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Building Better Neighbourhoods

The Contribution of Faith Communities to Oxfordshire Life

SURGE
 Applied Research Centre
 Sustainable Regeneration



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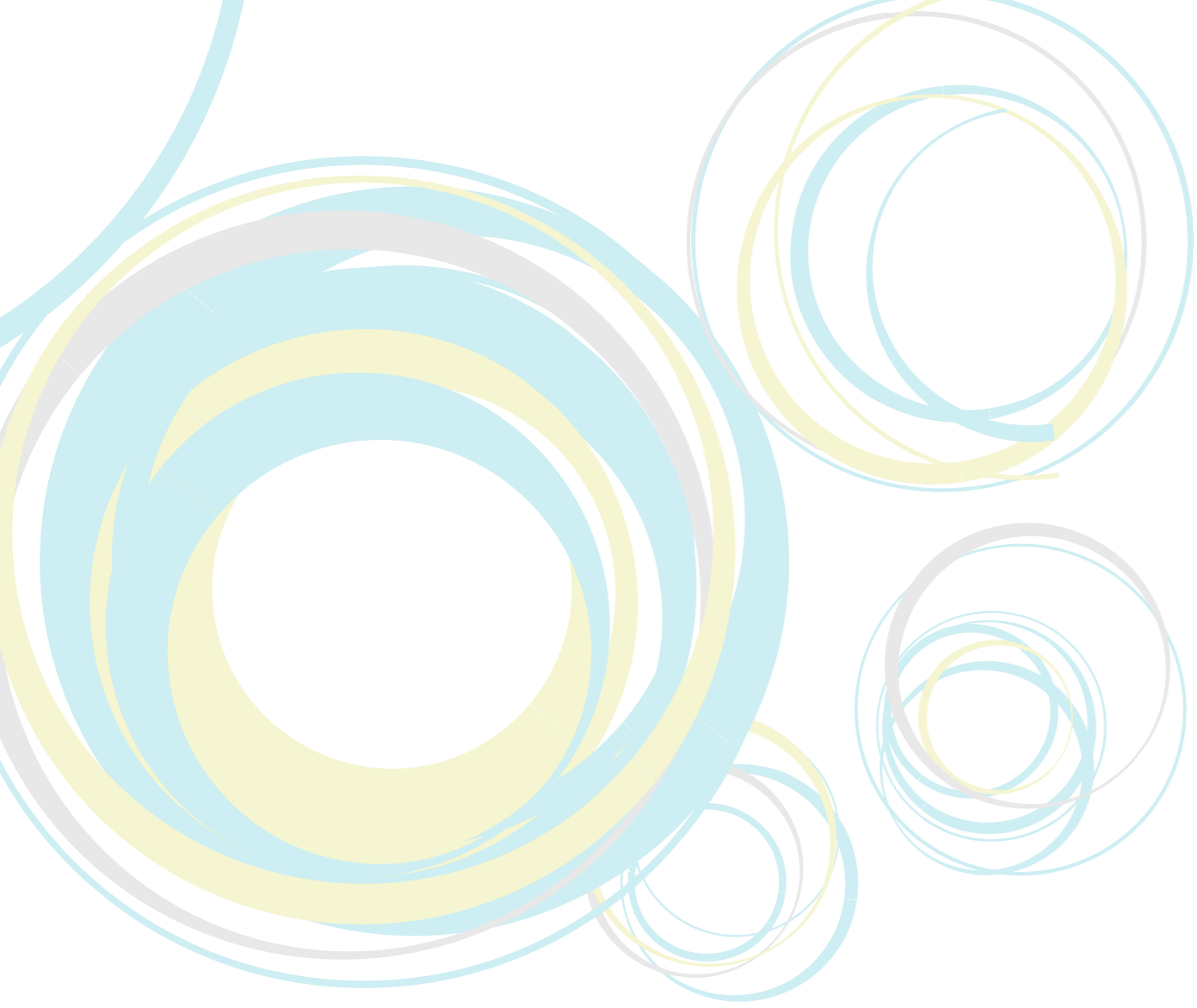
Coventry University Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration (SURGE)

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Foreword

Over the past 10 years a series of reports have been written looking at the contribution that faith communities make to their region, unitary authority, county or city. From them a consistent picture has emerged of these communities making a very significant contribution to the life and 'social capital' of their wider society. Oxfordshire has proved no different to that general rule. Economically they are among the top fifty largest employers in the County¹ and their role in tourism is of major importance; culturally, largely through voluntary giving, they care for more Grade I and II* buildings than any other organisation in Oxfordshire and open these up for a multitude of musical performances and artistic activities; organisationally they are responsible for generating all kinds of activities that contribute to the well-being of their towns and villages and so the list can go on.

This report looks at all those areas very particularly from the perspective of what they contribute to our County's life beyond the boundaries of their own organisations. So, when it comes to 'volunteers' no attempt has been made to count Churchwardens or Church elders and their equivalents in the other communities, and the report has limited itself to counting only those volunteers whose contribution lies outside the confines of the internal life of their own faith community.

The resulting picture to emerge is one of rich diversity with much activity focusing on children and young people and on some of the most disadvantaged and 'hardest to reach' groups in Oxfordshire. In that context it has been very good that this work has been funded and managed by a partnership, not just engaging the different faith communities themselves, but also involving the County Council, Cherwell District Council, Thames Valley Police and NHS Oxfordshire.

The lead body bringing all of this together has been the County's Stronger Communities Alliance (OSCA) and here I would want to pay tribute to Kate Hill and her colleagues at Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) who have contributed so much to its success. The researchers – Richard Farnell, David Jarvis, Fran Porter, Hannah Lambie and Kevin Broughton from SURGE – have also been outstanding as have the members of the Steering Group (Bede Gerrard, Penny Faust, Chinta Kallie, Dr Ramzy, Gill Crippen, John Robertson, Lynda Chalcraft, Meru Ostlund, Patrick Tolani, Nisha Prakash, Gwen Davies, Pauline McCreadie, Vince Gilio and Dee Singh) who have managed to make the work both intellectually stretching and a lot of fun.

The challenge now, of course, is to build on these partnerships and to see how we can all do even better what largely we are doing well already.

The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher
Chair of OSCA and of the Building Better Neighbourhoods Steering Group
23rd June 2010

¹ Using figures from an Oxfordshire Times Supplement earlier this year

Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| List of Figures | iii |
| List of Tables | v |
| Executive Summary | vii |
| 1.0 Introduction and Context | 1 |
| 2.0 Mapping Oxfordshire's Worshipping Communities | 5 |
| 2.1 Worshipping communities in Oxfordshire | 6 |
| 2.2 How are worshipping communities helping to build better neighbourhoods? | 12 |
| 2.3 Who benefits from the activities of worshipping communities? | 14 |
| 2.4 What resources do worshipping communities contribute to the task of building better neighbourhoods? | 16 |
| 2.5 How do worshipping communities contribute to local partnerships? | 25 |
| 3.0 Geography | 31 |
| 3.1 Worshipping communities and their place in the local community | 32 |
| 3.2 Great Tew | 33 |
| 3.3 Abingdon | 35 |
| 3.4 East Oxford | 37 |
| 3.5 Summary | 39 |
| 4.0 Volunteering | 41 |
| 4.1 A complex picture | 42 |
| 4.2 Belonging and believing | 43 |
| 4.3 Time and money | 44 |
| 4.4 Faith, voluntary and public sectors | 46 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 5.0 Faith-based Organisations | 49 |
| 5.1 Origins and nature of the activity | 51 |
| 5.2 Leadership and motivation | 53 |
| 5.3 Participation in local partnership structures | 54 |
| 5.4 Impact on the local community | 55 |
| 5.5 The particular contribution of faith-based organisations to Oxfordshire life | 56 |
| 5.6 Challenges facing semi-independent faith-based organisations | 57 |
| 6.0 Getting on Together | 59 |
| 6.1 Oxford Pastors' Forum | 61 |
| 6.2 Oxford Jewish Congregation | 62 |
| 6.3 Muslim communities in East Oxford | 64 |
| 6.4 Wantage and Grove Street Pastors | 66 |
| 6.5 Community impact | 67 |
| 7.0 Faiths and the Public Sector | 69 |
| 7.1 Cherwell District Council | 70 |
| 7.2 Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust | 72 |
| 7.3 Thames Valley Police | 73 |
| 7.4 Hook Norton Parish Council | 75 |
| 7.5 The future of engagement with local communities | 77 |
| 8.0 Summary and Implications | 79 |
| 8.1 Summary | 79 |
| 8.2 Implications and challenges | 81 |
| 8.3 Conclusions | 83 |
| Appendix One: List of References | 85 |
| Appendix Two: Contributors | 87 |
| Appendix Three: Research Framework | 89 |
| Appendix Four: Research Team | 91 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------|
| 2.1 | Faith group category of responding worshipping communities | 7 |
| 2.2 | Location of responding worshipping communities by local authority and location category | 8 |
| 2.3 | Total attendance at main regular worship meetings or gatherings of responding worshipping communities | 9 |
| 2.4 | Distance travelled by the majority of worshippers to attend worship [<i>amongst responding worshipping communities</i>] | 10 |
| 2.5 | Worshipping communities that have established independent or semi-independent groups, bodies, organisations or charities | 11 |
| 2.6 | Types of groups, bodies, organisations or charities established by responding worshipping communities | 11 |
| 2.7 | Neighbourhood needs identified by responding worshipping communities | 13 |
| 2.8 | Activities that responding worshipping community are currently undertaking in working to build better neighbourhoods | 13 |
| 2.9 | Activities that responding worshipping community would like to contribute to build better neighbourhoods in the future | 14 |
| 2.10 | Groups for whom responding worshipping communities run projects or activities | 15 |
| 2.11 | Full-time, part-time and sessional paid staff working on behalf of responding worshipping communities | 17 |
| 2.12 | Types of paid workers identified by responding worshipping communities | 17 |
| 2.13 | Total number of hours volunteered each month by members of responding worshipping communities | 19 |
| 2.14 | Tenure of worship venues amongst responding worshipping communities | 19 |
| 2.15 | Numbers of rooms available in buildings used by responding worshipping communities | 20 |
| 2.16 | Total numbers of hours each week that rooms operated by responding worshipping communities are in use | 21 |
| 2.17 | Adequacy of premises used by responding worshipping communities | 22 |
| 2.18 | Green space associated with the place of worship used by responding worshipping communities | 22 |
| 2.19 | Types of green space use or environmental project undertaken by responding worshipping communities | 23 |
| 2.20 | Types of tourist or visitor attraction identified by responding worshipping communities | 24 |
| 2.21 | Numbers of visitors received annually at the places of worship used by responding worshipping communities | 25 |
| 2.22 | Numbers of respondents that have worked with other worshipping communities of both the same and of different faith traditions | 26 |
| 2.23 | Numbers of respondents that have worked with other outside organisations | 27 |
| 2.24 | Participation of responding worshipping communities in local governance activities | 28 |
| 2.25 | Responding worshipping communities assessment of their contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire | 28 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------|
| 2.1 | Survey responses vs. population by district | 7 |
| 2.2 | Survey responses vs. population by district: Location type | 8 |
| 2.3 | Beneficiaries with particular significance for worshipping communities in the City of Oxford | 15 |
| 2.4 | Average number of paid employees per responding worshipping community | 16 |

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a programme of research into the contribution of worshipping communities in Oxfordshire to the task of **Building Better Neighbourhoods**. Commissioned by Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Alliance (OSCA) the research involved two phases of activity. **First**, a questionnaire survey designed to capture the characteristics of Oxfordshire's worshipping communities; the scale and scope of their contribution to building better neighbourhoods; the principal beneficiaries of their work; the resources that they bring to the task; the partnerships that they're involved with; and their assessment of the value of their activities. **Second**, face-to-face interviews were used to document stories about the roles and impact of faith groups in Oxfordshire on the development of better neighbourhoods.

Headline findings

Oxfordshire has as many as 450 worshipping communities of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other traditions. **These communities are diverse, reflecting differences within as well as between religions, in history, culture, ethnicity, theology and contemporary context.** This complexity must be recognised if a full contribution to building better neighbourhoods is to be achieved.

The 192 worshipping communities that participated in the questionnaire survey make a substantial contribution to the task of building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. The survey revealed that many of these faith communities have common concerns and are already working together on joint activity. Of particular note is the scale and scope of provision for children and young people. But, further work is needed to fulfil the aspirations of many faith groups to contribute more towards community integration and well-being.

Worshipping communities responding to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey are less than half of the worshipping communities of Oxfordshire. Even so they:

- **invest over £8.5 million each year in paying staff**
- **give 150,000 volunteering hours each year**, excluding that devoted to maintaining the internal life of the worshipping community. Multiplying this investment of time by the current minimum wage reveals that this volunteering is worth over £70,000 each month, or approximately £850,000 a year
- **make over 220 rooms and halls available for use by the wider community.** Of the 200,000 hours available each year **80,000 hours are already used by other organisations**
- Contribute in the order of £1.7 million to the tourist economy of the County each year

Faith-based social enterprises make an important contribution to meeting local needs including, for example, homelessness through a well established drop-in centre, problems of debt through a successful credit union and anti-social behaviour through a growing Street Pastors initiative.

In addition, visits to faith buildings and spaces contribute significantly to **tourism** and the management of churchyards provide valuable resources for the promotion of **green strategies**.

Survey respondents make the judgement that their **members make an even greater contribution to building better neighbourhoods through their everyday lives, work and associations** than through activity formally organised by the church, mosque, temple or synagogue.

Public sector agencies and voluntary sector infrastructure organisations display a willingness to work alongside worshipping communities, although they recognise the mutual barriers that can sometimes exist and that need to be overcome.

Worshipping communities make a considerable contribution to current policy development and implementation aimed at building better neighbourhoods, in particular through:

- **the volunteering** that they stimulate
- welfare projects and **social enterprises** that they establish
- their contribution to **building bridges** between people of different backgrounds

Detailed research findings

In conducting the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey responses were invited from the full spectrum of worshipping communities present in the County, including Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, United Reformed, Baptist, Orthodox and Black Majority Churches, as well as from Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other faith communities. However, because of the relatively small populations of worshipping communities involved, **in reporting findings it has been necessary to aggregate responses from Christian denominations other than Church of England and from other faiths in order that the anonymity of individual communities is maintained.**

Of the 192 responses to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey, the majority, 72%, came from Church of England communities, with 21% from other Christian denominations and seven per cent from other faiths. Over 13,000 people of all ages regularly attend the main worship meetings, one third of whom are under 30 years old. In terms of the distance travelled by members of responding communities in order to attend worship, data show that for bulk of Church of England respondents (85%), the majority of worshippers travel less than two miles to attend church services. This picture of relatively concentrated, localised worshipping communities is not repeated for responses from other Christian denominations nor from other faiths.

- **Who benefits from worshipping community activities?** The number of independent or semi-independent organisations established by worshipping communities in Oxfordshire is considerable. The types of issues being addressed undoubtedly contribute to the politically driven agenda of recent years which has placed increased emphasis on the role of the voluntary sector in helping to support delivery of welfare to those in the greatest disadvantage. Of particular note is the number of worshipping communities which have established independent projects to support the needs of children, young people and families or have established centres to support the needs of all in their local communities. Beyond these core areas of concern, evidence collected through the

Building Better Neighbourhoods survey suggests that worshipping communities in Oxfordshire are also helping to address other high profile needs in their local areas. These include responding to homelessness through a well established drop-in centre, the effects of being in debt through a successful credit union, and anti-social behaviour through a growing Street Pastors scheme.

- **What resources do they bring?** Worshipping communities in Oxfordshire dedicate an array of physical, emotional and spiritual resources to the task of building better neighbourhoods, including paid staff, volunteers, buildings and time. Types of paid worker employed include those concerned with meeting the spiritual and practical needs of the worshipping communities such as faith or worship leaders, caretakers and musicians, but also those with a wider remit which supports the community's efforts to build better neighbourhoods. The geographic distribution of these paid staff shows that by far the greatest overall concentration is in Oxford (186) followed by Cherwell (81), South Oxfordshire (74), Vale of the White Horse (62) and West Oxfordshire (54). Whilst City of Oxford still exhibits the highest concentration of paid workers per respondent (4.4), Vale of the White Horse emerges as the district with the second greatest concentration (2.2). West Oxfordshire has 1.6.
- **Physical resources.** Responding faith groups provide 254 rooms and halls for use by the worshipping community themselves and 221 for use by other groups. These figures indicate that worship venues are important community facilities. Of the rooms and halls available for use by the worshipping community, nearly 90% are also available for use by other groups in the community. The geographic spread of these rooms and halls is significant as the least densely populated districts of Oxfordshire (West Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse) offer some of the highest numbers of rooms for use by other groups, providing important facilities in Oxfordshire's most rural communities.
- **Green space.** A significant proportion (nearly 40%) of worship venues have green space associated with them, even in city locations. Over 90% of places of worship in small and large villages have green space, 31% of those in suburbs and 24% in market towns. Of those that have green space, almost a third (29%) actively utilise it for environmental projects.
- **Are worshipping communities working together?** Two thirds of respondents have worked with other worshipping communities from within their faith tradition, and 20% have worked with others from a different faith. These results show high levels of joint working within faith traditions, particularly in the more rural districts of West Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse, but also in the City of Oxford.
- **Contributions to other local partnerships.** Respondents were asked about the benefits that their worshipping communities gain from working with other organisations. Key benefits gained from working with a local authority or parish council included wider community awareness and involvement as well as funding opportunities. When working with the police, respondents identified that having good relations, support, assistance and joint working were benefits that they received. An important benefit of working with a local primary care trust was supporting the wider community. At the same time, public sector agencies participating in this research were universally positive about the unique contribution that faith groups can provide to achieving common goals. Despite these positive statements, worshipping communities also identified a number of barriers to working with external agencies. Principal amongst these are a lack of time and resources on the part of worshipping communities, and the perception that relationships with public agencies are bureaucratic and sometimes tinged with mutual suspicion.
- **Assessing the overall contribution to building better neighbourhoods.** When asked about their contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire, 67% of respondents felt that, as a group, their worshipping community made a significant contribution (assessed as 'a fair bit', 'quite a lot', or 'a lot'). Even more, 93% felt that members of their group made significant contributions as individuals in their everyday lives. Within these headline figures,

45% of Church of England respondents and 51% from other Christian denominations assessed their contribution as a group to be 'quite a lot' or 'a lot'. Whilst none of the respondents from other faiths regarded their contribution as a group in this way, assessed at the individual level, a third of respondents from other faiths reported that members of their worshipping community made 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of a contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire.

Implications and challenges

In addition to mapping and quantifying the activities of worshipping communities in Oxfordshire through the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey, qualitative case study research outlined in this report isolates a number of **important challenges for public sector organisations and the wider voluntary sector as well as for worshipping communities themselves**, in maximising the impact of faith communities' work to build better neighbourhoods. Specifically these are as follows:

- Despite inherent diversity and variations in the capacity of faith groups to contribute to building better neighbourhoods, at a deep-rooted level the activities of worshipping communities typically share common faith-based motivations or drivers. A key challenge for the public and wider voluntary sectors, therefore, is to extend levels of religious literacy amongst professionals who seek to work in partnership with Oxfordshire's worshipping communities.
- The quantitative benefit of external volunteering in terms of the economic value of hours given each year by worshipping communities in Oxfordshire has been noted. In relation to this, three specific challenges for the public and wider voluntary sectors are apparent:
 - **First**, acknowledgment that specific faith motivations for volunteering are not a barrier to the delivery of beneficial outcomes.
 - **Second**, recognition that the burden of volunteering by worshipping communities can fall heavily upon a core of particularly active or committed individuals who may benefit from help.

- **Third**, appreciation that support made available to the wider voluntary sector, including through the Oxfordshire Compact, should also be open to worshipping communities. Faith communities themselves are not well linked into the support available from the voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations.
- Alongside the contribution of paid staff and volunteers, the wider importance of physical resources such as worship venues or green space as community facilities is striking. The availability and use of rooms and halls other than for worship is noted and underlines the importance of challenging both the public and voluntary sectors to ensure participation of worshipping communities in development and delivery of local community plans and strategies.
- The development of independent or semi-independent faith-based organisations provides a mechanism via which those activities of worshipping communities directed to building better neighbourhoods can be made sustainable, and through which growth and greater impact may be achieved. Whilst such organisations can often find themselves working in partnership with public agencies, they benefit from independence from the statutory sector in determining priorities and ways of working, free from the constraints of an ever-changing public sector policy and resource context. Two challenges arise from this:
 - **First**, for worshipping communities themselves, it is crucial to ensure that effective governance structures are implemented within independent or semi-independent organisations in order that their potential may be fully realised.
 - **Second**, for the public sector, it is essential that contributions made by such organisations are recognised and valued even when they are not seen as aligning to the latest policy objectives.
- By providing formal and informal care and support to others, both within their own faith traditions and in their wider neighbourhoods, Oxfordshire's worshipping communities are playing an important role in enabling people of different generations, backgrounds and cultures to 'get on better together'. Alongside good neighbourliness, worshipping communities are instrumental in creating organisations and networks and providing resources and services which help to build bridges within and between people of different faith and people of none. As such, a key challenge for the public sector in particular is to recognise the value of social capital created through such activity, and the ways in which it can be harnessed to help support the achievement of cohesion-related policy goals and the more efficient delivery of public services, including, for example, policing. In this sense, co-operation and collaboration between faiths and the public sector helps to create a vibrant civic culture in which the roles and contributions of worshipping communities to building better neighbourhoods are fully acknowledged and valued.



1.0 Introduction and Context

This report presents the findings of a twelve month programme of research into the contribution made by worshipping communities in Oxfordshire to the task of building better neighbourhoods. Commissioned by Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Alliance (OSCA), the research was undertaken by a team from Coventry University's Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration (SURGE) and was conducted between March 2009 and March 2010. The specific aims of the research were to:

- Map activities carried out by members of faith groups or attached to places of worship across the County.
- Quantify the number of volunteers involved in these activities and the commitment of time which they make.
- Gain a better understanding of this activity and its positive outcomes, thereby demonstrating its value to Oxfordshire residents.
- Enable work carried out by faith groups in the community to be more fully recognised by statutory bodies.

In fulfilling these objectives a number of questions were of particular importance in helping to shape the research. In particular: ascertaining the nature of the contribution to building better neighbourhoods that faith communities themselves aspire to make; how these aspirations compare to what is happening at present; how they are changing and why; and what tensions and problems are faced by faith communities in their relationships with one another, external organisations, partnerships and agencies of the state.

The research programme was operationalised through two distinct phases of activity. The first, an extensive questionnaire survey was designed to capture: quantitative data regarding the characteristics of Oxfordshire's worshipping communities; the scale and scope of their contribution to building better neighbourhoods; the principal beneficiaries of their work; the resources that they bring to the task; the partnerships with which they are involved; and their assessment of the value of their activities, both as worshipping communities and as individuals in their day to day lives. The questionnaire was made available online and in hard copy, and was disseminated to worshipping communities by faith leaders in the County.²

The second phase of research built on insights garnered through the questionnaire survey and involved detailed qualitative case study research around five cross-cutting issues: geography; independent faith-based organisations; volunteering; getting on together; and faiths and the public sector. This second phase of research activity used a combination of face-to-face interview techniques to collect a range of qualitative data and document detailed stories about the role and impact of faith groups in Oxfordshire on the development of strong communities and better neighbourhoods. The focus here was upon processes and outcomes for local communities and is important in 'bringing to life' the map of activity established through the earlier quantitative questionnaire survey of Oxfordshire's faith groups. Such intelligence is also valuable in helping to set an agenda for the future which supports faith communities in contributing positively to their neighbourhoods and in looking at the challenges that they face.

