains three interrelated work streams:

1. Mapping and Community Research

Involving extensive engagement within the target communities and through community anchors to develop a deep understanding of social and community enterprises formally and informally responding to community needs within the area. This information was recorded in an Airtable CRM system which was integrated with a digital mapping system to display key elements of the gathered data – detailed further below.

2. Embedding CWB Practice in anchor organisations

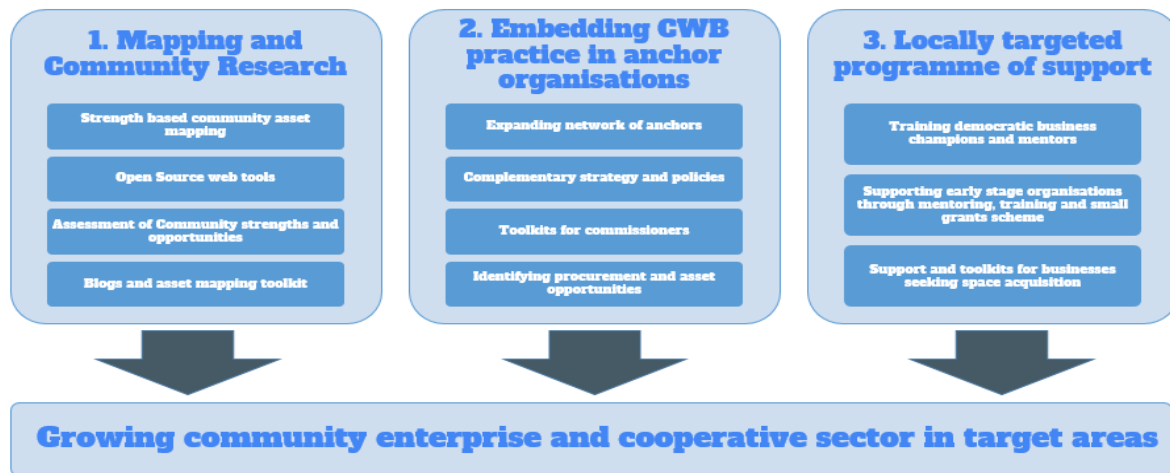
This workstream involves expanding and embedding Community Wealth Building practice within the network of anchor organisations through policy development and engagement through forums such as the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership and the Oxford City Council Community Wealth Building Working Group.

3. Locally Targeted Programme of Support

Once identified, the partnership seeks to offer tailored support to organisations meeting the objectives and ethos of the project. This is different for each organisation but could include help accessing space, grants, business development, or support

Mapping and Community Research

The Mapping and Community Research workstream is most closely related to this test and learn pilot.



The Airtable Cloud collaboration service was chosen as a suitable system for data gathering for the project by the OBO team. A CRM template designed for small Not-For-Profit organisations provided a powerful framework for the core team to collect and organise data as well as survey tools to involve others in data collection. The Digital Commons Co-operative (a new UK cooperative cofounded by SEA) developed an interface between Airtable and their digital mapping and directory platform. This enabled the OBO team to create publically visible maps and directories of some or all of the organisations they documented in the CRM system as well as maps which included co-operatives and other solidarity economy initiatives published from other sources.

Purpose

These maps serve a number of purposes. Fundamentally, if successfully promoted these maps can increase the visibility of purposeful community activity already underway within a locality. This could lead to a number of benefits:

- Highlighting the contribution these organisations already make to the area
- Making the activity visible to likeminded organisations and encouraging networks of solidarity and support
- Making this activity visible to policy and decision makers within anchor organisations
- Making visible the goods and services available locally to buyers within anchors and other local organisations

Technical

Digital Commons provided the technology and knowledge base to create online maps which displays key information about an organisation or initiative and provides a standard classification.

The Airtable Cloud collaboration service was chosen as a suitable system for data gathering for the project by the OBO team. They adapted an open-source CRM template designed for small Not-For-Profit organisations by [The Good Ship](#). This provided a powerful framework for the core team to collect and organise data as well as survey tools to involve others in data collection. The Digital Commons Co-operative (a new UK cooperative co-founded by SEA) developed an interface between Airtable and their digital mapping and directory platform. This enabled the OBO team to create publicly visible maps and

directories of some or all of the organisations they documented in the CRM system as well as maps which included co-operatives and other solidarity economy initiatives published from other sources.

The maps can combine publicly available datasets on the cooperative sector from dotcoop and Coops UK and supplements this with the information gathered and input into the Airtable CRM through the (ongoing) community engagement process. The map also includes a simple webform which allows organisations to add their initiative or edit their details on the map. Web entries are checked by a member of the team for alignment with the objectives of the project before being confirmed for entry on the public map.

The map is in development and will be launched on the website in May.

Later iterations of the mapping software will include automatic merging of data about organisations from different sources, enabling organisations to update their own data etc. The team are excited about offering support to other Community Wealth Building projects with these tools and learnings.

Learning from the Mapping and Community Research Workstream

The mapping and engagement with community organisations highlighted a number of points of relevance to the objective of growing an Inclusive Cooperative Economy.

Although Oxford has a wider democratic business sector than many areas of the country, the distribution of cooperatives and community enterprises tends to cluster in specific areas and among specific demographics.

The prevalence of cooperatives and other forms of purposeful business is much lower in the areas of Oxford targeted by the project making it difficult to envisage direct commissioning opportunities with cooperatives in these areas within the life of the project. This pattern of poor representation of co-operatives in working class communities is something observed by SEA in their work across the country.

Community engagement with formally and informally constituted purposeful businesses in these areas has confirmed that awareness of democratic enterprise models is low among the target groups and further work needed to embed recognition of the distinct value provided by democratic enterprise among commissioners and decision makers.

Oxford has a very strong Social Enterprise sector and support infrastructure and these models have successfully entered mainstream economic development discourse in the city. Although this stands as a positive in its own right, this success also inhibits the visibility of, and opportunities to grow, the cooperative and democratic business sector in the city.

Following the community research, the Owned by Oxford project has successfully identified funding to bring a Coop development agency (Cooperative Futures) into the project. It is anticipated that this will increase understanding and awareness of the benefits of democratic business models at both anchor and community level, and provide direct business development support to organisations exploring these organisational models.

In most cases these organisations are not yet large enough or sufficiently developed to be able to win contracts to wholly provide services to councils or other large anchors. However, the map creates an opportunity to make these organisations more visible to purposeful 'middle tier' local organisations who can approach them directly for services, in the knowledge that they will be buying from an organisation that is local, purposeful and democratic in their design.

An additional benefit comes from increasing visibility to others likeminded organisations, creating opportunities to support and collaborate with peers, potentially leading to future collaboration around procurement opportunities for clusters of likeminded organisations.

The distinct benefits of Cooperatives and other forms of democratic enterprise need to be recognised in any frameworks of social value which are being developed by anchor organisations if public spending is going to be successfully deployed at scale as a tool to enable future growth of the sector. Without direct reference to these values in policy frameworks, good intentions among officers are unlikely to be 'sticky' and won't create the promise of future opportunity which could influence the micro-level decision making on the constitutional form a new organisation might take.

Although beyond the scope of this test and learn pilot, a useful follow-up exercise for the CCIN network might be the development of a subset of social value TOMs, tailored to target outcomes uniquely provided by the democratic enterprise sector. As a starting point, this could build evidence towards a set of proxy values on the benefits of distributed ownership: for example, local wealth retention, distributed skills development, increased personal and community agency, engaged and happier workforce, improved health and wellbeing, greater organisational resilience to economic shock, and greater quality of provision through responsiveness to local needs.

For further information contact:

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