² It should be noted here that in conducting the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey no attempt was made to embrace the wealth of chaplaincies working in the County. These include those at both universities, and a significant number of schools, hospitals, hospices, prisons, young offender institutions and immigration removal centres. Alongside these are those working with the police and the armed services. We are well aware that these make a substantial contribution to the lives of both faith communities and the County as a whole, and regret that we can do no more than mention them here. In addition, church and other faith schools have not been a focus for this study.

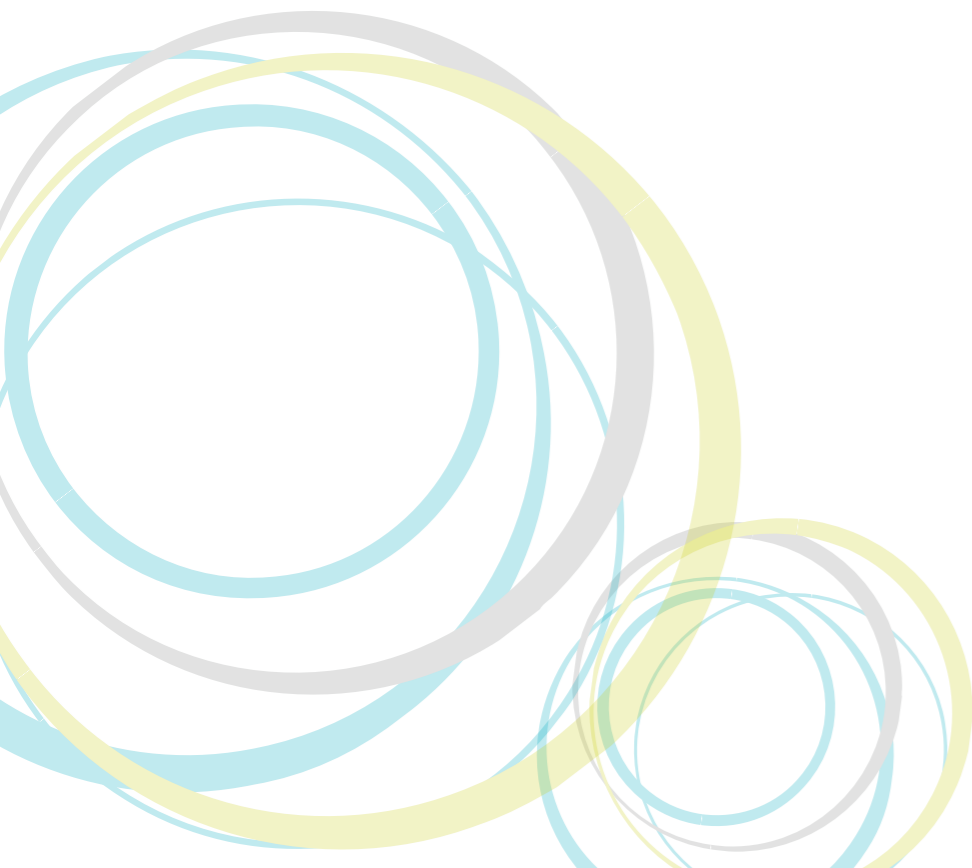
In reporting findings from this programme of work, it is crucial to recognise that the issues under investigation are set against a backdrop of UK government policy towards faith which, over the past decade, has come to view local faith communities as a core part of the wider voluntary or third sector and, in turn, as providers of welfare services (both informally and increasingly formally), advocates of social enterprise, leaders of the community cohesion agenda, and a source of willing volunteers. This view is held across all three major political parties in the UK and is reflected in a stream of publications from government, the most recent of which, *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for inter faith dialogue and social action*, suggests that faith-based organisations must be a part of any response that public authorities make to tackle complex challenges faced by communities across the UK. This desire on the part of government is set to increase further in the context of ongoing economic recession, and the need to devise new and more cost-efficient ways of delivering public services to those members of society suffering the greatest disadvantage.

Whilst faith communities are rightly resistant to the notion of incorporation within the government machine, and indeed are often critical of government policy, many recognise that they have an important role to play in contributing to efforts to address the 'social evils'³ faced by communities. This includes ensuring wider social well-being and meeting the combined challenges of an absence of shared values, inequality and individualism. At a local level, this role is recognised in public policy through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) framework, and the drive to task faith communities with the job of contributing to Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets for volunteering. However, at the same time, there is ongoing debate about the capacity and capability of faith communities to meet the growing expectations of government, as well as wider questioning of whether the religious values and teachings of individual groups are always consistent with the values and goals of the state. Specific tensions may arise, for example, in relation to gender roles and equality, homosexuality and even freedom of speech.

This wider context points towards complexity and diversity within and between faith communities, and the fact that their capacity and willingness to contribute to the public realm is highly variable. This assertion is reinforced by the fact that there is often misunderstanding of faith, and the scope of the contributions that faith groups make to building better communities, on the part of policy makers. The generally low-level of 'religious literacy' demonstrated by policy makers further complicates the context for this research, and suggests that its contribution is both timely and significant.

³ Between July and September 2007, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation asked the public to consider what social evils face the UK today. The list produced reveals a strong sense of unease about some of the changes shaping British society. Participants highlighted the following concerns about how we seem to live our lives: a decline of community; individualism; consumerism and greed; a decline of values. Against this backdrop, people identified some more concrete social evils: decline of the family; young people as victims or perpetrators; drugs and alcohol; poverty and inequality; immigration and responses to immigration; crime and violence. [Further details can be obtained from <http://www.sociale evils.org.uk/>].

The report is structured in seven further chapters. The first of these, Chapter Two, presents a summary of key findings from phase one of the research programme, the quantitative questionnaire survey of worshipping communities in Oxfordshire. **Complete results from this survey are also available in a separate electronic Technical Appendix which can be downloaded from <http://www.oxnet.org.uk/>.** Following on from the review of quantitative data Chapters Three to Seven are concerned with reporting qualitative research from each of the five cross-cutting themes noted above (geography; independent faith-based organisations; volunteering; getting on together; and faiths and the public sector). Finally Chapter Eight provides summary conclusions and considers the implications of the research, both for faith groups and for external organisations, agencies and partnerships to which, through their activities, worshipping communities directly or indirectly lend support.



2.0 Mapping Oxfordshire's Worshipping Communities

This section presents a 'map' of faith groups in Oxfordshire and their activities which draws upon findings from an extensive questionnaire survey of worshipping communities.⁴ Conducted over a five month period from June to October 2009, and designed to elicit information about the roles which faith communities play in improving the lives of people in Oxfordshire, the 'Building Better Neighbourhoods survey' was disseminated through the networks of faith leaders in the County in both paper and electronic form. Individuals receiving an invitation to participate in this way were also encouraged to pass details of the survey to others in order that as many individual worshipping communities as possible could be reached. Whilst this process of respondent-driven sampling (RDS) means it is difficult to accurately state the total number of recipients who will have received the questionnaire, it is estimated that the survey population here does not exceed 450. In light of this, the 192 responses received represent a response rate of 40% or more, high even in the context of similar surveys of faith communities elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

⁴ Data captured by the questionnaire, which comprised 32 (predominantly closed) questions in six sections, are presented in detail in a separate electronic Technical Appendix available to download from <http://www.oxnet.org.uk/>.

The summary of key findings which follows is structured in five sub-sections. These relate to the individual sections of the questionnaire which was designed to capture data concerning: the characteristics of responding worshipping communities (see section 2.1); the work they are doing towards building better neighbourhoods (see section 2.2); the individuals and groups that benefit from that work (see section 2.3); the resources that they bring to the task (see section 2.4); the partners that they work with (see section 2.5); and their own perception of the value which they bring, both as individuals and as worshipping communities, in supporting their local neighbourhood (see section 2.5). Assessed in conjunction with detailed qualitative research presented elsewhere in this report, data gathered under these themes are valuable in helping to set an agenda for the future which supports faith communities in contributing positively to their neighbourhoods and in looking at the challenges that they face.

2.1 Worshipping communities in Oxfordshire

Of the 192 responses to the survey of worshipping communities in Oxfordshire, the majority, 72%, came from Church of England communities, with 21% from other Christian denominations and seven per cent from other faiths (Figure 2.1). It is important to note that in conducting the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey responses were invited from the full spectrum of worshipping communities present in the County, including Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, United Reformed, Baptist, Orthodox and Black Majority Churches, as well as from Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other minority faith communities. However, **because of the relatively small populations of worshipping communities involved it has been necessary here to aggregate responses from Christian denominations other than Church of England and from other faiths in order that the anonymity of individual communities is maintained.** In geographical terms, the proportion of responses drawn from each of the five local authority districts is roughly in line with each district's share of the total County population (see Table 2.1). Only in the Vale of the White Horse and in the City of Oxford are the proportions of responses noticeably less than the proportion of the County's population resident in the district.

This overall pattern is broadly consistent for both Church of England responses and those from other Christian denominations. However, responses from other faiths come exclusively from the City of Oxford itself and Cherwell district. This concentration, and the relatively small number of responses from faith communities other than Christian, is perhaps unsurprising given that in 2007 black and minority ethnic communities (from which many though not all members of faith communities other than Christian come) were estimated to comprise approximately eight per cent of the total population of Oxfordshire but more than 17% of the population of Oxford.

⁵ Population data are drawn from 2007 mid-year estimates produced by Office for National Statistics [Available at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14238>].

Figure 2.1 Faith group category of responding worshipping communities

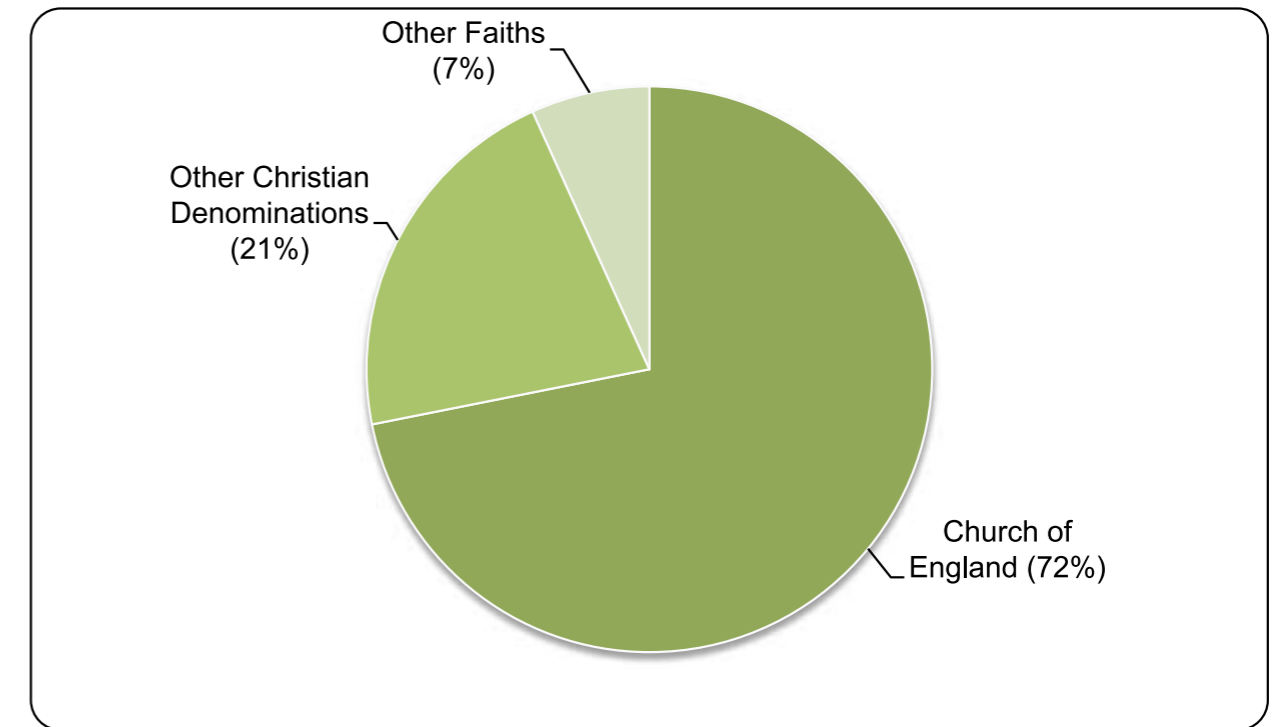


Table 2.1 Survey responses vs. population by district

| | Cherwell | City of Oxford | South Oxfordshire | Vale of the White Horse | West Oxfordshire |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Proportion of survey responses | 23% | 22% | 23% | 15% | 17% |
| Proportion of total population | 22% | 24% | 20% | 18% | 16% |
| Variance (+/-) | +1 | -2 | +3 | -3 | +1 |

In addition to reflecting the distribution of population across Oxfordshire's political and administrative divisions, responses from worshipping communities reflect a range of different settlement or location types (Figure 2.2). Of particular note is the high proportion of responses received from worshipping communities who describe their location as a 'small village' (47%). When set against population statistics illustrating the urban/rural distribution of population across Oxfordshire, only in Cherwell is the proportion of responding worshipping communities from small villages out of line with the general distribution of population (Table 2.2). The fact that one worshipping community from the City of Oxford identified their location as a small village is an anomaly and perhaps reflects a perception of their location as an 'urban village'. In terms of the profile of responses from small villages, over 90% are from worshipping communities within the Church of England faith tradition.

Figure 2.2 Location of responding worshipping communities by local authority and location category

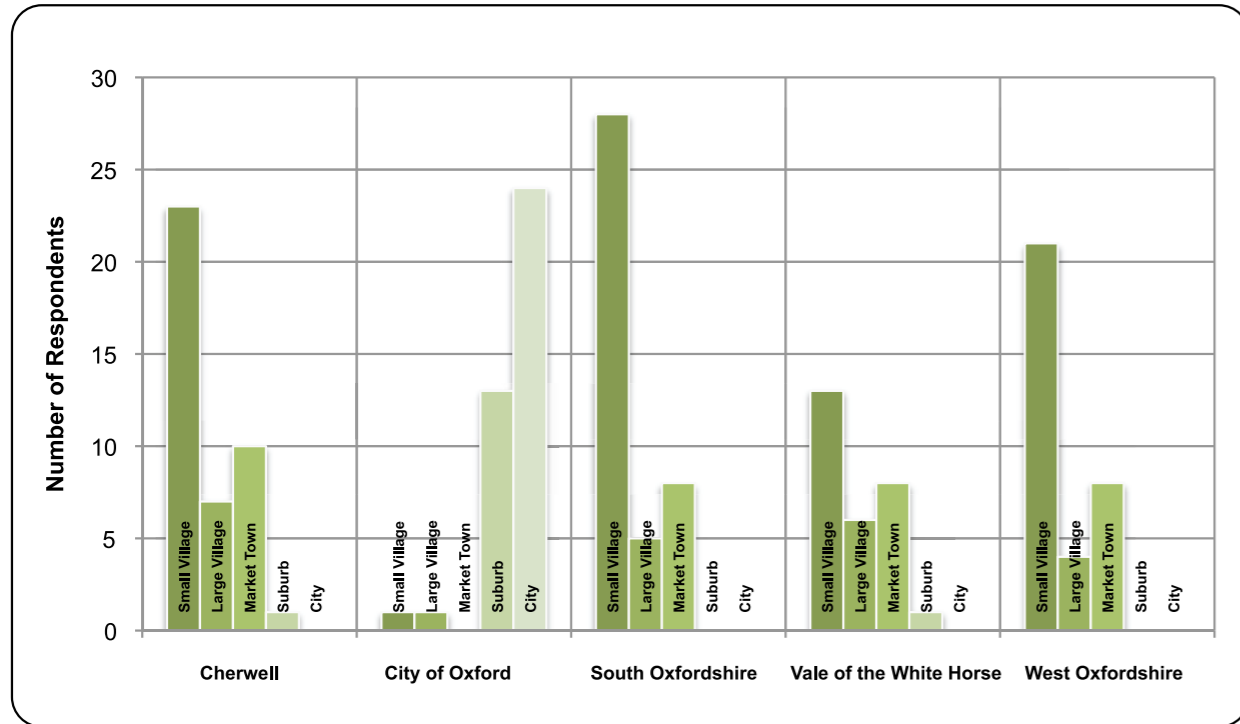


Table 2.2 Survey responses vs. population by district: Location type

| | Cherwell | City of Oxford | South Oxfordshire | Vale of the White Horse | West Oxfordshire |
|--|----------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Proportion of survey responses from Small Villages | 56% | 2% | 68% | 46% | 64% |
| Proportion of total population defined as rural | 34% | 0 | 65% | 44% | 62% |

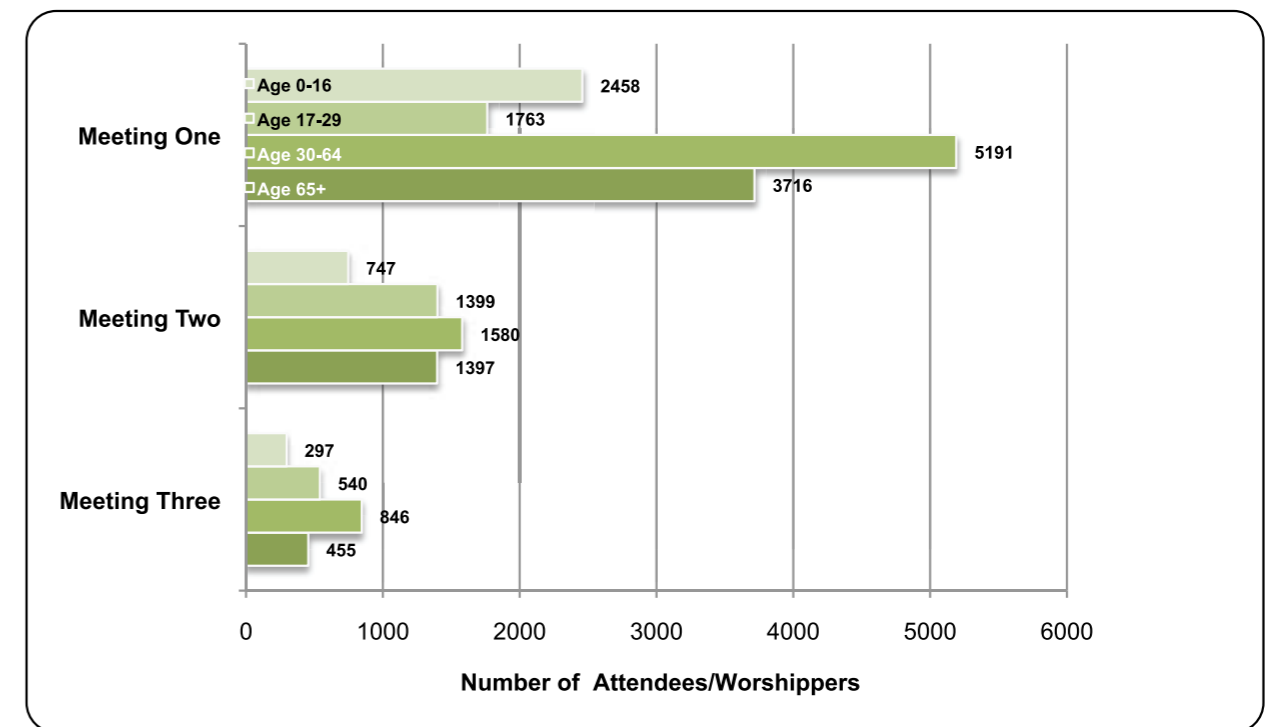
An over-reliance on older, and particularly retired, people has been noted as a feature of many worshipping communities by other research into the contribution of the faiths sector to civil society. In line with this broader national picture, data collected concerning the age profile of attendees at responding worshipping communities' main worship events reveals a distribution that is slightly skewed towards the upper age groups (Figure 2.3). In Oxfordshire, individuals aged 30-64 are the biggest age group attending worship, and this picture is consistent across each of the three main regular worship events identified by respondents. Perhaps reflecting the fact that this age group includes people most likely to be at a life stage where they are raising a family, individuals aged 16 or under also account for

⁶ Data concerning the distribution of population across different settlements types are based on Oxfordshire Partnership (2007) Briefing paper 9: population.

⁷ See for example, Farnell, R., Hopkinson, J., Jarvis, D., Martineau, J. and Ricketts Hein, J. (2006) Faith in Rural Communities: Contributions of social capital to community vibrancy. Coventry: ACORA.

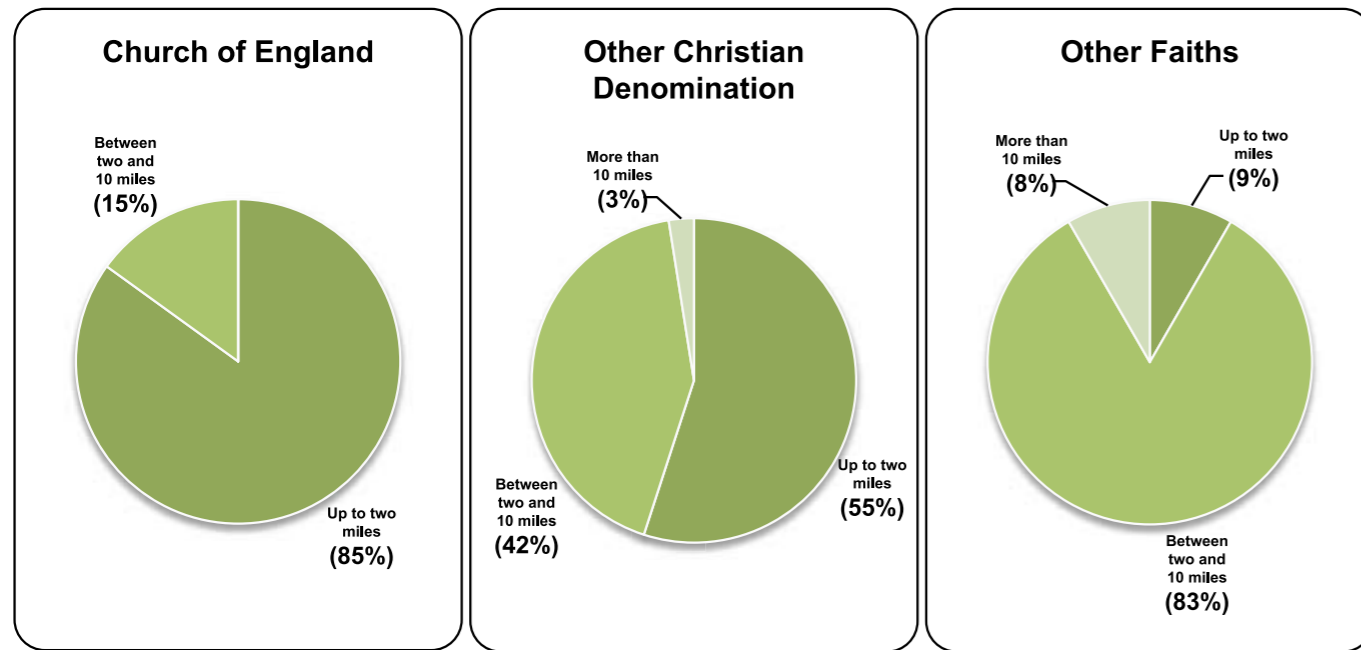
almost 20% of attendees at the main worshipping events of responding communities. This relatively high proportion of young worshippers decreases for the age group 17 to 29, before (as noted above) increasing for those aged over 30. This pattern of attendance may point towards a re-engagement with faith at the point in individuals' lives when they begin a family, either for spiritual reasons or other considerations such as schooling. Associated with this, it may also reflect a return home to Oxfordshire following a period of study or work elsewhere.

Figure 2.3 Total attendance at main regular worship meetings or gatherings of responding worshipping communities



In addition to numbers of individuals attending worship, the questionnaire survey reported here also collected information concerning the distance travelled by members of responding communities in order to attend worship (Figure 2.4). These data show that for the bulk of Church of England respondents (85%), the majority of worshippers travel less than two miles to attend Church services. This picture of relatively concentrated, localised worshipping communities is not repeated for responses from other Christian denominations nor other faiths. In the case of other Christian denominations, 42% of responding communities draw the majority of their worshippers from a distance of between two and ten miles. For other faiths the degree of dispersion is even greater with 83% stating that most of their worshippers travel between two and ten miles, with a further eight per cent indicating that the majority of the community travel more than 10 miles in order to attend worship. This variation in the geographical coverage of individual worshipping communities is almost certainly a consequence of differences in both the numbers of individual worshippers and the length of time for which worshipping communities have been established in particular places. For example, whilst the Church of England has long-standing and historic ties to local places and local people, members of other faith groups are fewer in number across the County as a whole and so need to travel further to establish viable, functioning worshipping groups – typically in Oxford or Banbury but with smaller communities elsewhere.

Figure 2.4 Distance travelled by the majority of worshippers to attend worship
[amongst responding worshipping communities]



The following two charts (Figures 2.5 and 2.6) illustrate the number of worshipping communities that have established independent and semi-independent groups, bodies, organisations or charities through which they work to build better neighbourhoods, and the types of activities delivered in this way.⁸ In Oxfordshire, 30% of responding worshipping communities claim to have established such faith-based organisations, with coverage across each of the five local authority districts (Figure 2.5). This proportion is exceptionally high and perhaps reflects misinterpretation on the part of some respondents who may have wrongly included the day-to-day activities of their worshipping community such as, for example, mothers and toddlers groups, under this heading. Nevertheless, the number of independent or semi-independent organisations established is clearly considerable and the types of issues being addressed undoubtedly contribute to the politically driven agenda of recent years which has placed increased emphasis on the role of the voluntary sector in helping to supporting delivery of welfare to those in the greatest disadvantage (Figure 2.6).

⁸ In completing the questionnaire, individual worshipping communities were able to note the establishment of more than one independent or semi-independent group, body, organisation or charity. As a result the number of responses illustrated on Figure 2.5 is greater than on Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.5 Worshipping communities that have established independent or semi-independent groups, bodies, organisations or charities

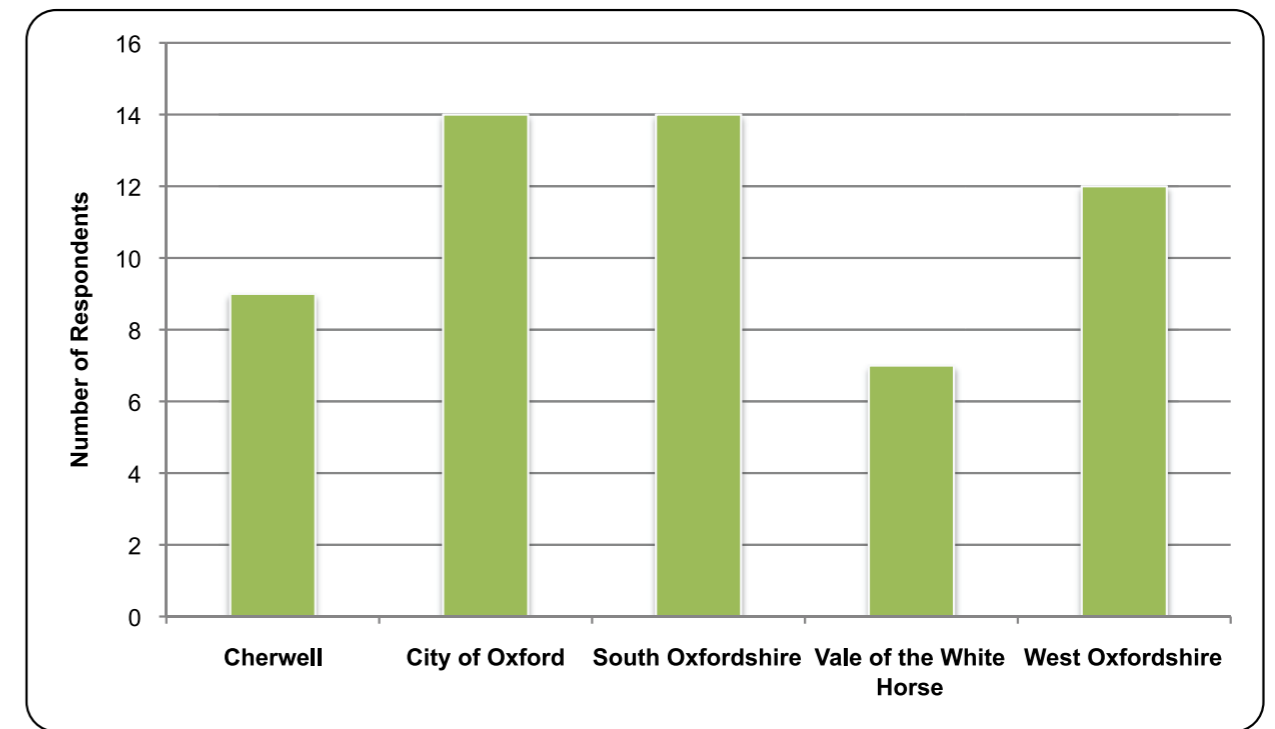
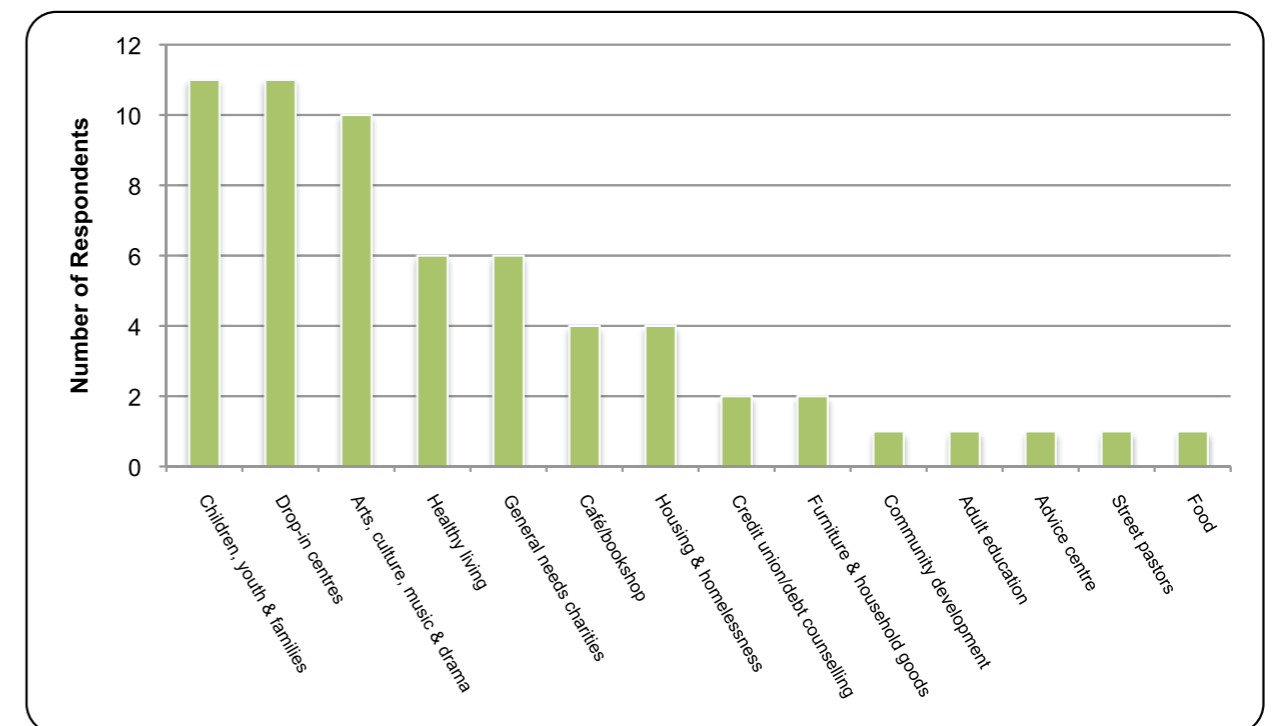


Figure 2.6 Types of groups, bodies, organisations or charities established by responding worshipping communities



Of particular note is the number of worshipping communities which have established independent projects to support the needs of children, young people and families or have established drop-in centres to support the needs of all in their local communities. Beyond these core areas of concern, evidence collected through the questionnaire survey suggests that worshipping communities in Oxfordshire are also helping to address other high-profile needs in their local areas including: homelessness through a successful drop-in centre; the effects of recession through a successful credit union; and anti-social behaviour through a well-regarded Street Pastors scheme. The origins, drivers and outcomes of such faith-based organisations are examined in Chapter Five which focuses on three case study projects.

2.2 How are worshipping communities helping to build better neighbourhoods?

In developing the types of independent or semi-independent faith-based organisations or projects highlighted above, worshipping communities are often acting in response to clearly identified needs within their local communities. Data collected through this survey show perceptions of needs within neighbourhoods focus on a general lack of belonging and support within their local community and the needs of children and young people (Figure 2.7). These needs are identified as the top two priorities when responses are disaggregated by local authority and by location type. Within these spatial sub-categories, a lack of belonging and support in the community are felt most strongly in small villages and suburban locations where, from both types of place, 27% of respondents identified them amongst their key concerns. On the face of it, this kind of response from small village communities is perhaps a surprise. However, recognition of the fact that village locations across the County are now home to new inhabitants commuting to employment sites elsewhere in Oxfordshire, or the wider South East region, means that in terms of their character they are increasingly similar to suburbs where the focus of residents is typically outwards facing rather than on their immediate locality or community.

Following on from worshipping communities' identification of need, Figures 2.8 and 2.9 present data concerning the areas where worshipping communities are currently working and those in which they aspire to contribute towards the task of building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. These areas of activity go beyond the purposes of independent or semi-independent faith-based organisations, and typically involve members of worshipping communities in supporting directly the building of better neighbourhoods. In accordance with the needs identified in Figure 2.7, data collected help to reinforce earlier findings concerning the priorities of worshipping communities, and in particular the emphasis which is placed on work with children and young people, including formally through involvement with local schools, and with older people, whilst future aspirations focus on support for community integration and well-being. Issues further down the list of priorities include housing and homelessness and work with people of other ethnicity, faith or culture.

Figure 2.7 Neighbourhood needs identified by responding worshipping communities

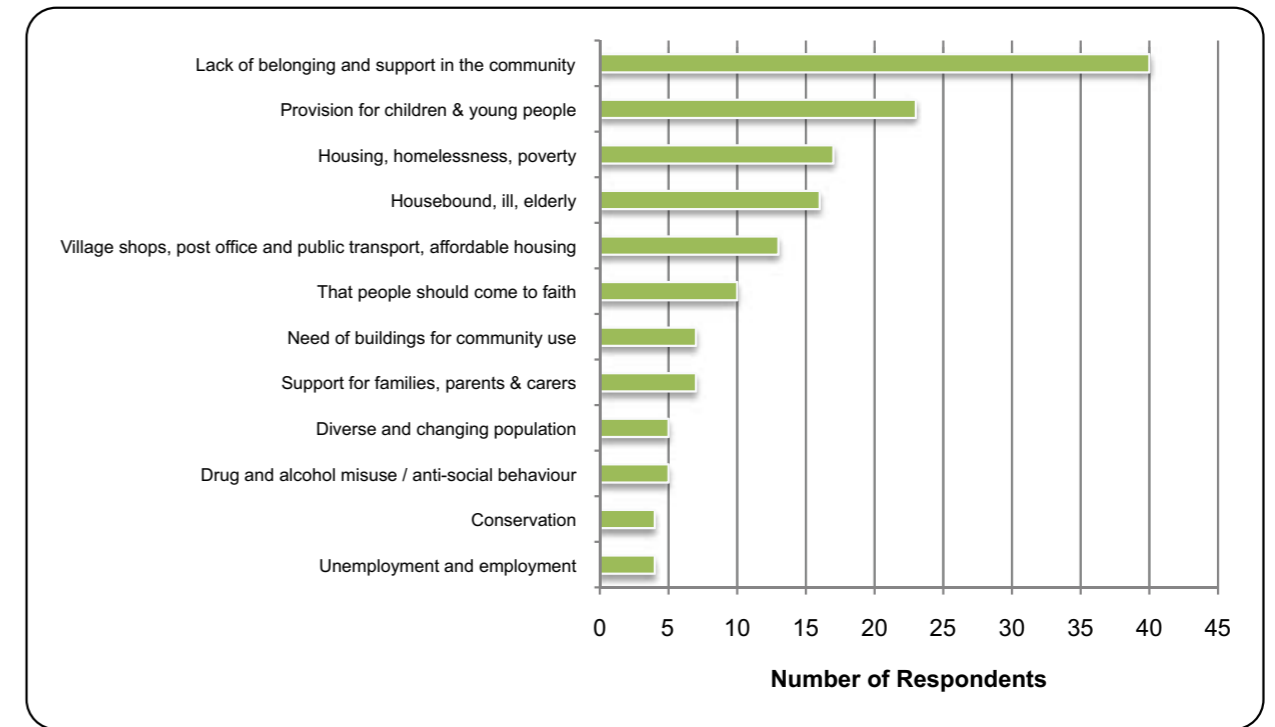


Figure 2.8 Activities that responding worshipping community are currently undertaking in working to build better neighbourhoods

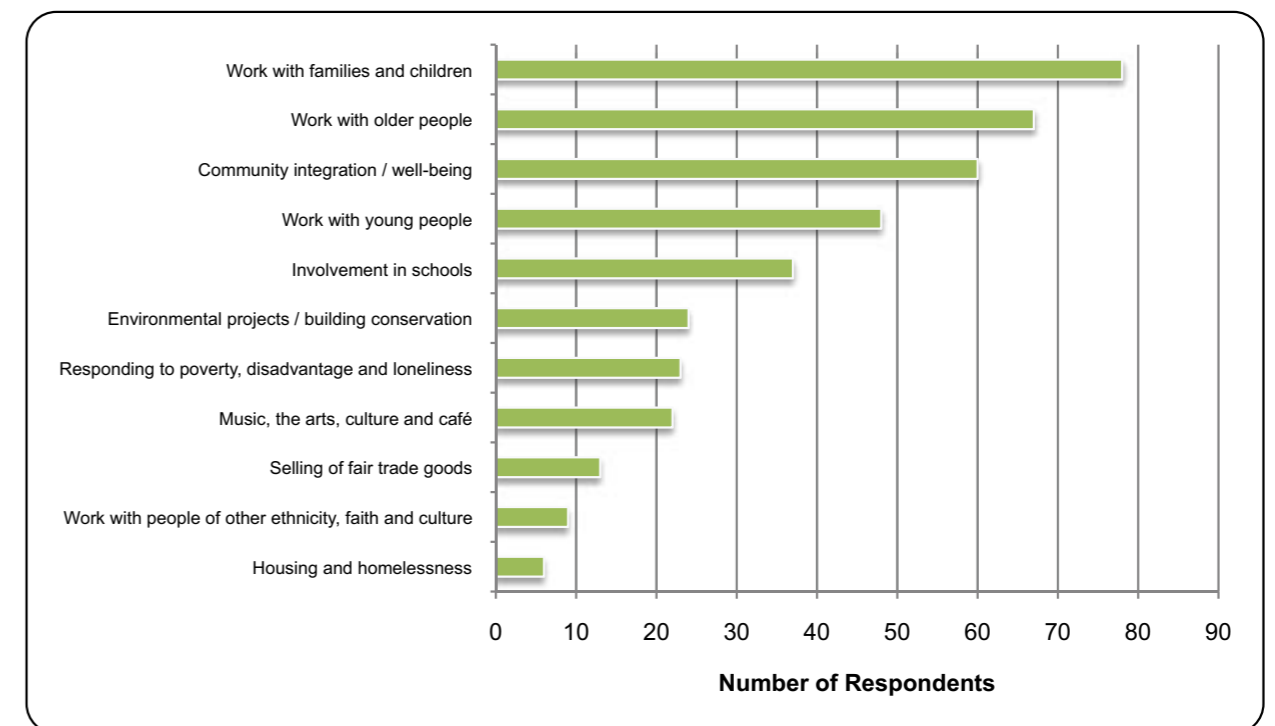
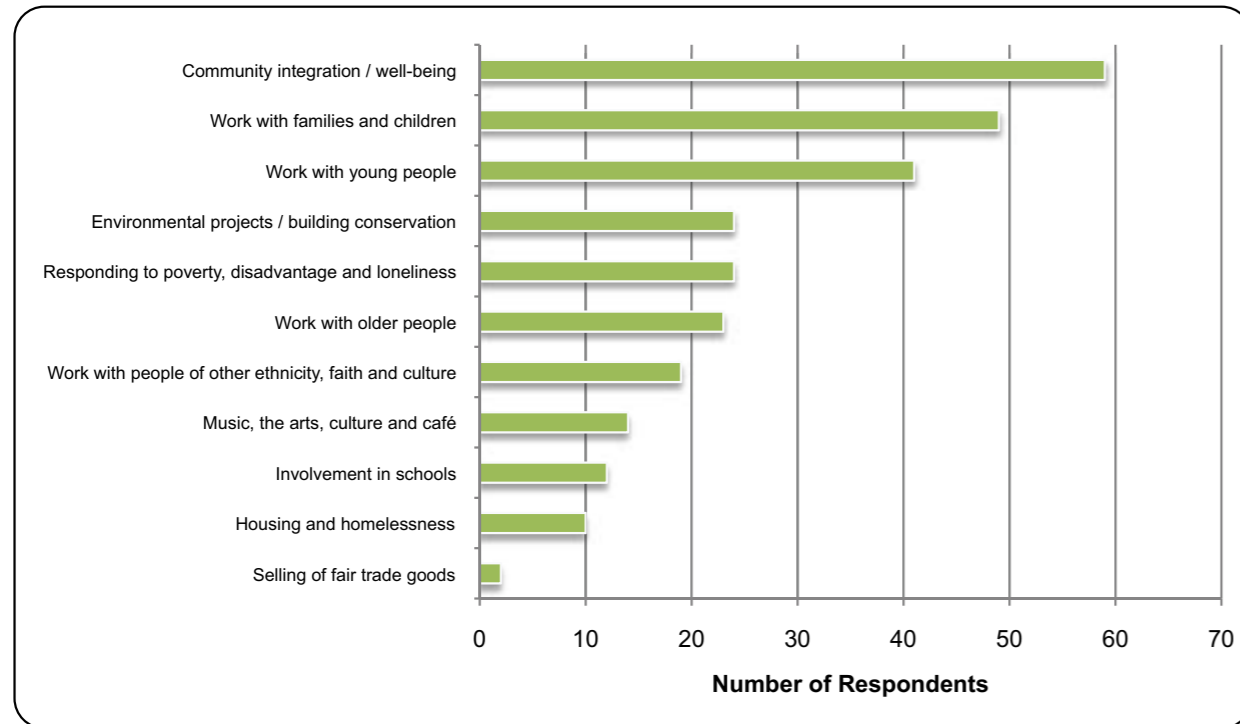


Figure 2.9 Activities that responding worshipping community would like to contribute to build better neighbourhoods in the future



The availability of affordable housing is a live issue nationally and especially within the South East region whilst work which builds bridges between people of different cultures and faiths is a core element of the prevailing community cohesion agenda. As such, it is surprising that whilst these issues are noted by responding communities they are not currently nearer the top of their lists of priorities for action. This perhaps points towards a socio-economic profile for responding worshipping communities that is skewed towards more wealthy socio-economic groups, and for which the affordability of housing is not a major concern. Lack of awareness and engagement with the cohesion agenda, which includes combating anti-social behaviour and work across generations as well as between people of different faiths and cultures, may reflect limited engagement in local policy delivery structures such as local strategic partnerships. These issues will be revisited later in this chapter when data relating to worshipping communities' work with external agencies is reviewed, as well as through qualitative case study research presented in Chapter Seven.

2.3 Who benefits from the activities of worshipping communities?

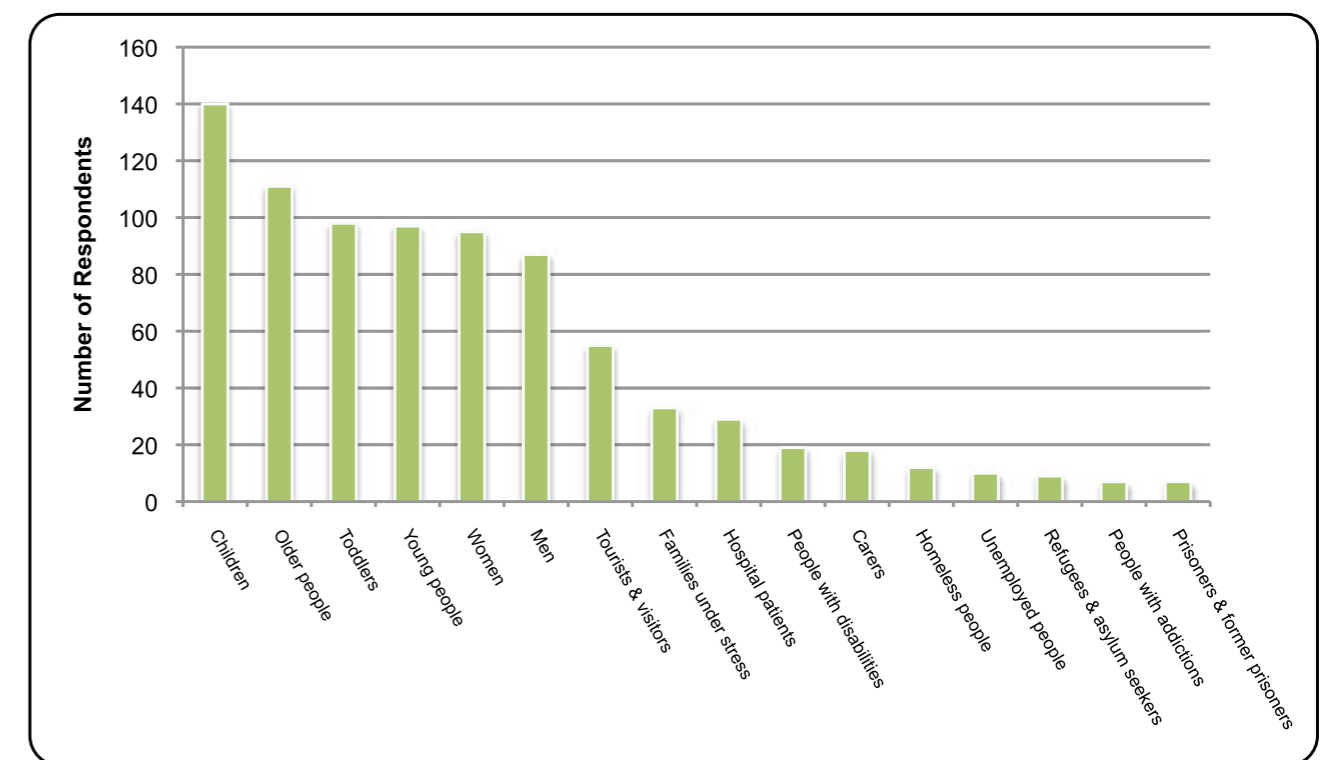
Data presented in Figure 2.10 shows clearly that toddlers, children, young people as well as older people are the principal groups targeted by the activities of worshipping communities, and such beneficiaries are consistent with the priorities of worshipping communities and their identification of needs noted earlier in this chapter. The prominence of these groups as the primary beneficiaries of worshipping community activities is consistent geographically, both across Oxfordshire's administrative divisions and different settlement types. A similarly even geographical picture is apparent for other beneficiaries illustrated in Figure 2.10, with a number of notable exceptions. Specifically, a number of categories of beneficiary are more significant in responses from worshipping communities in the City of Oxford than elsewhere in the wider County (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Beneficiaries with particular significance for worshipping communities in the City of Oxford

| | | Families under stress | People with disabilities | The homeless | Prisoners and former prisoners | People with addictions | Refugees and asylum seekers |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Responding worshipping communities targeting specific groups of beneficiaries | City of Oxford | 11 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| | Rest of Oxfordshire | 33 | 11 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 1 |

For most of these categories of beneficiary, it is clear that they relate to neighbourhood needs more often than not associated with urban communities (e.g. homelessness, refugees and asylum seekers), or reflect the fact that the needs are typically more concentrated or involve greater numbers of people in larger urban populations (e.g. people with disabilities, people with addictions). As such, the concentration of worshipping communities supporting these groups in Oxford itself is perhaps unsurprising.

Figure 2.10 Groups for whom responding worshipping communities run projects or activities



2.4 What resources do worshipping communities contribute to the task of building better neighbourhoods?

Worshipping communities in Oxfordshire dedicate an array of physical, emotional and spiritual resources to the task of building better neighbourhoods, including paid staff, volunteers, buildings and time. Figure 2.11 shows that responding worshipping communities employ a total of 232 full-time, 177 part-time and 48 sessional members of staff. Of these 56% are men and 44% are women. Based on estimated total annual employment costs for an average full-time and part-time worker of £30,000 and £10,000 respectively, the value of this investment in building better neighbourhoods is considerable at an excess of £8.5 million each year, the overwhelming majority of which is raised through voluntary giving.⁹ Moreover, this figure relates only to those worshipping communities that completed and returned a questionnaire as a part of this research and does not account for additional investment in employees made by other worshipping communities across the County.

The geographic distribution of these employees shows that by far the greatest overall concentration is in Oxford (186) followed by Cherwell (81), South Oxfordshire (74), Vale of the White Horse (62) and West Oxfordshire (54). However, when these data are set against the total number of responses for each district the picture which emerges is slightly different (Table 2.4). Whilst City of Oxford still exhibits the highest concentration of paid workers per respondent (4.4), Vale of the White Horse emerges as the district with the second greatest concentration (2.2) whilst West Oxfordshire remains in last place with 1.6 (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Average number of paid employees per responding worshipping community

| | Cherwell | City of Oxford | South Oxfordshire | Vale of the White Horse | West Oxfordshire |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Proportion of survey responses | 1.8 | 4.4 | 1.7 | 2.2 | 1.6 |

Types of paid worker employed include those concerned with meeting the spiritual and practical needs of the worshipping communities such as faith or worship leaders, caretakers and musicians, but also those with a wider remit which supports the community's efforts to build better neighbourhoods (Figure 2.12). Such paid employees comprise youth, community or pastoral workers and provide a professional resource which can support worshipping communities' diverse aspirations in building better neighbourhoods. In numeric terms, responses from worshipping communities indicate that Church of England employ 38 youth, community or pastoral workers, with other Christian denominations employing 18 and other faiths just one. However, when considered against the number of responses received from each of these broad faith groupings, the number of employees per respondent is substantially greater amongst other Christian denominations (0.43) than for Church of England worshipping communities (0.27).

⁹ Average employment costs reflect a broad range across different worshipping communities. Whilst it is recognised that for Church of England clergy employment costs will be higher than those suggested here, for many other worshipping communities, and other types of paid employee, costs will be considerably lower.

Figure 2.11 Full-time, part-time and sessional paid staff working on behalf of responding worshipping communities

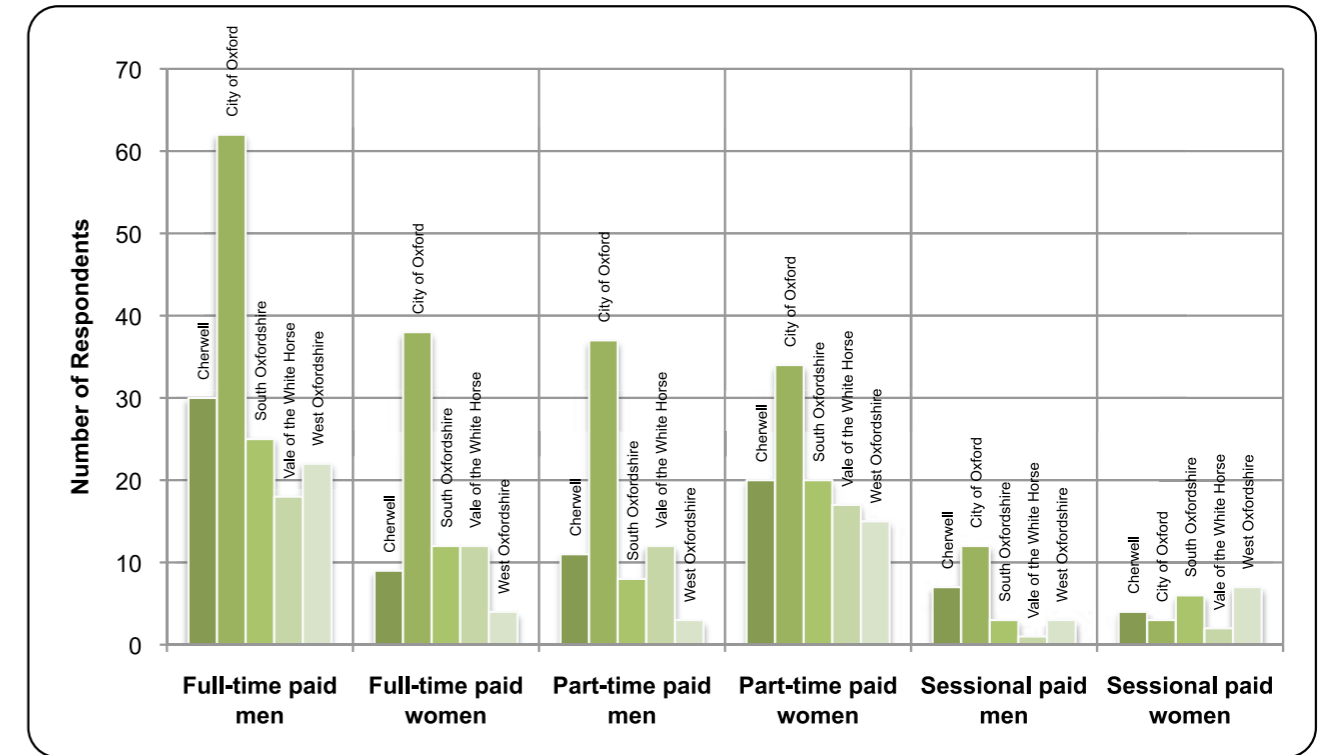
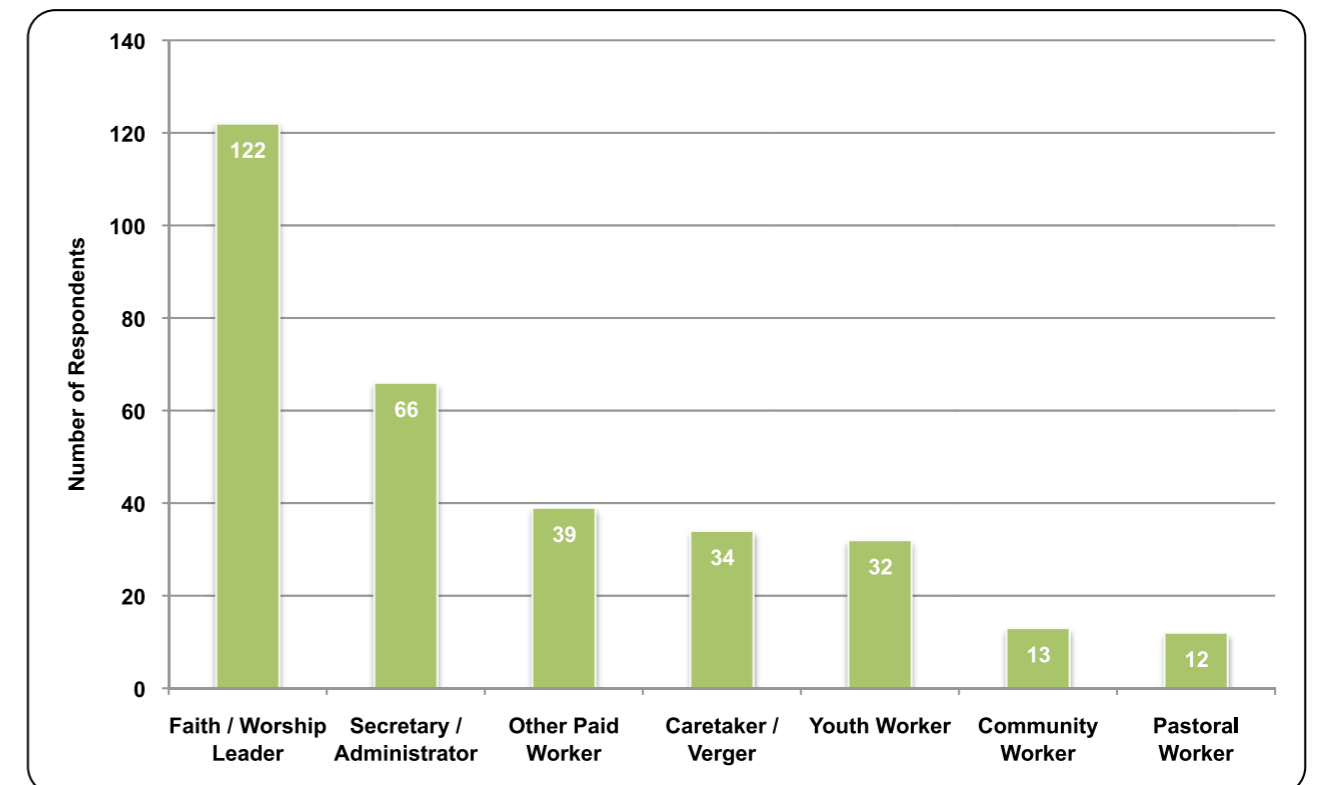


Figure 2.12 Types of paid workers identified by responding worshipping communities



In addition to paid employees, the findings show that overall, 12,406 volunteer hours are given every month by members of the responding worshipping communities in Oxfordshire. This amounts to nearly 150,000 hours every year. **Crucially this time relates only to outward facing voluntary activity and does not include the additional investment of time given by individual members in supporting the internal activities of their own worshipping community.** If these 150,000 hours were to be multiplied by the minimum wage rate of £5.80, the economic value of volunteering by the responding worshipping communities amounts to just over £70,000 a month, or £850,000 a year.

As the respondents to the questionnaire represent only a portion of all worshipping communities across Oxfordshire, it is possible to draw very tentative conclusions about what these findings may amount to if they were scaled up. This must be done with caution, as it is likely that the respondents are made up of the more active worshipping communities, and it would therefore not be appropriate to assume that the findings are representative or generalisable to all other communities in the County. Taking a conservative estimate, adding 30% onto these findings, volunteer hours by people from faith communities could be worth as much as £1.15 m a year to the County's economy. These findings are in line with those of similar studies that have found high levels of volunteering in faith-based work. Whilst levels of volunteering are spread across the County, the Vale of the White Horse has particularly high levels, almost twice that of South Oxfordshire (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.14 illustrates that the overwhelming majority (97%) of the worship venues used by Church of England communities are owned by the Church. Whilst a slightly higher proportion of groups from other Christian denominations hire their venue, over 80% own them. For other faith communities, there is a more even split, and a significantly lower proportion own their worship venue. The fact that such a high proportion of other faith groups and, to a lesser extent, other Christian denominations hire their venue rather than lease or own it is important to note. This may indicate that newer worshipping communities find it harder to access suitable venues of which they can take greater ownership. Alternatively, some of these groups may take a deliberate decision to hire their venue, as it could offer particular benefits such as freedom from the responsibility of maintenance, or ability to access good facilities such as toilets or kitchens.

¹⁰ Minimum wage for workers aged 22 and over [<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw>].

¹¹ See for example, HE Research (2009) Economic Impact Assessment of Faith Communities in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Figure 2.13 Total number of hours volunteered each month by members of responding worshipping communities

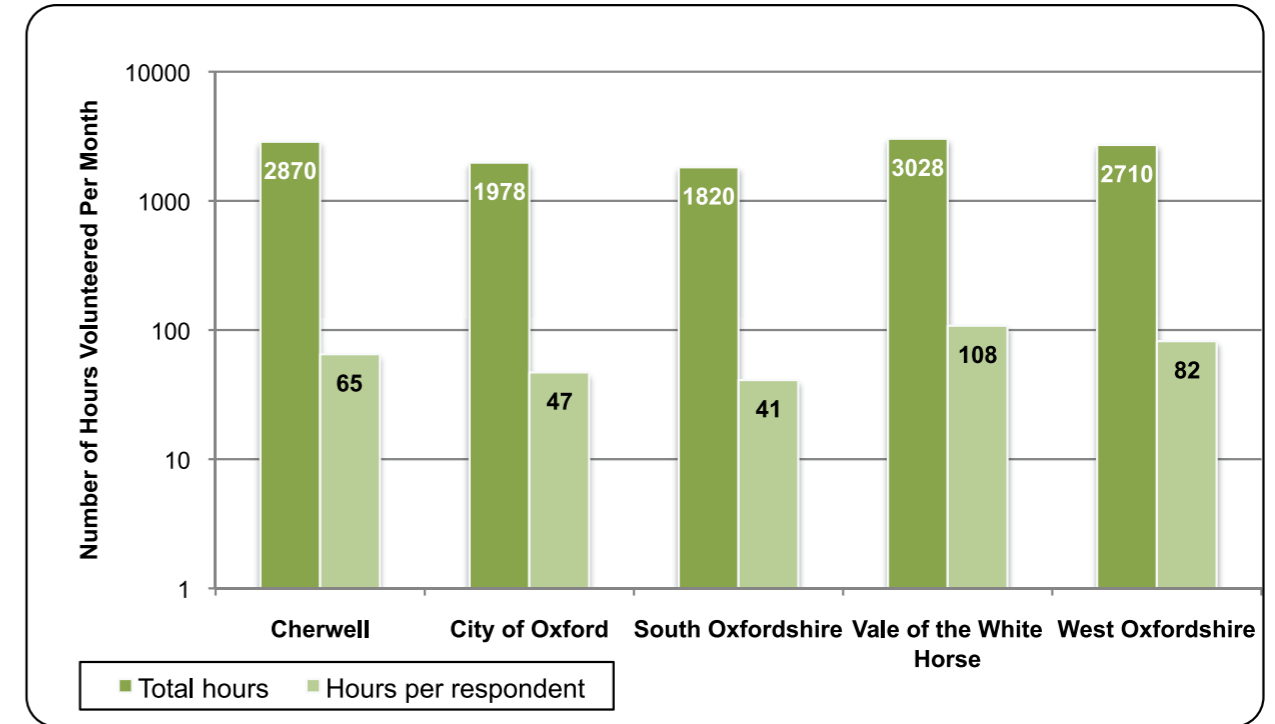
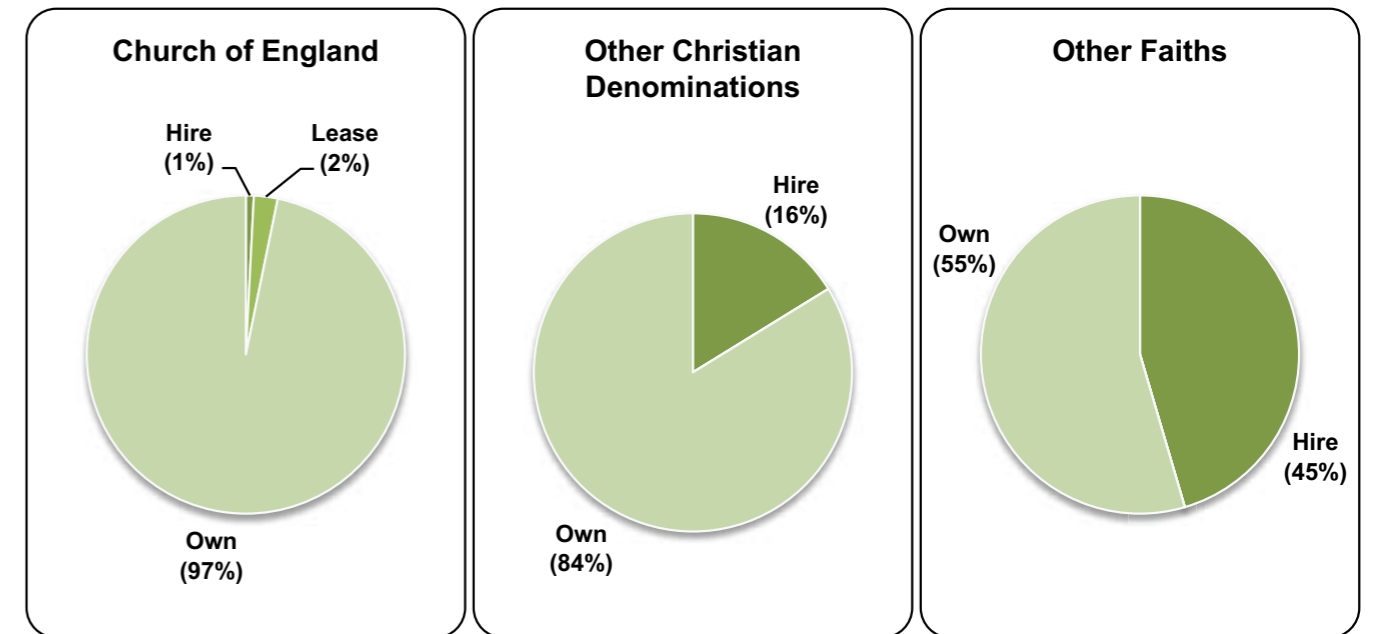


Figure 2.14 Tenure of worship venues amongst responding worshipping communities



Responding faith groups provide 254 rooms, including halls, for use by the worshipping community themselves and 221 rooms/halls for use by other groups (Figure 2.15). These figures indicate that worship venues are important community facilities. Of the rooms available for use by the worshipping community, nearly 90% are also available for use by other groups in the community. The geographic spread of these rooms is also significant; the least densely populated districts of Oxfordshire (West Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse) provide some of the highest numbers of rooms and halls for use by other groups, providing important facilities in Oxfordshire’s most rural communities. The rooms provided in the City of Oxford account for a third of the total number of rooms and halls available for use by other groups.

Figure 2.15 Numbers of rooms available in buildings used by responding worshipping communities

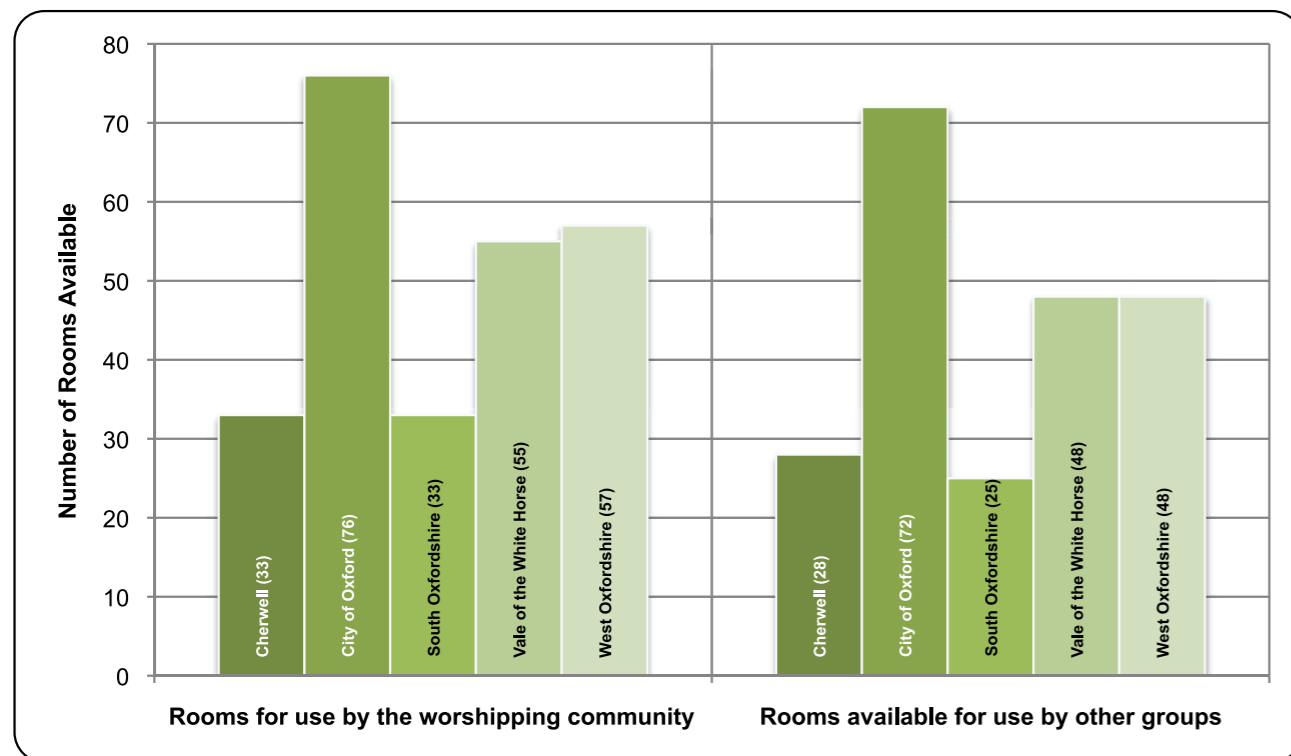
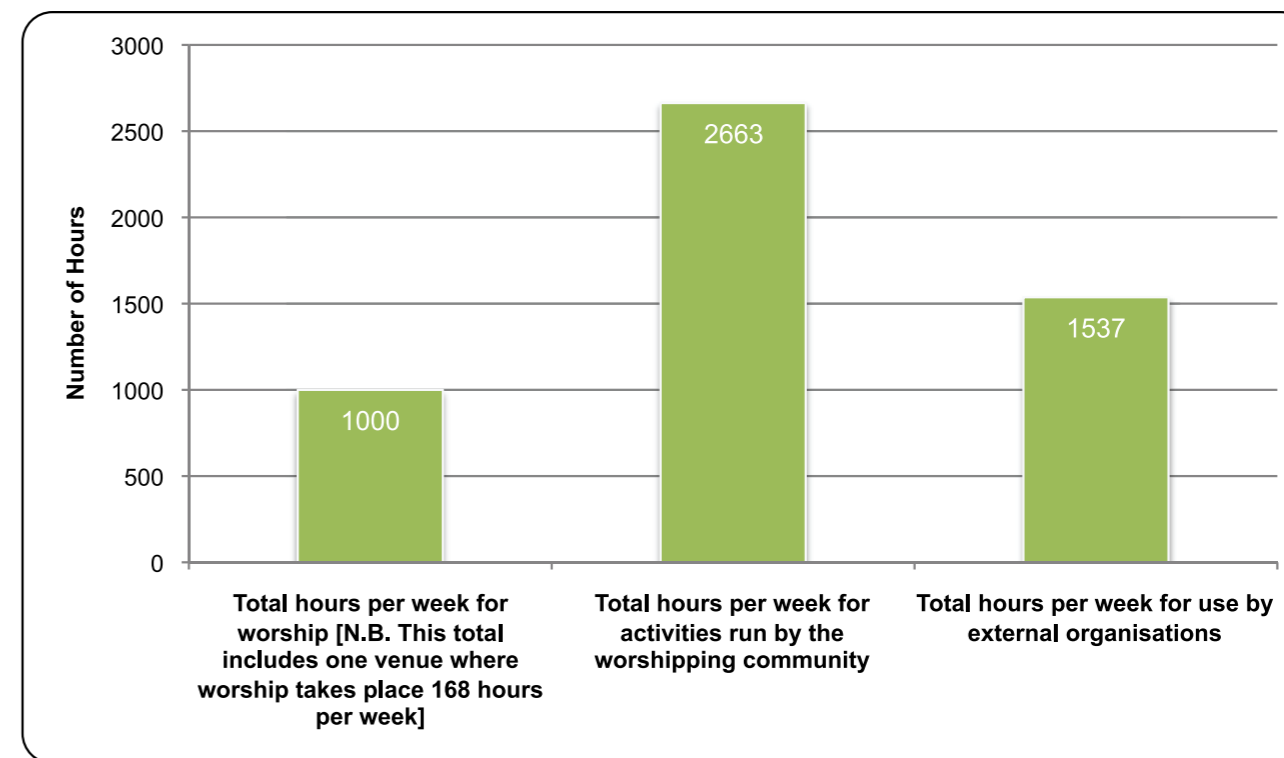


Figure 2.16 provides further evidence of the importance of worship venues as community facilities. Rooms operated by the responding worshipping communities have nearly 80,000 hours of use by external organisations each year. This level of use clearly indicates the importance of these facilities, which are utilised by a range of external organisations to provide community services, host groups and clubs, and other community activities. The fact that these rooms are used least for worship when compared to other activities highlights how worshipping communities maximise their facilities: for their own use and by others in the community.

The premises used by responding worshipping communities are generally considered adequate, with 81% adequate for worship, and 51% adequate for other activities. Across the different location categories, premises are more adequate for worship than they are for other activities. Urban areas, namely market towns and the City of Oxford, had the highest proportion of venues which were not adequate for worship. In each location category at least a quarter of premises were inadequate for other activities, and for those in the city it was as much as 73% of venues. Large villages have the highest proportion of venues which are adequate for other activities.

Figure 2.16 Total numbers of hours each week that rooms operated by responding worshipping communities are in use



The inadequacy of venues for worship is an issue which warrants further attention. Whilst Figure 2.17 highlights geographic disparities, other data gathered through the questionnaire highlight that a disproportionate number of other faith groups use premises which are inadequate for worship: 50% compared with 14% of Church of England and 15% of other Christian denominations. These results could be associated with those presented in Figure 2.14 which showed that 42% of other faith communities hire their worship venue, indicating that perhaps not only do these faith communities have difficulty finding venues of which they can take ownership, but that they also struggle to find venues which are adequate for their needs.

Data presented in Figure 2.18 illustrate that a significant proportion (nearly 40%) of worship venues have green space associated with them, even in city locations. Over 90% of places of worship in small and large villages have green space, 31% of those in suburbs and 24% in market towns. Of those that have green space, almost a third (29%) actively utilise it for environmental projects. Places of worship in large villages are most often used for environmental initiatives, 1.5 times more than in small villages and 2.5 times more than in market towns. These results are significant given current policy priorities in Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire 2030 Partnership Plan identifies the environment and climate change as a key priority, with ‘preserving and enhancing the character of our city, our market towns and villages’ and ‘enhancing the quality of the natural environment’ as key issues to be addressed.¹² The fact that a significant number of faith communities are addressing these issues indicates that they are already making important contributions to this policy agenda.

Figure 2.17 Adequacy of premises used by responding worshipping communities

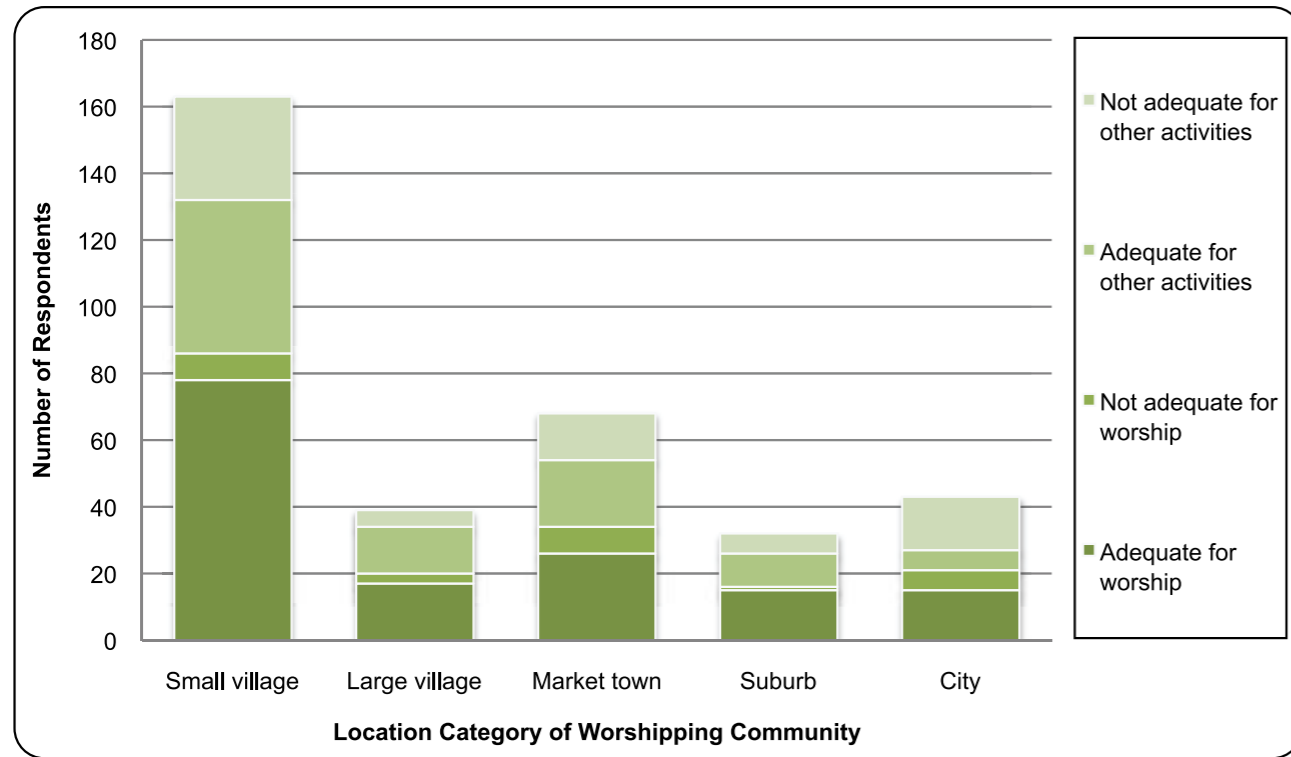
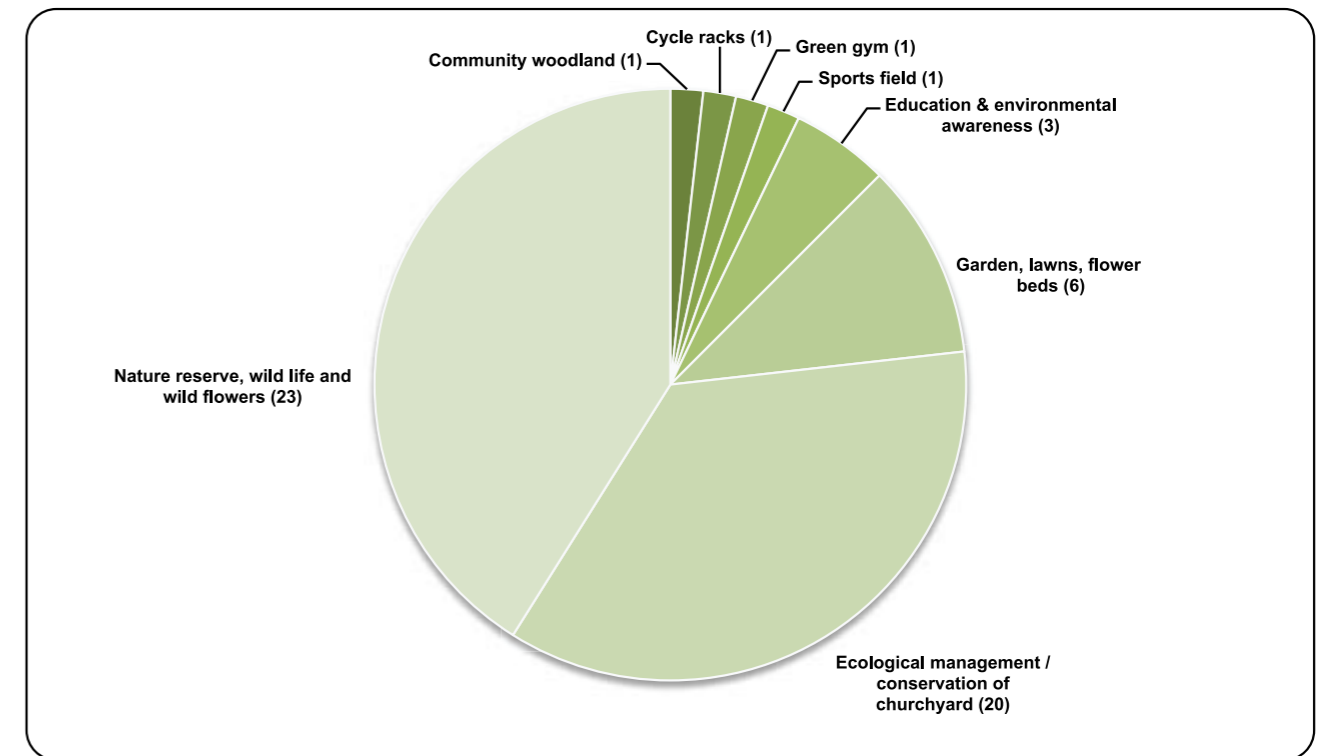


Figure 2.18 Green space associated with the place of worship used by responding worshipping communities



The various environmental projects that worshipping communities are undertaking in Oxfordshire are illustrated in Figure 2.19. Eighty percent of the activity is accounted for through initiatives around: managing a nature reserve, wildlife and wild flowers; the ecological management or conservation of a churchyard; or tending to a garden, lawns or flower beds. These activities relate directly to the Oxfordshire Partnership’s priority for the enhancement of the quality of Oxfordshire’s natural environment. There are also a number of projects dedicated to education and environmental awareness, indicating that faith communities are playing a role in raising awareness and educating people in the County about environmental issues. There are small numbers of other projects such as a Green Gym, a sports field and the provision of cycle racks which indicate that worshipping communities are providing ‘green’ facilities for the wider community, potentially contributing to other policy agendas such as promoting healthy lifestyles and green transport.¹³

Figure 2.19 Types of green space use or environmental project undertaken by responding worshipping communities

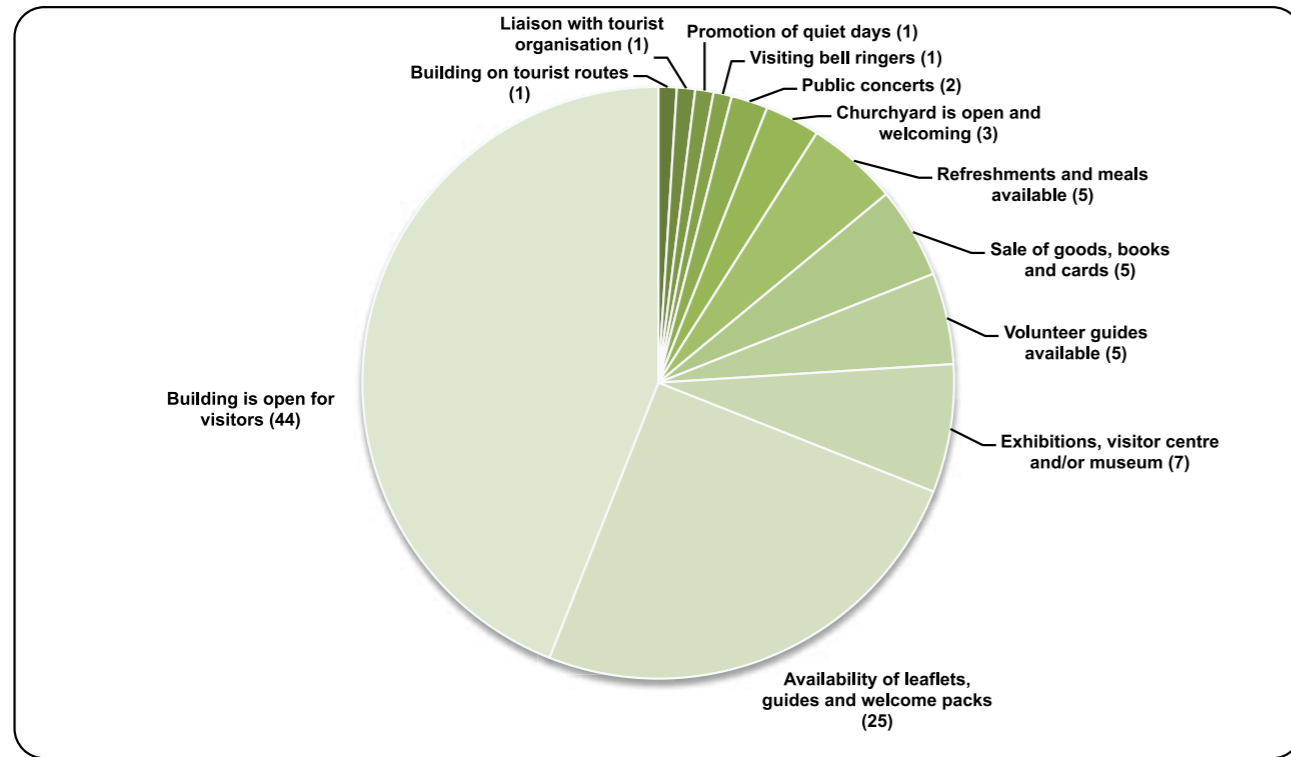


The results of the questionnaire found that places of worship were frequently identified as visitor attractions (Figure 2.20). The types of attractions different worshipping communities felt their worship venue had to offer varied, although the most frequent response was that the building is open for visitors. Many respondents noted that they offered visitors additional services: providing leaflets, guides and welcome packs; selling refreshments or meals; selling goods, books and cards; making volunteer guides available; or having exhibitions, a visitors centre or museum.

¹² Oxfordshire Partnership, Oxfordshire 2030: A partnership plan for improving quality of life in Oxfordshire [available at: <http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/oxfordshirepartnership/oxfordshire2030/2030reportFINAL.pdf>].

¹³ Ibid - See ‘Healthy and Thriving Communities’ and ‘Environment and climate change’ priorities.

Figure 2.20 Types of tourist or visitor attraction identified by responding worshipping communities



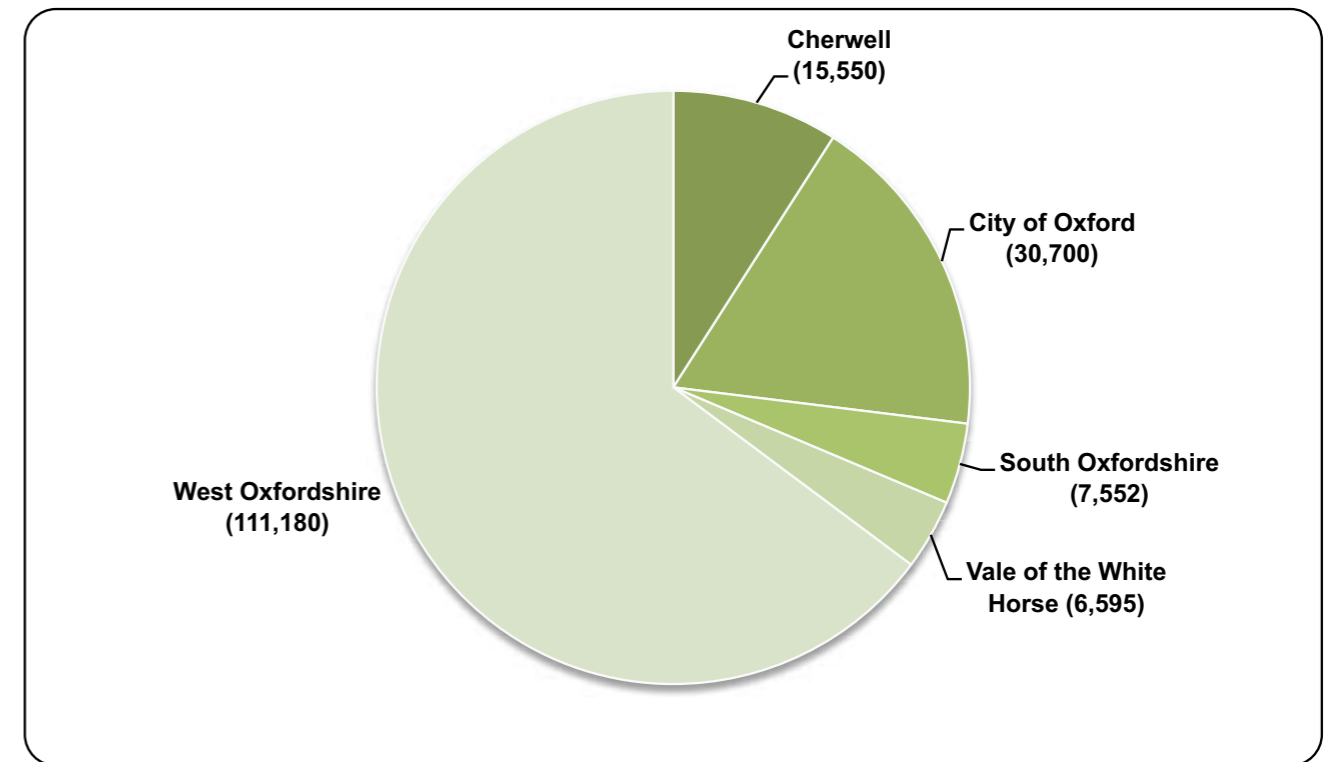
These findings are supported by reports of visitor numbers, which total almost 180,000 a year. Figure 2.21 presents these visitor numbers according to districts in the County, with 65% of visitors recorded in West Oxfordshire. Places of worship in the more rural areas of the County, notably South Oxfordshire, the Vale of the White Horse, and West Oxfordshire account for nearly three quarters of all visitors, indicating that places of worship may be particularly important to the tourist economy in rural Oxfordshire. These findings relate to the fact that these districts are located (or partially located) within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the Cotswolds; the Chilterns; and the North Wessex Downs.

Other similar studies have tried to quantify visitor numbers in terms of their economic value. A study in Yorkshire and the Humber calculated this value on the basis of each visitor to a faith site spending between £10 and £12.¹⁴ If this were true for visits recorded by responding worshipping communities in Oxfordshire, this faith-based tourism would generate around £1.7 million pounds for the County's economy every year.¹⁵ In order to gain an idea of what these findings might mean for all worshipping communities in the County, a conservative estimate would be to add a further 30% onto these figures. This would mean that faith-based tourism could contribute as much as £2.27m to the Oxfordshire economy every year, and possibly more.

¹⁴ 'Welcome to Yorkshire (formerly Yorkshire Tourist Board) estimates £36/individual for a full day's outing – assuming around a third of this for a faith site visit.' HE Research (2009) Economic Impact Assessment of Faith Communities in Yorkshire and the Humber (p. 35).

¹⁵ Based on £10 expenditure.

Figure 2.21 Numbers of visitors received annually at the places of worship used by responding worshipping communities



2.5 How do worshipping communities contribute to local partnerships?

Two thirds of respondents have worked with other worshipping communities from within their faith tradition, and 20% have worked with others of different faith (Figure 2.22). These results show high levels of joint working within faith traditions, particularly in the more rural districts of West Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse, but also in the City of Oxford. The relatively small percentage of respondents working with communities outside their own faith traditions almost certainly reflects population trends. Those districts with the highest levels of inter-faith working are the City of Oxford and Cherwell. Importantly, these districts demonstrate the highest levels of diversity in the County, and as such, it is perhaps not surprising that the levels of inter-faith working elsewhere are lower. Some of this intra- and inter-faith work may be facilitated by partnerships or organisations in the County (such as Churches Together in Oxfordshire, or the Oxford Council of Faiths) which support such joint working.

Figure 2.22 Numbers of respondents that have worked with other worshipping communities of both the same and of different faith traditions

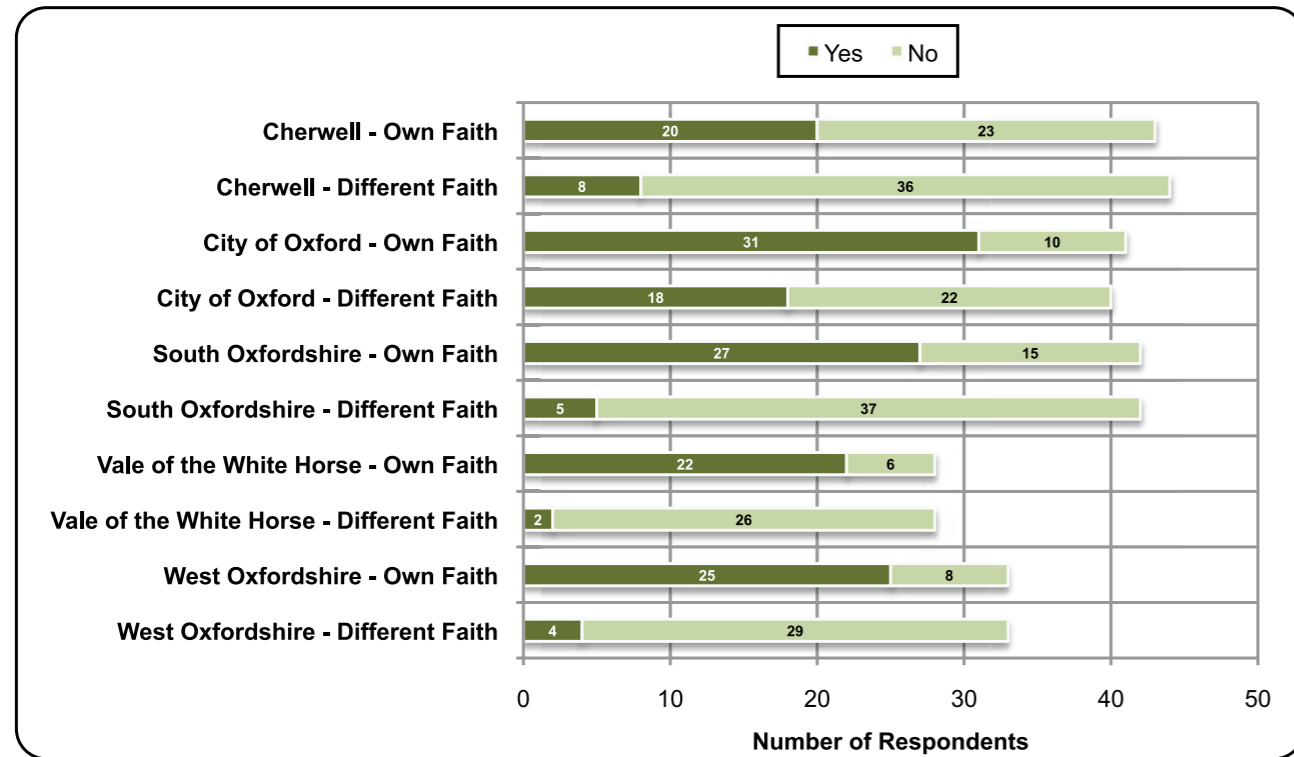
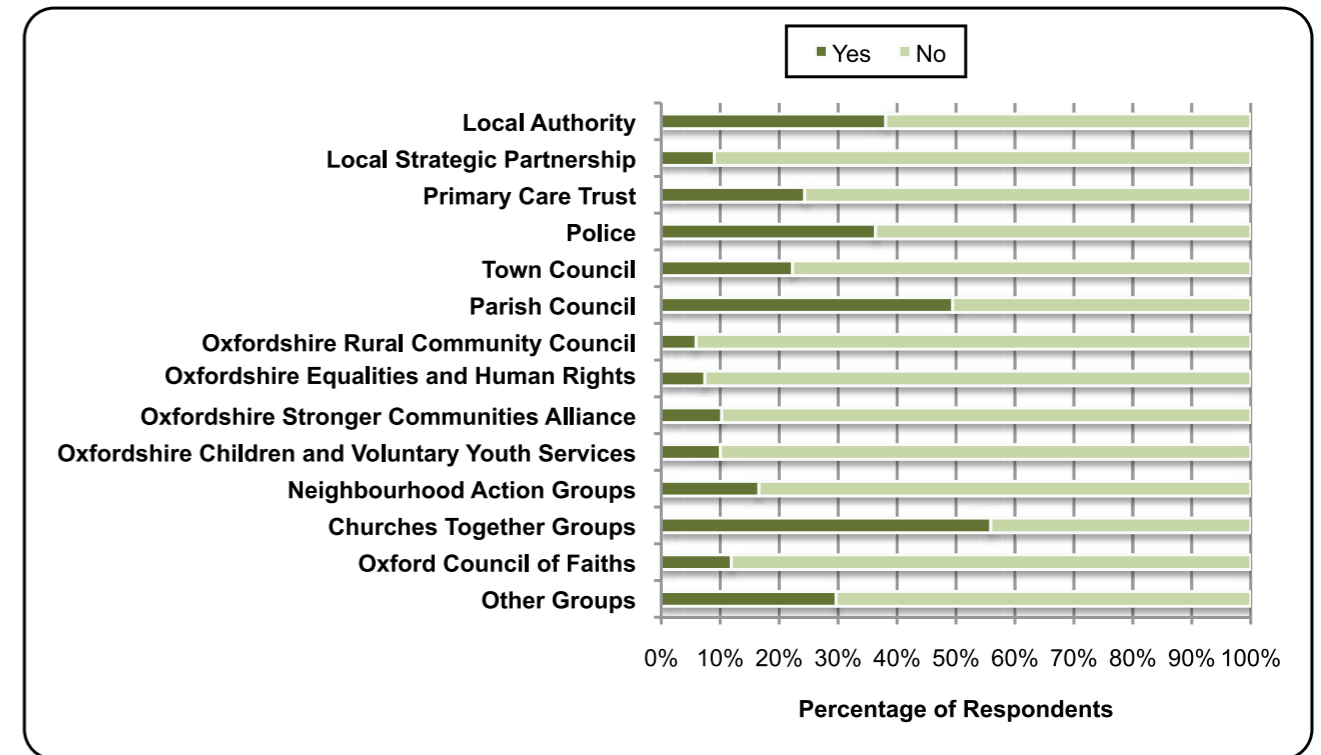


Figure 2.23 Numbers of respondents that have worked with other outside organisations

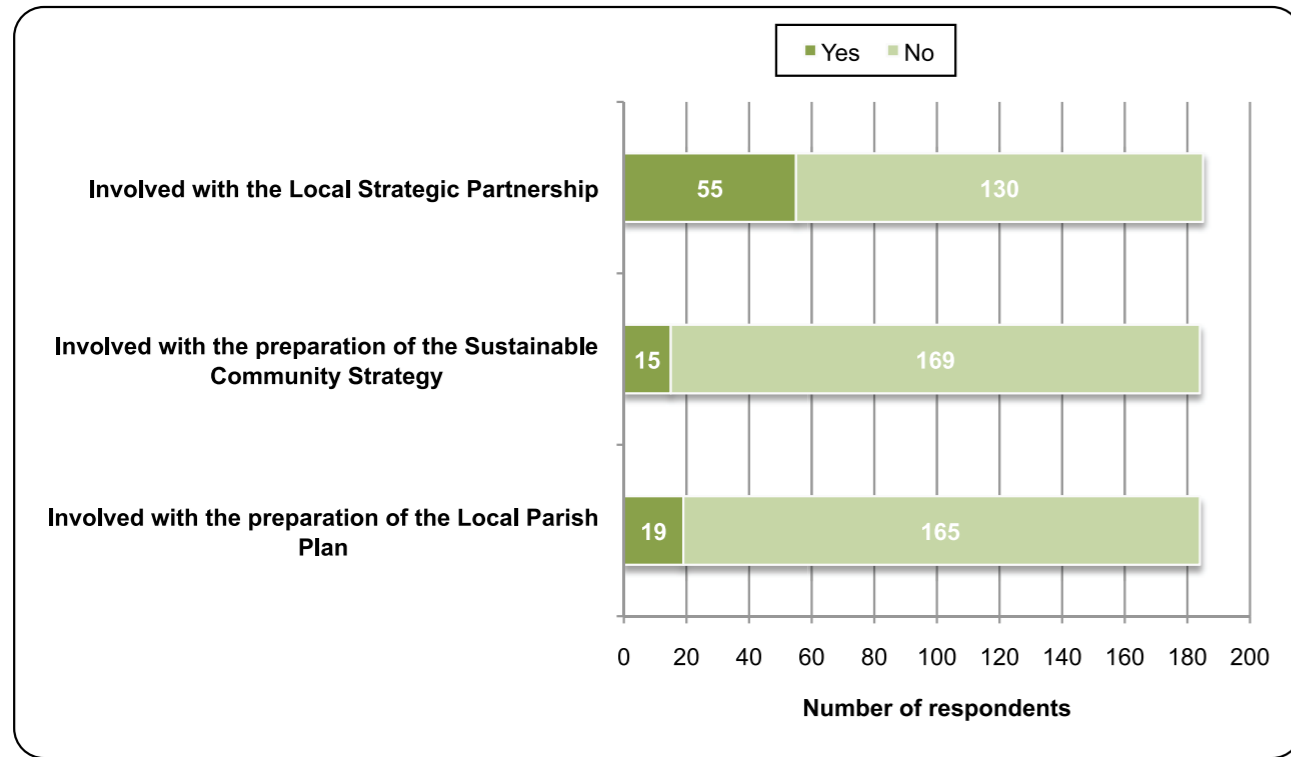


Other groups with which responding worshipping communities have worked are illustrated in Figure 2.23. Of those identified, the largest proportion have worked with Churches Together groups. A significant proportion of respondents have worked with their local parish council (around 49%) or local authority (around 38%). The police are the next most worked with organisation. Importantly, these data show that a considerable proportion (over 20%) of respondents have worked with each of the major service providers in their local area: the local authority; parish and town councils; primary care trust; and the police. Levels of engagement with other organisations are lower, although in some cases this may simply reflect issues of capacity (to engage and be engaged) on the part of both specific organisations and individual worshipping communities.

Respondents were also asked about the benefits that their worshipping communities gain from working with other organisations. Key benefits gained from working with a local authority or parish council included wider community awareness and involvement as well as funding opportunities. When working with the police, respondents identified that having good relations, support, assistance and joint working were benefits that they received. An important benefit of working with a local primary care trust was supporting the wider community. People who undertook inter-church working felt that sharing resources, working together, good relations, and friendships were important benefits. Despite these positive statements, worshipping communities also identified a number of barriers to working with external agencies. Principal amongst these were a lack of time and resources on the part of worshipping communities themselves. Also of note, however, is the perception that engaging with public agencies can be bureaucratic and sometimes tinged with mutual suspicion.

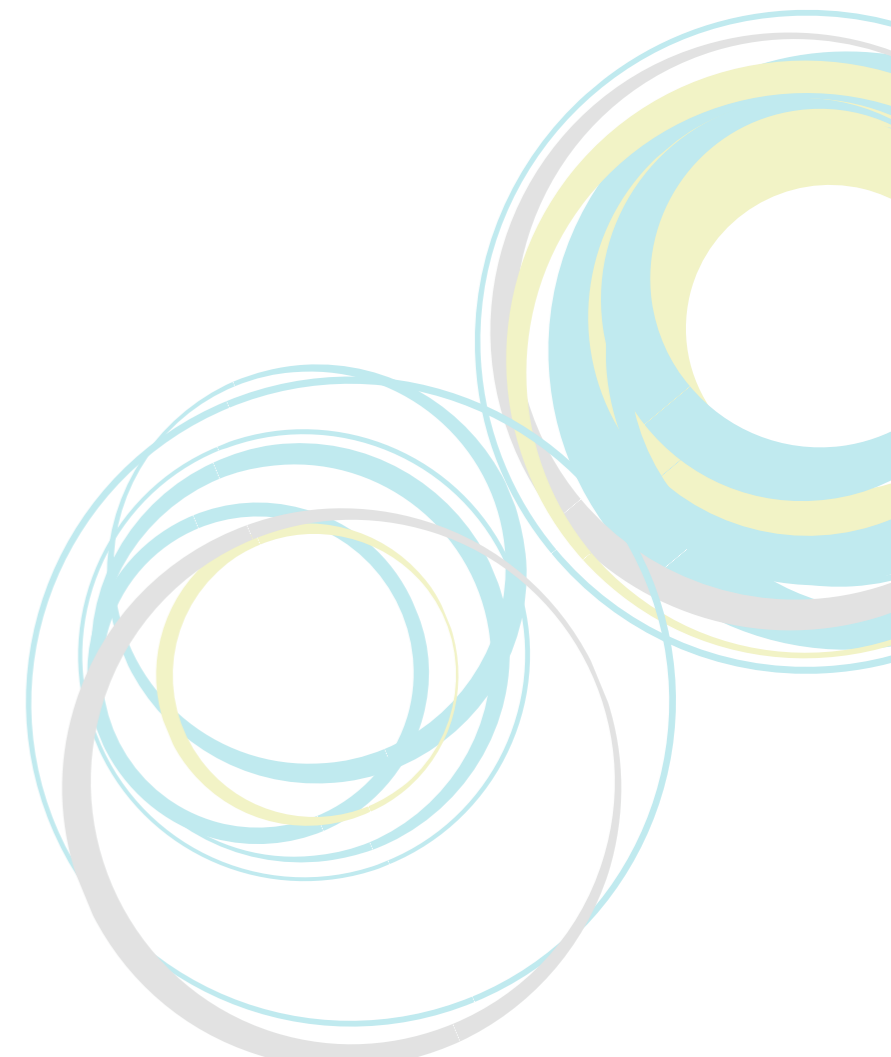
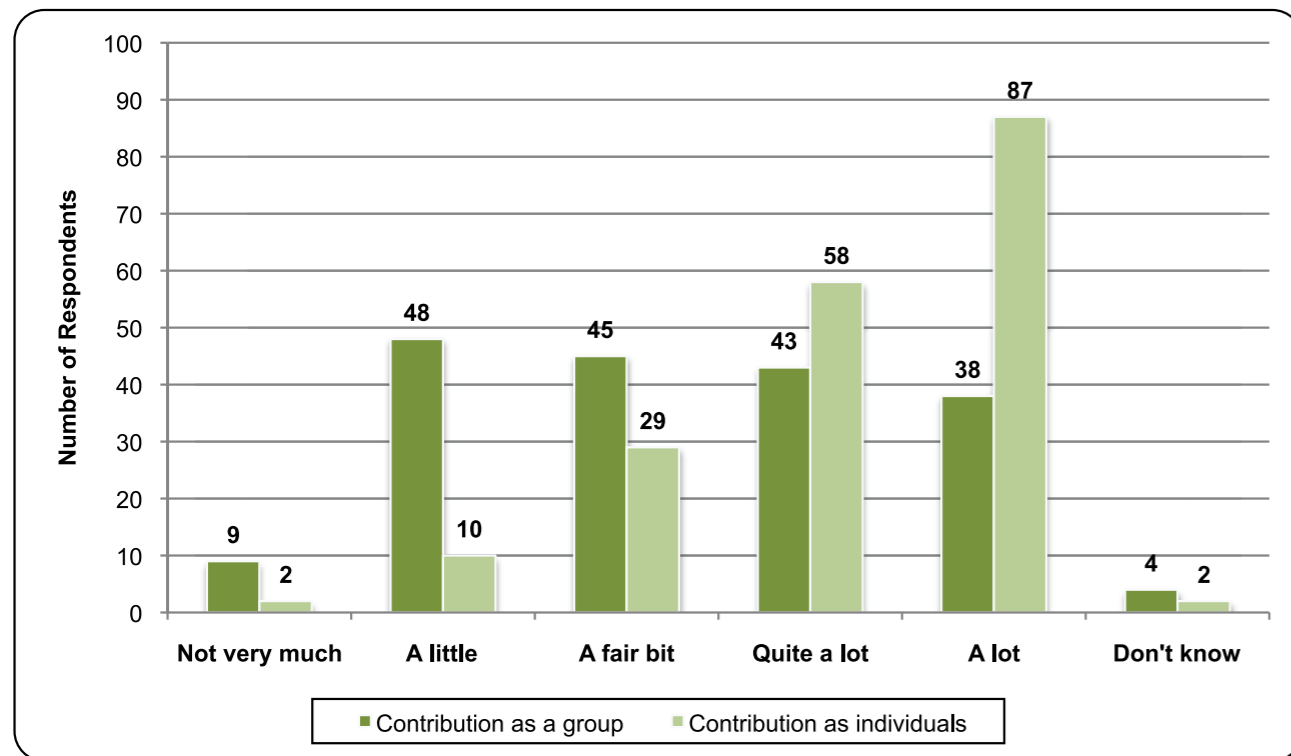
Whilst Figure 2.23 illustrates that many worshipping communities are working with external organisations, partnerships and agencies, the level of engagement with Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Alliance suggests that worshipping communities are not well linked into wider voluntary or third sector support arrangements. In addition, data presented in Figure 2.24 suggests that participation in formalised local governance activities is relatively low. Whilst a third of respondents had been involved in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), 10% or less had been involved with the preparation of the local Sustainable Community Strategy or their local Parish Plan. Whilst these findings indicate a challenge for partnership working, discrepancies between Figure 2.23 and 2.24 in terms of the level of engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships reported by respondents, suggests that part of the challenge lies in addressing confusion and misunderstanding.

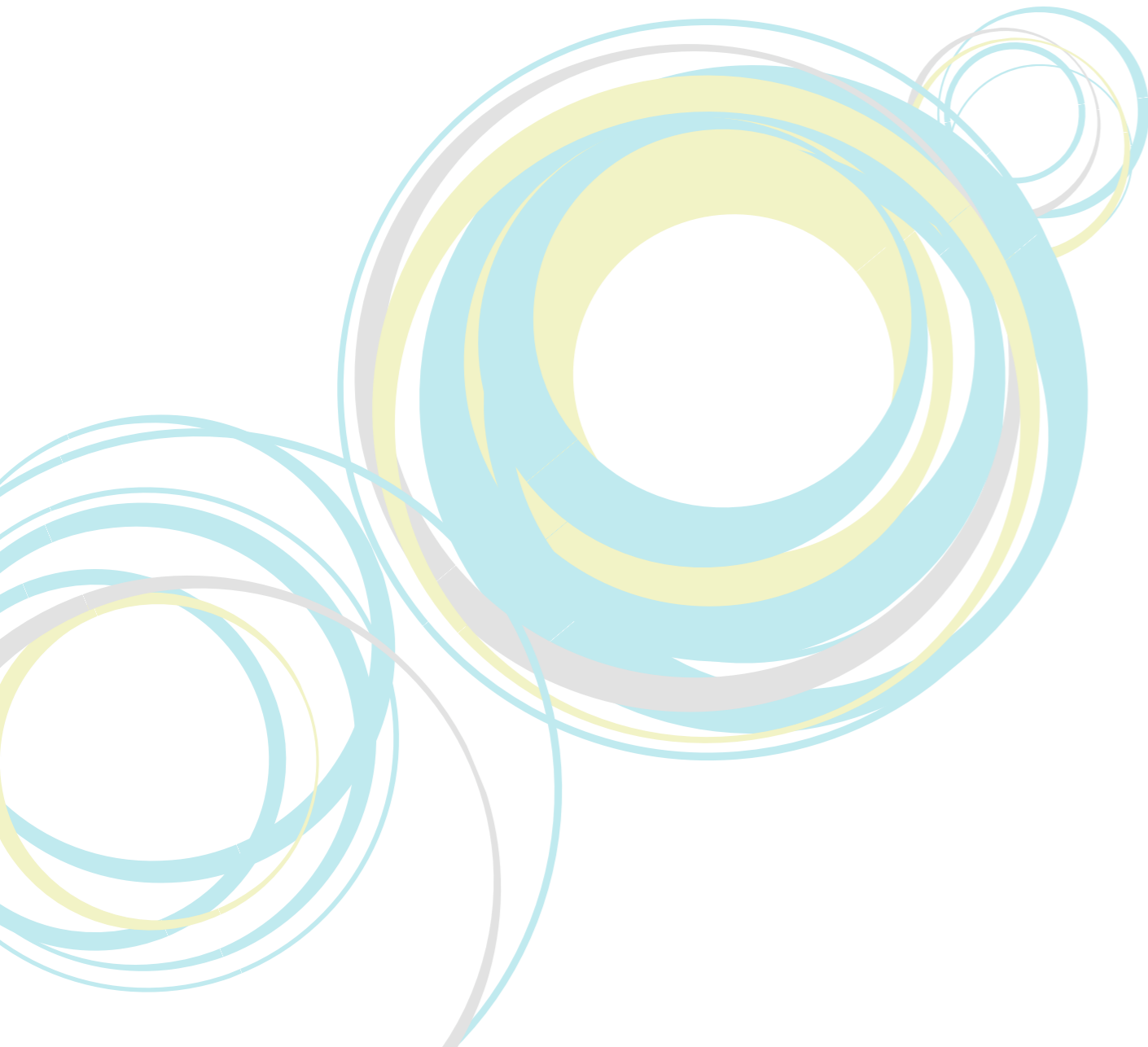
Figure 2.24 Participation of responding worshipping communities in local governance activities



When asked about their contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire, 67% of respondents felt that, as a group, their worshipping community made a significant contribution (assessed as 'a fair bit', 'quite a lot', or 'a lot'). Even more, 93% felt that members of their group made significant contributions as individuals in their everyday lives (Figure 2.25). Within these headline figures, 45% of Church of England respondents and 51% from other Christian denominations assessed their contribution as a group to be 'quite a lot' or 'a lot'. Whilst none of the respondents from other faiths regarded their contribution as a group in this way, assessed at the individual level, a third of respondents from other faiths reported that members of their worshipping community made 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of a contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. For Church of England respondents this was 81%, and for other Christian denominations 78%.

Figure 2.25 Responding worshipping communities assessment of their contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire





3.0 Geography

This is the first of five chapters (Three to Seven) which report qualitative case study research. These chapters build upon the findings of the questionnaire survey reported in Chapter Two and focus on five cross-cutting issues. These issues highlight areas of significance for worshipping communities in Oxfordshire and correspond to important national and local policy agendas relating to Building Better Neighbourhoods. First, this chapter deals with issues of geography, specifically the contributions which Oxfordshire's worshipping communities make to building better neighbourhoods in different types of place (i.e. small villages, market towns, and the city); **Chapter Four** explores the volunteering by individual members of worshipping communities; **Chapter Five** looks at the work of independent or semi-independent faith-based organisations established by Oxfordshire's worshipping communities; **Chapter Six** considers the role which is played in supporting people of different faiths, cultures or age groups in getting along together; and **Chapter Seven** investigates the nature of relationships between worshipping communities and the public sector, from the perspective of key public sector agencies and organisations in Oxfordshire.

In each of these five chapters the findings presented are based upon in-depth face to face interviews conducted with key stakeholders between November 2009 and February 2010. The names of those individuals who have contributed to the research in this way are amongst those acknowledged in Appendix Two.

3.1 Worshipping communities and their place in the local community

At the heart of worshipping communities' work to achieve change and development in their neighbourhoods is a unique 'faith-based view of communities which values and dignifies all people.'¹⁶ Activities which represent the outworking of this ethos vary widely but, according to Farnell¹⁷, may be conceptualised as an idealised fivefold typology. This typology contends that the growth and development of faith-based activity geared towards building better neighbourhoods may be classified as follows:

- i. Networks of informal, often interpersonal, mutual aid and support within worshipping groups
- ii. Welfare services for faith group members
- iii. Provision of these services to others in the local neighbourhood, often in response to perceived need
- iv. Local partnerships created to maintain or extend service provision, enabling public funds to be accessed and staff to be employed
- v. Growing awareness of the deep-seated issues faced by local people leading to activities that address matters of power and politics including, for example, through campaigning

The provision of services across the spectrum of activities within this typology will vary according to local identified needs, but also according to the positionality of individual worshipping communities and perceptions of their place within wider neighbourhood communities. The effect of location or geography upon the historic relationship between faith communities and the wider community is potentially significant and an important determinant of the kind of contributions that are made towards the task of building better neighbourhoods. In the context of Oxfordshire, this set of issues will now be explored in more detail through three place-based case studies each of which will characterise worshipping communities' perceptions of need in their neighbourhoods, their activities and aspirations for the future, and their formal contribution to local and national policy agendas. These case studies are: first, **Great Tew**, a small village in the Cotswold area of north west Oxfordshire; second, **Abingdon**, a market town to the south west of Oxford; and third, **East Oxford**, a diverse urban area of the City of Oxford focusing upon the Cowley Road.

¹⁶ Finneron, D., Green, L., Harley, S. and Robertson, J. (2001) Challenging Communities: Church related community development and neighbourhood renewal. London: Church Urban Fund and Churches Community Work Alliance.

¹⁷ Farnell, R. (2001) Faith communities, regeneration and social exclusion: developing a research agenda. Community Development Journal 36(4), 263-272.

3.2 Great Tew

Great Tew is an ancient Oxfordshire village with a population of approximately 140 people. Located five miles east of Chipping Norton and overlooking the Worton Valley, much of the property within the village is of ironstone and thatch and up to 70% of it remains in the control of the Great Tew Estate. Over recent years some cottages have been sold to fund the repair or restoration of others and this has had a direct impact on the socio-economic profile of the village, which is now characterised by a minority agricultural population (around 40% of residents) and a majority of new wealthier residents who typically commute out to jobs in academia, the media, the arts or publishing, either in Oxford or London.

The sole worshipping community in Great Tew is focused upon the local Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels which attracts between 25 and 30 worshippers to its principal Sunday morning service, although a number of these attendees are drawn from surrounding villages and parishes, with people attracted to the Church in Great Tew by the traditional approach which is taken to worship. In common with many other small rural settlements in England, the Church in Great Tew is viewed as 'a sort of glue', with people who are involved in the Church typically involved in or leading many other aspects of village or community life as well. In this way the boundaries between worshipping communities and village communities are blurred, often to the extent that they are not perceived at all by local populations.

However, it is also clear that for some people engagement with faith provides an important driver to take on wider responsibilities in village life. This faith motivation was neatly summed up by the parish vicar who stated that: 'I hope it [the church] motivates people and gives them clear ideas and purpose for why they do what they do.'

“As they often are in small places I think, that's my experience, that the movers and shakers in the village are the movers and shakers in the Church.”

Community needs in Great Tew are for the most part concerned with the needs of elderly residents who, once they are unable to drive, would be left isolated and alone without support from either the local worshipping community or village community in general. In this sense the worshipping community provides informal pastoral care as a matter of routine. This is not formalised in any way but regarded as a natural part of village life, and often draws upon the skills and experiences which residents bring from their professional lives, either past or present: 'There are sort of key people as I think there probably are in every situation like this, retired nurses and people like that, who will come and tell you about people, what's happening in their lives and so on.'

“People look after each other and ... my feeling is it's the situation that does that to people. You've got to do it, we're all in this boat together. It's a sort of fellowship of adversity in a sense.”

The social and professional connections of residents, particularly new residents, are also brought to bear through governance positions within the village and through the development of community projects such as the recent development of a joint community centre with neighbouring Little Tew. A by-product of this connectedness and latent professional capacity within the village is that relationships between the worshipping community and external organisations and agencies tend to be initiated by the worshipping community itself and are often dependent upon key individuals. In this sense relationships are largely ad hoc and focused upon specific activities or needs at any one point in time, rather than those which are established, enduring and geared towards fostering and supporting the contribution that the worshipping community makes to policy agendas pursued through formal structures such as the local strategic partnership.

The picture of the worshipping community in Great Tew presented above relates to the first three categories in Farnell's typology of faith group activities, in that informal mutual support and welfare services are provided both within the worshipping group and to others in the local neighbourhood. The informality of much of this activity is characteristic of small village locations elsewhere in the country, many of which are more dependent on the Church as a physical location for meetings than Great Tew owing to the absence of other community facilities.¹⁸ This suggests that the true value of worshipping community contributions to building better neighbourhoods in such places is neither fully recognised in, nor supported through, local policy agendas and structures.

¹⁸ Farnell, R., Hopkinson, J., Jarvis, D., Martineau, J. and Ricketts Hein, J. (2006) Faith in Rural Communities: Contributions of social capital to community vibrancy. Coventry: ACORA.

3.3 Abingdon

The second of the three case study locations is the market town of Abingdon. Situated approximately five miles south west of Oxford City Centre, Abingdon is a town of some 32,000 people and the seat of Vale of White Horse District Council. Historically, Abingdon was home to MG cars (1929–1980) and the Morland Brewery. Today Abingdon is close to several major scientific employers including the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Culham, Harwell Laboratory and the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, and many inhabitants work either in these facilities or commute to Oxford or by rail from nearby Didcot to London. In addition, the British Army occupies nearby Dalton Barracks, which, prior to 1993, was the Royal Air Force station, RAF Abingdon.

A number of formally constituted worshipping communities are to be found in Abingdon, with representation from most Christian denominations. Fourteen of these communities come together in an ecumenical group called the Church in Abingdon. The complexity of needs identified by these worshipping communities are reflective of a larger population size when compared to Great Tew, with most particular to small areas or estates, or to quite small pockets or groups of people within the town. Principal amongst these needs are: issues of loneliness or depression amongst the elderly; exclusion and disadvantage, particularly related to young single parents; and education and activities for children and young people. In addition to the above issues, which are associated with groups often described as vulnerable, one interviewee suggested that a particular need within Abingdon related to professional women who have given up careers in Oxford or London to start families. Such individuals can suffer emotionally as a result of perceived loss of status and through feeling cut off from former professional networks, and worshipping communities have identified a need in helping those affected in this way by recognising their professional status and in helping them to adjust to a different way of life. The range of different needs identified demonstrates the significance of local knowledge within worshipping communities and, as a result of this sensitivity to local needs, their ability to support individuals or communities typically over-looked or excluded from statutory or mainstream provision.

“The other thing that quite obviously serves the community is two toddler groups ... where the community comes into the building. And in coming into the building quite often they don't even realise that it's a church.”



Whilst the boundaries between church life and community life are more clearly perceived by faith groups in Abingdon than in the foregoing Great Tew case study, the origins of work undertaken by worshipping communities in support of their local neighbourhoods may still not be recognised by beneficiaries as originating from the faith sector. This is typified by the following quote from one interviewee who indicated that users of toddlers groups: ‘... come into the building. And in coming into the building quite often they don’t even realise that it’s a church.’ The way in which needs are identified and addressed is also different in a market town setting. Whilst instances of needs being identified and addressed in an informal ‘organic’ manner are numerous, with individual worshippers applying their professional skills and experience to the problems that they encounter, there is also evidence of formalised needs analysis and delivery through new and existing partnership structures. This includes partnerships between individual worshipping communities and with other statutory agencies, including social services and local schools.

This more formal activity is also often supported through paid employees such as youth and community workers who professionalise the services provided to the community and also help to facilitate incidental linkages which connect people to other sources of external support available in a joined-up manner. This is exemplified by the comments of one interviewee:

‘... as soon as we started to do this work, we actually found ourselves making cross links. Which is we’d find one group and they’d say, “well this is what we really need”, and we’d say “OK we’ll note that”, and then a short while later somebody else, “this is the kind of thing that we’re provisioning but we can’t find anybody that needs it”. And I think that [helping to identify incidental linkages] is one of the most productive things that we’ve done.’

A further consequence of the formalisation of worshipping community activities in this way is that it can lead to greater awareness of and engagement with local policy agendas than is the case in more rural small village settings such as Great Tew. This is apparent, for example, in roles of various worshipping communities in initiating a Town Centre Chaplaincy, and ongoing work with the police to establish a Street Pastors scheme in Abingdon. Both of these activities help to support the goals of the local authority and other agencies involved, whether through supporting the well-being of local shop workers or in aspiring to reduce the level of alcohol-related anti-social behaviour on the town’s streets.

Despite the many positive outcomes of this activity, it is also important to note that the complexity of challenges faced within Abingdon means that tensions can and do arise, both between worshipping communities and external organisations and between individual worshipping communities themselves. For relationships with outside agencies, tensions can form as a result of rules which make it difficult for faith-based projects or organisations to access public funds. In contrast, tensions between worshipping communities stem from the challenges of working successfully in partnership and managing the competing personalities, priorities and approaches involved. In some circumstances, these can lead individuals or groups to feel that the issues which they prioritise are excluded or overlooked, or that others are ‘treading on their toes’ in attempting to provide support to the community in their part of the town. This is one interviewee’s experience of the ecumenical ‘Church in Abingdon’ group. However, these types of challenges are no different to those faced by any organisation entering into partnership with others to address commonly held goals, and point to the importance of open and ongoing dialogue between all those concerned in order to minimise the risk of conflict and to maximise the benefit for those who are the intended recipients of the activity concerned.

The brief portrait of Abingdon presented here suggests that the nature of the issues faced by worshipping communities in market town settings is different and more complex than in small village locations. In turn, this tends to promote both partnership working and the professionalisation of worshipping communities’ efforts to build better neighbourhoods. In this sense, worshipping communities in such environments can be seen to be fulfilling the first four categories of activity in Farnell’s typology. Specifically, mutual support and welfare services are provided both within the worshipping group and to others in the local neighbourhood, including through mutually beneficial local partnership arrangements. The value of this activity to the building of better neighbourhoods is significant, particularly in terms of the willingness of worshipping communities to undertake formal assessments of local needs, to co-ordinate action to address local issues and to help establish linkages between the community and other sources of support.

3.4 East Oxford

The final case study presented in this chapter focuses on East Oxford and specifically the Cowley Road. Cowley Road follows a south-easterly route from the Centre of Oxford, through the inner city area of East Oxford and into the industrial suburb of Cowley. The area is home to a number of distinct ethnically and economically diverse populations. These include significant, long-standing South-Asian communities, who have been joined in more recent years by African, Chinese and East European immigrants. Alongside these groups, East Oxford plays host to a sizeable population of young professional people and their families, many members of the city’s academic population, both undergraduate and academic staff, and a core of longstanding predominantly elderly white British residents.



The area's religious groups are reflective of this diversity and include long-established Christian communities: Church of England, Methodist and Roman Catholic; as well as a large number of newer ethnic or community churches including Chinese, Indian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Rwandan and Ugandan Christian worshipping communities. In addition, the area is also home to three mosques; including Oxford Central Mosque which attracts up to 800 Muslim worshippers for midday prayers on Fridays. The complex diversity of the area in ethnic, economic and religious terms means that individual worshipping communities' perceptions of need in the neighbourhood typically focus upon their own membership or wider group. This is unsurprising in that members of many of the groups noted will include newly arrived migrants, often in need of support to help them to integrate to a new way of life and, as a consequence, a greater proportion of volunteer time is used in maintaining the structure and identity of newer groups than is typically the case in more established worshipping communities.

The principal effect of this focus is that worshipping community activities are directed internally, and work beyond the boundaries of faith groups, either in linking to other faiths or in support of the wider community in the East Oxford neighbourhood, is typically more limited. It was suggested by one interviewee that, for some, this also reflected the lack of a common neighbourhood identity or a clear sense of place. The Cowley Road means different things to different groups, to the extent that some would not recognise the area as a neighbourhood or feel any sense of direct connection with it. This is particularly true for members of communities that travel, sometimes considerable distances, into the neighbourhood in order to attend worship.

Despite this apparent lack of partnership working amongst East Oxford's worshipping communities, interviewees were able to cite a number of exceptions. These related to circumstances where the area's worshipping communities had come together to address issues and to speak with a unified voice. Typically, these instances relate to external events or threats where the issues at hand are a challenge to or concern of all worshipping communities in the area. Such events included, for example, responding to the 2004 Asian Tsunami disaster.

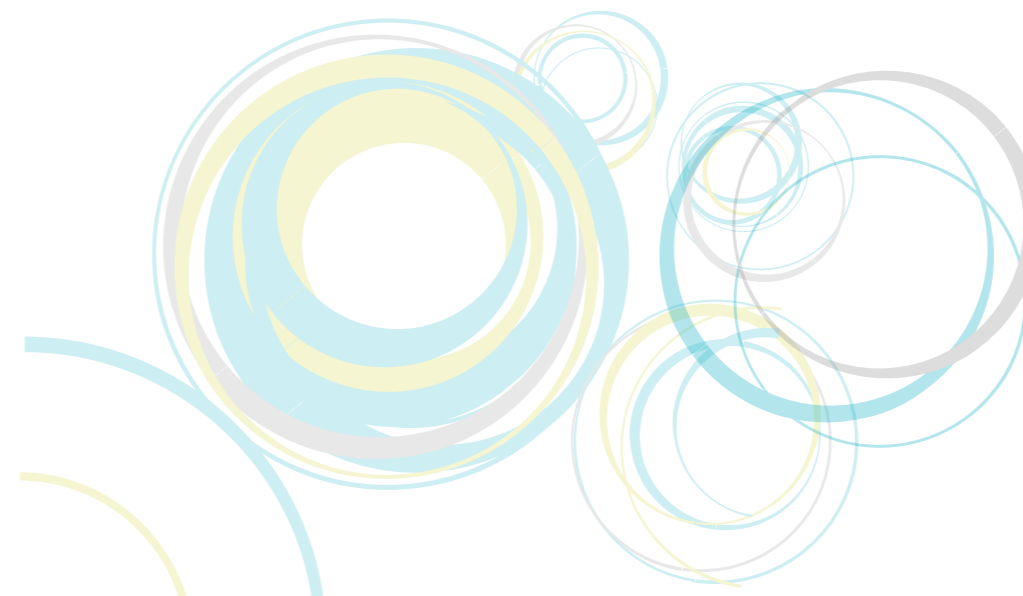
To the casual observer, similarities between East Oxford and Great Tew, the small village case study presented earlier in this chapter, would seem minimal. Whilst Great Tew is characterised by a single worshipping community and all but invisible boundaries between the faith and village communities, East Oxford is home to multiple religious and ethnic groups, many of which do not interact with each other either collectively, as worshipping communities, or as individual worshippers. However, in Great Tew the emphasis which is placed upon bonding social capital¹⁹ within the faith/village community is very similar to the position of individual worshipping communities in East Oxford. There the focus on members of the community from which worshippers are drawn is very similar, prioritising as it does the development of bonding social capital rather than the bridging and linking social capital which is characteristic of the market town case study Abingdon.

¹⁹ Social capital is the shared knowledge, norms and sense of trust that is brought to an activity. In this context it is an intermediary concept which helps to conceptualise worshipping communities as: bonding with those of similar background; bridging to people of different backgrounds and cultures; or linking with centres of agency and power.

As in Great Tew, therefore, the activities of worshipping communities in East Oxford correspond to the first three categories in Farnell's typology of faith group activities, in that informal mutual support and welfare services are provided both within the worshipping group and to others from the wider community in the local neighbourhood. In addition to this however, evidence of joint responses to external challenges amongst East Oxford's worshipping communities suggests that their activities also fulfil category five in the typology: activities that address matters of power and politics including, for example, through campaigning.

3.5 Summary

This chapter helps to illustrate the different ways in which worshipping communities contribute to the building of better neighbourhoods in different types of place. Moreover, whilst there are superficial differences between the faith communities concerned and the manner in which they go about identifying and addressing local needs, the use of Farnell's typology of activities has shown that important fundamental similarities exist across the spectrum of settlement types found in Oxfordshire. The next chapter of this report will examine in detail a key element of the types of activity identified in the typology, namely the participation of volunteers from worshipping communities in building better neighbourhoods.





4.0 Volunteering

Faith communities have long been places rich in voluntary ethos. The considerable activity carried out within and by faith communities relies heavily on volunteers who give their time, energy and skills to people, places, events, organisations, programmes and communities. The average number of volunteers for each of the Oxfordshire faith communities that responded to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey is 20 (12 women and eight men) who together give, on average, 66 hours each month to various activities supporting their faith community's contribution. Altogether there are more than 3,750 people volunteering from these faith groups.

It is important to note that this picture concerns volunteering which is focused externally and which could be conceived of as helping to build better neighbourhoods, and does not include volunteering concerned with the institutional functioning or worship activities of worshipping communities. In a typical village church these would include church wardens, bell ringers, flower arrangers, cleaners, members of the church council, fundraisers, Sunday school teachers and choir masters along with many others. Similar patterns are found both in town churches and amongst other worshipping communities. Neither do these figures include the time and contribution of individuals belonging to worshipping communities who may volunteer in other capacities. While less than half (43.3%) of survey respondents thought that their worshipping community contributed 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of value (rather than 'a fair bit' or 'a little') to the task of building better neighbourhoods, more than three quarters of respondents (77.2%) thought that their individual members, outside of the formal structures of their community, contributed 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' to this task.

Over recent years the capacity of faith communities to carry out all this activity has drawn the attention of those responsible for implementing public policy, both locally and nationally. It is part of public policy to revitalise public engagement in civic institutions and society generally in order to promote greater community responsibility, foster social cohesion, and facilitate service provision. The participation of volunteers is an integral part of this approach and the faith sector is increasingly seen as a resource of individuals and groups who can contribute to delivering these aims.

4.1 A complex picture

So why do people in faith communities volunteer, not only within their particular faith community but in their locality in both activities connected with faith communities and those which have no founding faith base, such as public bodies, local initiatives, and voluntary and community organisations? To explore this question Building Better Neighbourhoods talked to volunteers drawn from two churches in an area that had high levels of volunteering in comparison to the size of the congregations. These volunteers were active within their church congregations, the local communities, more widely within Oxfordshire and the country, and through church activities and faith-based initiatives, other local organisations and programmes, and public bodies. This material was supplemented by interviews with members of other churches gained in the course of the research. **While there is commonality in terms of the faith sector overall regarding issues of volunteering in the current public policy context, the evidence base presented here (in contrast to statistics from the survey) comes from the churches sector only and not other faiths.**

As other research has found, the reasons why people volunteer are complex, often involving a mixture of faith, upbringing and social background along with situational factors that prompt and facilitate opportunities for volunteering.²⁰ Among church interviewees in Oxfordshire there are intermingled strands of personal story and interests, skills and experience, individual faith and community belonging, that come together into an integrated whole of the person who volunteers. While it is not appropriate to isolate these strands from one another, it is possible to identify certain (albeit overlapping) factors that illuminate what lies behind the contribution of volunteers.

Some volunteers spoke of their own **personal experiences** of lack, need, difficulty and anxiety at some stage in their lives that made them want to help people they knew to be struggling in similar ways. As one parent commented about the challenges of bringing up children, 'I remember well the struggles that I had and I would have done anything to have been able to have talked to someone else at that stage so that's why I want to help people.' For another interviewee involved in an area of welfare provision, the experience of poverty as a child in which their family lost a sense of being valued contributors to society, were pitied and on the receiving end of handouts, gave them a determination that receiving welfare provision should be 'something that is lovely and a really positive experience.'

²⁰ Locke, M. (2007) 'Faith as a motivation for voluntary action' in Jochum, V., Pratten, B. and Wilding, K. [eds] Faith and Voluntary Action: An overview of current evidence and debates, London: NCVO, 29-34.

For others, volunteering was an outlet for their own **skills and abilities**. Hence, keeping alive a cultural interest and skill in their locality for one volunteer was also 'furthering an interest of mine ... a hobby.' Indeed, finding the right fit of skills to a volunteer opportunity helps maintain commitment to that particular opportunity: 'you stay with it if you find your skills or your gifts suit the need.' Another person's creativity was being used to provide a craft activity and through that a sense of self-worth for people: 'I am interested in the people but for [a] long time I've gained a lot of satisfaction personally out of creating things and I just think that everybody can create something.'

A further identifiable strand in what motivates volunteers is **attentiveness** to the society around them: seeing what the needs are and deliberately setting out to address them. Sometimes this is in response to something obvious: 'things ... come along and because of your background, you think that's a need, I can get in there ... whatever there is in the community, just get stuck in there and do it.' At other times a more deliberate seeing is required if needs are to be met. As one church leader said, 'if you go below the surface of any town you will see there are people in need. It is a case of what do you see ... people who would normally come in under the radar who wouldn't be seen.'

4.2 Belonging and believing

Volunteers may also have a sense of **community belonging** that prompts their engagement. Having lived in the same area all their life, one person explained, 'I want to try and help the community and by helping with these sort of voluntary things, hopefully I can do a bit of good.' As another volunteer pointed out, belonging to a particular community means that, 'if you want to change something you've got to get involved and the best way I can get involved is to go out and help people'. Such involvement can be personally satisfying. 'It's incredibly rewarding', reflected one interviewee, 'because if you're doing things you want to do there is enormous personal reward in doing that.'

A strong theme among the interviews conducted was that it was simply **natural** to be involved in the community in which you live. 'The reason I do those things', one interviewee pointed out, 'is just to be involved in the community and get to know people and it just seems a natural thing to do as a Christian or not as a Christian.' Another interviewee agrees, 'I think some of the things I have done as a volunteer are just because I want to be a good sort and ... I think non-Christians feel the same thing. You want communities to work well. [This] is now my community, this is what I want to serve, so there's a sense of belonging, there is a sense of getting out as much as you put in.'

“if you want to change something you've got to get involved and the best way I can get involved is to go out and help people.”

This acknowledgement that it is an expression of common humanity to be so actively engaged, does not negate that **Christian faith** is instrumental among churchgoers' volunteering. Whether expressing a sense that 'with a strong background of Christian upbringing, if somebody asked me to do something then I can't say no', or as 'a basic practical expression of faith', or that 'a Christian is the whole essence of who you are deep down', the element of faith is integral to people's involvement because it is part of who they are. So, as one person said, 'I don't like [the term] "volunteers" because it smacks of having an arm up your back in some way whereas this is absolutely no pressure. We want people to give from the point of view of giving because they feel it's the right thing to do, usually a God-centred giving and a God-prompted giving ... (whether it's to pray, or to do something physical or to give an item) ... The faith and the giving are absolutely intertwined. It's not giving out of duty, it's giving out of love.'

“if you have a faith that is deep-rooted and you really believe this faith that you have, it will overflow into what you do.”

Developing this **ethos** is, in part, how church communities facilitate wider community involvement by their members for, 'if you have a faith that is deep-rooted and you really believe this faith that you have, it will overflow into what you do.' Creating an atmosphere where people are encouraged and enabled, being open to ideas that arise from the talents, experiences and situations of church members themselves, means that much volunteering is organic in nature rather than artificial. 'We bring community things into our church notices and into our church world and into our church prayers. The leadership of our church are quite consciously trying to create an environment where our loving our neighbour is expressed outside of the church community as well as within it.'

4.3 Time and money

In addition to creating the right environment, a crucial factor concerns the use of time. The willingness of church organisations not to monopolise their members' time on activities within the boundaries of the life of the local worshipping community, allows for greater participation elsewhere. 'We do enjoy [our church] community', explained one leader, 'but I think quite consciously ... we don't make that community too demanding. There are churches that have church activities every night of the week and if you're a member of that church you're in church things every day and therefore you don't actually have the space to get involved in the [wider] community.' Another leader agrees, 'Don't think that a [church] meeting takes preference over involvement in the community. Or if your next door neighbour on a Sunday morning is in real trouble then your commitment is to your next door neighbour and not to be here on a Sunday morning.' In the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey, lack of time was the chief barrier that hindered worshipping communities from working with other organisations and agencies, with more than one in five (21.9%) citing this as an obstacle to greater involvement.

Having time was also recognised by interviewees as crucial in their volunteering. 'I'm at a time in my life where I've got time on my hands', said one volunteer, 'I don't have money to spare but I've got time to give to people.' Indeed, as an alternative to being described as a 'volunteer', one interviewee preferred the term 'giver of time'. Recent evidence suggests that during the current economic recession there is an increase in the number of overall enquires about volunteering.²¹ However, this may result in an increase in short-term volunteering as people see volunteering as a way to gain skills that will help them find employment. Indeed, organisations that involve volunteers are said to be wary of recruiting people who are keen to return to paid employment because they are more likely to lose them as volunteers.²² While time is a significant factor in all volunteering, and hence faith communities themselves may experience an increase in available volunteers during economic recession, it is clear that time is not the only consideration for faith-community volunteers. For many of the interviewees, volunteering was very much an integral part of their life stories and they had histories of volunteering in numerous capacities, which goes against the reported general trend of an increase in short-term and one-off volunteers.²³ At the same time, many worshipping communities are likely to experience a similar dynamic to that of many voluntary organisations and associations in which it is the few who do most of the volunteering. As one interviewee put it, 'If you're a busy person you can become a busier person... there is a general understanding in churches that a certain proportion are doing everything, I'm sure that's a fact of life – and a certain proportion aren't doing anything.' They went on to reflect, 'I think the difficult thing is knowing when to stop or when to say no.' Bearing this in mind, another interviewee noted, 'I know my own capacity now. I think it's something you have to learn, your own capacity.' In the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey, lack of staff including volunteers was the third most frequent barrier cited by worshipping communities (15.6%) that hindered their inter-agency engagement.

Core to the concept of volunteering is the fact that people who volunteer are not paid for what they do; their involvement is not dependent on an economic contract of some kind that places them under obligation to participate. This dynamic in itself was seen as an added value in a number of the activities in which people were involved. One person described how it 'creates a reaction when you are talking to support workers [from statutory bodies] that we're all givers, none of us is salaried, we're all doing this because we feel it's the right thing to do – to serve our community in that way and that does create often quite a significant reaction among the professionals we come into contact with.' They reflected further, 'I think it's just the society we live in that everything is counted in monetary terms and I find [it] really exciting actually that you are saying there is something greater than that, you know – we want to make a difference.' Other interviewees told of how not being paid had had an impact on some of the people volunteers may be seeking to serve. 'It creates bridges', said one person, 'it makes a huge difference.'

²¹ Volunteering England (2010) Volunteering in the recession: Outline report for the Recession Summit 21 January 2010 [available at <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Policy/whatwearesaying/Volunteering+in+the+recession>].

²² Ibid.

²³ Third Sector Foresight, Trends in Volunteering, 22nd September 2009 [available at: <http://www.3s4.org.uk/drivers/trends-in-volunteering>].

This does not mean that funding is not an issue for many of the projects and activities in which volunteers are immersed. Projects have overheads and expenses even if they do not have to pay staff. ‘Churches are volunteer rich, cash poor’, summed up one project leader, ‘We have the best volunteers in the world because they do it out of love, they don’t expect to get anything out of it, but what we need is to make sure those volunteers are well supported.’ Some interviewees talked of their concerns about the difficulty of negotiating funding application processes – knowing for which of the available grants they were eligible, understanding the language of funders and the correct terminology, and having access to personnel who might assist them with any queries.

4.4 Faith, voluntary and public sectors

A further difficulty that can arise for faith communities in their group endeavours, or as individuals in their volunteering, is negotiating relationships with voluntary and public sector bodies. In total, nearly one quarter (23.4%) of Building Better Neighbourhoods survey respondents spoke of issues of mutual suspicion, conflict of interest and differing agendas, the prejudice of other sectors and their perceptions of faith groups having hidden agendas as barriers hindering their own engagement with other organisations. This reflects ongoing dialogue around the increasing involvement of faith communities in delivering public policy objectives and whether the two are always compatible. Underlying concerns are whether and how faith communities maintain the integrity of their own beliefs, value-base and ethos while delivering public good in a pluralist society that includes people of many faiths and of none.

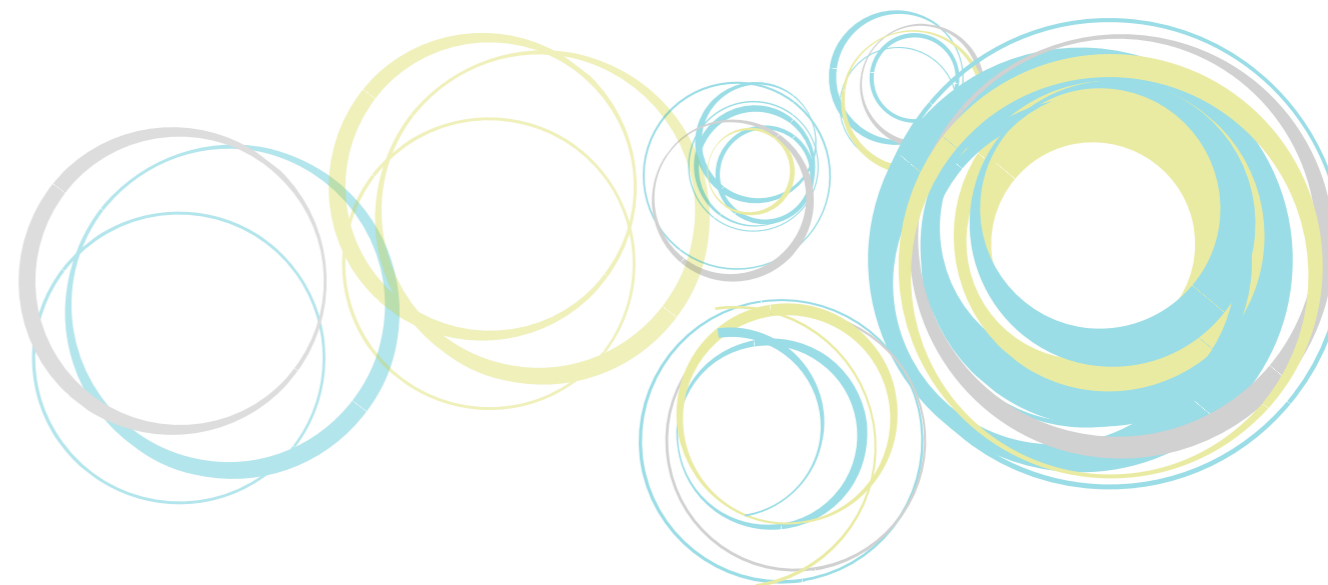
A number of the volunteers interviewed had experienced some hesitation from public sector personnel towards them. ‘I am increasingly aware of distrust from other bodies that would actually be able to make referrals to me’, one person explained, ‘... I do understand it because its accountability, isn’t it? They want to know who I’m accountable to... So that has been a sort of problem especially because it is voluntary and so they question, why [are they] doing this? I think people like to have some sort of organisation which gives some security and accountability.’ This same person, however, had good working relationships with other public sector personnel that had been built up over time. Clearly, often a measure of trust needed to be established between the volunteer and the public or third sector body and this means overcoming negative stereotypes. One interviewee spoke of their experience of someone in the public sector ‘who’s been very, very negative about the fact that we are Christians and has really struggled with the fact that all of the people that would be going into their client would be Christians.’ Despite this, as a result of a client having a ‘very good experience, and having met us and seen us and seen what practically we can do to alleviate the suffering of [their] client, [they have] been very much more warm to us... [Their] perception of what Christianity would look like has been challenged.’ The concern was that the Christian volunteers would place undue influence and pressure on the referred client towards Christian faith. As another interviewee observed, ‘if a church tries to draw down funds, grants from other organisations, it is very difficult to get money because that is what people think.’

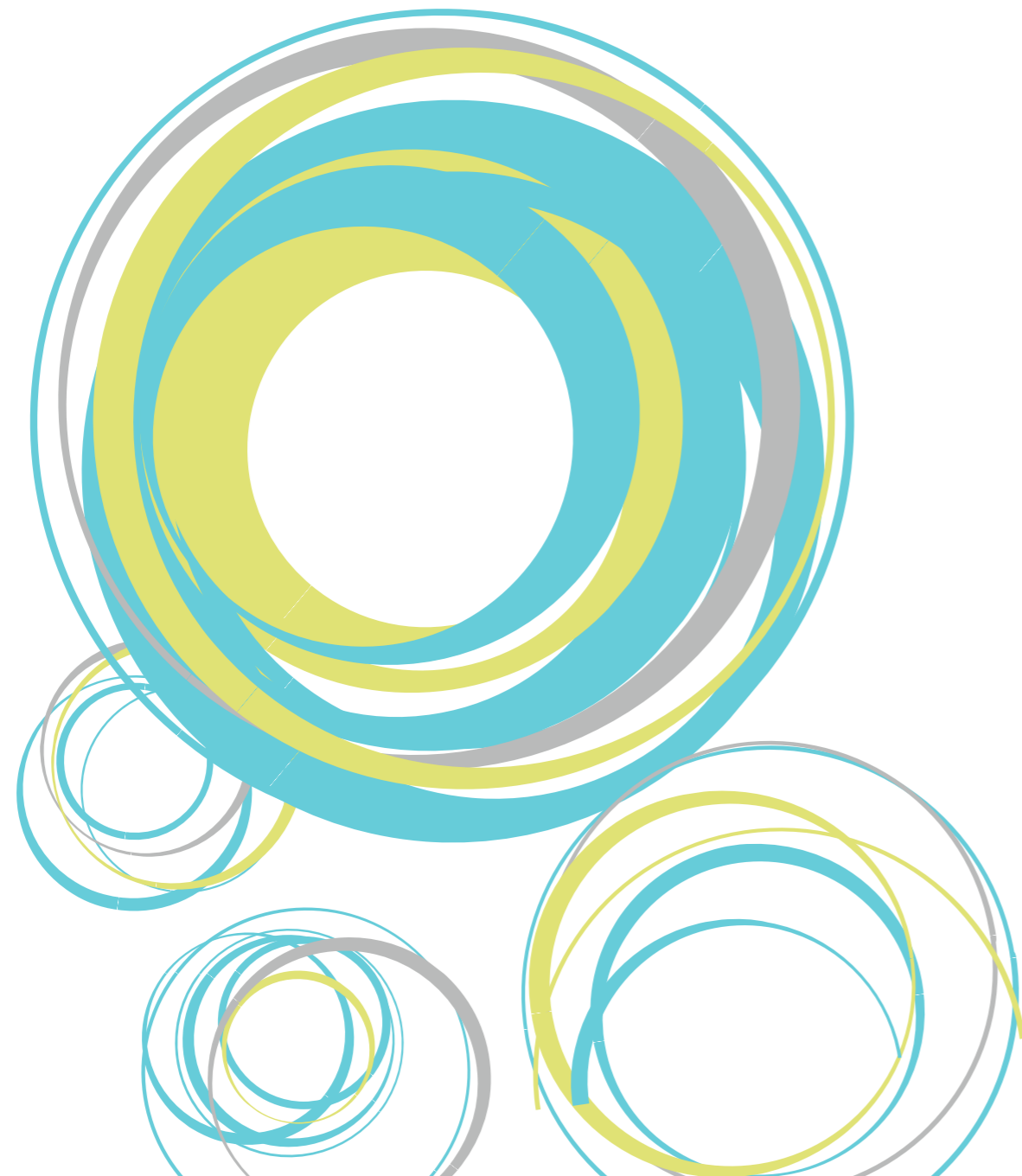
There was also a view among interviewees that participating on various public bodies had become more accessible to people from faith communities. In part, this was attributed to the statutory obligations of public bodies to include representatives from numerous organisations and groups in society, including faith groups. However, interviewees saw this as a real opportunity to participate and not simply a paper exercise: ‘Yes, there is a box to be ticked and so that’s why somebody is sat there, but also, on the other side, I do think my opinions and comments are listened to ... what I say is respected, so it’s not just that this is the token faith-voice type of thing.’

In addition, volunteers felt that public bodies were receptive to their involvement because of what faith communities could contribute: ‘if you have something that can benefit them and also that can save them money – because everybody is looking at ways of saving money.’ Speaking of a particular church-initiated project that involved the co-operation of a number of churches and several public bodies, one person commented, ‘there’s a kind of virtuous circle here whereby, where the churches are seen to be doing something, that creates a new sense of the value of the churches to [various public bodies] and that enables more to happen.’

In the current public policy context, the many opportunities for volunteering in ways that contribute to building better neighbourhoods are likely to continue or even increase. While the reasons that the people interviewed here volunteer are varied, the numerous mixes of background, interest, skill and faith, blend together in ways that are of benefit to volunteers and to those to whom they give their time, energy and skills. In the words of one interviewee: ‘We want to be involved with the community, make a difference in the community, we want to see the best that the community can be, we can see things and we know it could be better, so we can help that process and we want to be in the mix of it.’

“... we want to see the best that the community can be”





5.0 Faith-Based Organisations

In recent years, voluntary sector organisations have come to be of increasing importance in the delivery of social programmes: in community development; welfare provision; regeneration; and social enterprise, to cite just a few examples. Policy focus has now shifted to the particular contribution that faith-based organisations can make.²⁴ The government's Third Sector Review of 2007 reported research into the contribution of faith groups, noting that they act as 'a catalyst for the formation of networks, as welfare service providers, as participants in partnership structures and as a basis for a community coming together around a particular issue'.²⁵

In the context of the recent recession, the government has identified faith groups as playing a key role in the challenging social and economic times. In their third sector action plan, the government states that the sector, defined broadly so as to include faith groups, is 'often ideally placed to support individuals and families during times of need, and to support communities facing social and economic change'.²⁶ The Conservative Party has also emphasised the importance of the third sector and of social enterprise in the current social and economic contexts.²⁷

²⁴ See Harris, M., Halfpenny, P. and Rochester, C. (2003) 'Social Policy Role for Faith-Based Organisations? Lessons from the UK Jewish Voluntary Sector', *Journal of Social Policy* 32(1), 93-112, p.94; Hepworth, C. and Stitt, S. (2007) 'Social Capital and Faith-Based Organisations', *HeyJ* XLVIII, 895-910, p.903.

²⁵ HM Treasury (2007) *The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: Final report*. London: HM Treasury, p.35.

²⁶ Office of the Third Sector (2009) *Real Help for Communities: Volunteers, charities and social enterprises*. London: Cabinet Office, p.7.

²⁷ David Cameron (2009) Speech given on 10th February 2009, 'Social enterprise can help training schemes change'.

This chapter focuses on the contribution of semi-independent faith-based organisations to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. The emphasis on semi-independent faith-based organisations requires some explanation. The term ‘faith-based organisation’ encompasses a diverse range of initiatives; initiatives that vary considerably according to the work they do, the nature of their delivery, and the role that faith plays in the organisation and its work. Research reported here was interested to look at those organisations which had been established by faith communities in Oxfordshire, but had grown and developed to become semi-independent. The Gatehouse, Bicester Food Bank, and the Blackbird Leys Credit Union were identified as good examples of semi-independent faith-based organisations, and form the case studies on which this chapter draws.

In order to better understand the nature of these organisations, and what we mean by semi-independent faith-based organisations, it is helpful to refer to a typology of faith-based organisations developed by Sider and Unruh.²⁸ This typology identified six different types of organisation: faith-permeated; faith-centred; faith-affiliated; faith-background; faith-secular partnership; and secular.²⁹ Whilst they are outlined as distinct types, this categorisation represents points on a spectrum of levels of spiritual emphasis. The case study examples in this chapter fall very broadly into the category of ‘faith-affiliated’, described by Sider and Unruh as:

*‘Faith-affiliated organizations retain some of the influence of their religious founders ... but do not require staff to affirm religious beliefs or practices, with the possible exception of some board and executive leaders. Although faith-affiliated programs incorporate little or no explicitly religious content, they may affirm faith in a general way and make spiritual resources available to participants. Faith-affiliated programs may have the intent of conveying a religious message through nonverbal acts of compassion and care.’*³⁰

Most organisations, however, cannot be categorised simply and easily into one specific ‘type’. Therefore, it may be that particular aspects of the characteristics of these case study organisations may fall more appropriately into, say, ‘faith-centred’ or ‘faith-background’ organisational types.

²⁸ Sider, R. and Unruh, H. R. (2004) ‘Typology of religious characteristics of social service and educational organisations and programmes’. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, 109-134.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.120.

This research also sits within a wider context of research which has sought to explore in more depth the question of the distinctiveness of faith-based organisations. Studying the contribution of faith-based organisations to urban governance in comparison to the ‘secular’ voluntary and community sector (VCS), Chapman found that beyond explicit links to faith, there are ‘no clear cut or universal distinguishing features between faith-based and wider VCS organisations’.³¹ Such findings have important implications for questions over how faith-based organisations are perceived and engaged by policy, practitioners, and funders.

In Oxfordshire, 30% of respondents to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey claim to have established an independent or semi-independent organisation through which their worshipping community is currently working. These organisations are spread across the County with 44 in Cherwell, 39 in the City of Oxford, 40 in South Oxfordshire, 28 in the Vale of the White Horse, and 33 in West Oxfordshire.

Faith-based organisations in Oxfordshire are extremely diverse, reflecting the wide range of community needs that faith groups are trying to meet. They include food banks, work with disabled people, projects for children and young people, cafés, work with the homeless, and wider community development initiatives. This diversity, geographical spread, and number of initiatives indicates that these faith-based organisations make an important contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. This chapter explores the contributions made by semi-independent faith-based organisations through three case studies: The Gatehouse, a programme for homeless people in central Oxford; Bicester Food Bank; and the Blackbird Leys Credit Union.

5.1 Origins and nature of the activity

For each of the three case study organisations, the origins of their work was rooted in the faith groups’ intuitive understanding of the needs of their local community. For Blackbird Leys, it was the chance to offer people an alternative to paying moneyshops to cash their cheques, or to paying extremely high interest on small loans (sometimes as much as 270% of the original loan). For central Oxford, it was helping to support the many homeless people, and in Bicester it was about helping local people who had fallen on hard times.

The projects were each developed from the initiative of one or a small number of local churches, but soon became vibrant inter-church endeavours. The Gatehouse project grew out of the desire of Churches Together in Central Oxford to work more proactively in the community. Blackbird Leys Credit Union was built up by a number of volunteers from the local Church of the Holy Family, along with the community worker employed by the church, and soon had volunteers from the local Catholic Church playing a key role. Whilst the idea for Bicester Food Bank came from a small group within Emmanuel Church, the project was developed in partnership with other local churches, its distribution centre being hosted by the local Methodist Church, and came to be run by the ecumenical organisation, Bicester Christian Action.

³¹ Chapman, R. (2009) ‘Faith and the voluntary sector in urban governance: distinctive yet similar?’ in Dinham A., Furbey R., and Lowndes V. [eds] *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices*. Bristol: Policy Press, 203-223. p.219.

The Gatehouse (Homeless People and the Oxford Churches)

Instigated by Churches Together in Central Oxford, The Gatehouse is a project for homeless people which began as an initiative for the Christmas and New Year period of 1988. The project opened in their current premises in 1990 and aims 'to welcome the homeless and lonely, and to provide a place where dignity, companionship and refreshment can be found in a warm and safe environment.'

Open six days a week from 5pm-7pm, The Gatehouse provides homeless people over the age of 25 with food, hot drinks, sympathy and support. Guests are offered sandwiches, fruit, cakes, and soup in the winter. In addition, the project always has a selection of newspapers, a library of books, access to computers and the internet, and a second-hand clothing store. Other activities are also on offer to guests, including an art group, creative writing project and IT tutoring.

Sessions are staffed by a team of 12, led by an experienced volunteer and supported by two part-time paid workers, and food is donated from all over the city and surrounding villages. Volunteers total around 500, including those who run and support the sessions as well as numerous Food Groups. The Gatehouse has around 24,000 visits a year, and at Christmas makes up packages for 200 regular guests.

Each of the case study projects serves the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in their local communities, and all adopt a holistic approach to the work that they do. The work may begin with food parcels, financial services, or a plate of sandwiches, but each project provides support beyond these primary activities: talking with people; listening to their stories; helping people overcome feelings of alienation; signposting them to other agencies; or working with them further. In addition, these organisations are highly inclusive, particularly in the case of the Gatehouse and Bicester Food Bank, which were careful not to establish 'hoops' or 'tests' which beneficiaries have to pass through successfully before they are able to access help on offer.

Ultimately, these organisations are whole community endeavours. For the Gatehouse and Bicester Food Bank, food, donations and support come from across the local community and sometimes further. The Gatehouse, for example, has volunteer Food Groups across the County who regularly provide homemade sandwiches, cakes and soup. In the beginning these groups came from churches, but more recently local employers have been encouraging groups of staff to come together to make sandwiches and bake cakes, sometimes using company time and facilities to do so.

5.2 Leaderships and motivation

For each of the three case study organisations, activities are delivered by committed volunteers, with the help of wider networks of volunteers or donors. In addition, the Gatehouse and Blackbird Leys Credit Union have both been supported by paid workers. A community worker funded by the Diocese of Oxford and based at the local Church of the Holy Family, worked closely with the Credit Union from its inception for over 20 years, and remains a committed volunteer. For nine years, The Gatehouse has had a dedicated Director who co-ordinates the running of the project.

Each organisation is supported by formalised governance structures. Blackbird Leys Credit Union has a formal Board of Management in line with Financial Services Authority (FSA) guidelines, Bicester Food Bank is managed by the charitable organisation Bicester Christian Action, and The Gatehouse is a charity in its own right, known as Homeless People and the Oxford Churches. These structures illustrate how the organisations have grown and developed; how they have gained independence from the groups that initiated them and become distinct entities, with established governance procedures.

Bicester Food Bank

Bicester Food Bank began as the vision of a small group within Emmanuel Church, Bicester. A franchise of the Trussell Trust's Salisbury Food Bank, the project supports people who have fallen on hard times with parcels of nutritionally-balanced food.

Managed by the ecumenical organisation, Bicester Christian Action, the food bank obtains food through donations from local people via churches, schools, and other awareness-raising initiatives such as collections from shoppers at local supermarkets. The food, which consists of non-perishable items such as cartons of fruit juice, pasta, rice, tinned vegetables, jars of sauce, and UHT milk, is collected and sent to a central store where it is sorted. The exact make-up of the food parcels will depend on what is in stock, but they will be nutritionally balanced, and sized according to the number of people in the household.

Before a person can receive any food from the Food Bank, they need to be given a food voucher from one of a number of places: from local pastors or priests; through the Citizen's Advice Bureau; from a social worker; or from certain local community programmes. In 2009 1,300 adults and 900 children received support from the Food Bank.

When people receive their food parcel from the distribution centre, they are offered a cup of coffee and have the opportunity to chat with volunteers. This social aspect of the project is vitally important, supporting those in crisis with understanding and helping them to feel part of the community. At Christmas time the project also gives presents to all the children who are receiving help from the Food Bank, and for some it will be the only gift they receive.

The Food Bank involves the whole Bicester community in supporting local people in crisis, from young children donating food through their school to the diverse range of volunteers who manage the many different aspects of the day to day running of the project.

From their origins, each project has been supported by church members who have played vital roles as volunteers and supporters of the projects: running the activities day to day, supporting them financially and with in-kind donations. This support from the congregations of the different churches has played an important role in helping to initiate, establish and maintain the organisations. Beyond the support of individual congregations, each project is an example of inter-church working and also offers insights into how faith-based organisations can facilitate inter-faith work. The Gatehouse provides a particularly special example of this, in the story of 'inter-faith soup'. A local Catholic congregation had the idea of providing The Gatehouse with frozen, homemade soups which could be defrosted each night, and their church offered to provide a week's supply of soup. A friend from the local synagogue heard about it and volunteered to provide their own soup, and the interest spiralled. Now, the project regularly receives homemade soup from a range of faith groups, including a Buddhist study group, an Islamic group, and the local Orthodox Church.

Each project has a variety of different volunteers: people of different ages, cultures and backgrounds and from different faiths or none. What is important in motivating the volunteers of all the projects is a strong sense of helping and supporting others in the local community. This may be related to individual experiences, for example many volunteers at the Bicester Food Bank have either received support from the Food Bank, or can remember a time when they were struggling with a young family. Volunteers are also motivated by wider considerations, for example, The Gatehouse offers volunteers an increasingly rare opportunity to work directly with homeless people, as other projects become more and more specialist and professionalised. As a result of this, the project has seen many of its volunteers going on to careers in, for example, drug intervention or the probation services.

5.3 Participation in local partnership structures

Each of the case study organisations works with other voluntary or statutory organisations, although this may not be through formal arrangements such as local partnerships. The main ways in which they work with others are through signposting, or established referral channels.

Each of the case study organisations signposts clients to other local agencies where they feel it appropriate. In Blackbird Leys, the Credit Union will send people to the local advice centre if they feel that people need further support, or, where they can, will liaise with other agencies on behalf of their clients. Similarly, in addition to being an active part of the Oxford Homeless Network, The Gatehouse provides information to guests about where they can get further advice and support on a range of issues such as mental health, domestic and sexual abuse, substance misuse and employment opportunities.³²

³² The Gatehouse project report.

In the same way, people are referred to the case study organisations through other agencies and bodies. Bicester Food Bank has established formal channels through which statutory and other voluntary organisations can refer individuals to the Food Bank. In order to receive a food parcel, an individual requires a food voucher. These can be obtained from a variety of local agencies or individuals, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, social workers, local pastors, and other local community projects.

The three case study projects each provide a unique service in their local communities. In every case they offer something beyond that which the state and other organisations provide: food in a time of crisis; a listening ear; or flexible and cost-efficient ways to manage money. For example, when they are contacted by a social worker who has a family in a crisis situation, Bicester Food Bank can provide them with a much needed parcel of food. As The Gatehouse states in their promotional material, there are a whole host of agencies providing services for homeless people in Oxford, but their particular contribution 'is a friendly, accepting atmosphere with as little aggravation as possible and all the sandwiches, tea and sympathy we can supply'.³³

5.4 Impact on the local community

The number of beneficiaries that each project serves is an important indication of the impact that they are having on their local communities. With 600 members, the Blackbird Leys Credit Union is an important part of the local community, where low cost and flexible financial services are much in need. Similarly, having supported 1,300 adults and 900 children in 2009 alone, Bicester Food Bank provides vital support to many in the Bicester Community. The Gatehouse has around 24,000 visits a year, and around 200 regular guests, illustrating both the tremendous need, and the important place the project has in the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in Oxford.

³³ The Gatehouse publicity material.

Blackbird Leys Credit Union

Based in one of the most deprived areas of Oxfordshire, the Credit Union was established 20 years ago by a Community Worker employed by the local Church of the Holy Family and supported by other key volunteers from the Church.

Located in the Leys Linx Centre, it provides a place where people can save money, take out loans, cash cheques, pay in wages and benefits and have them exchanged for cash free of charge. Loans range from smaller amounts up to around £500 for a first loan and £1,000 for other loans. Exceptionally, for people who have savings with the Credit Union, loans are given up to £12,000. For smaller loans, the Credit Union provides services at much lower rates than local private lending companies.

Local people save with the Credit Union for a variety of reasons: the convenient location of the Credit Union; to save for a holiday or for Christmas; or in order to get loans based on their savings. The Credit Union also supports customers in other ways, signposting people to other agencies, or liaising on their behalf.

The Credit Union enables people to make better use of their finances, and has around 600 active members. The organisation is currently lending about £120,000, and has almost £200,000 in investments and savings.

Each organisation has important stories to tell about the positive impact they have had on the lives of the people their project has helped. The practical, emotional and, when requested, spiritual support provided has helped local people and encouraged them towards taking positive steps in their lives. The holistic approach taken by each organisation is an important factor in this. Helping people beyond the primary services on offer, guiding and supporting them in all the ways they can, the organisations are able to make a huge impact on the lives of local people. These organisations also play the important role of bringing the community together to work towards supporting the needs of others. Each project has significant numbers of locally-based volunteers who come from all walks of life and are motivated by the desire to help their neighbours.

5.5 The particular contribution of faith-based organisations to Oxfordshire life

The faith-based nature of these case study organisations brings with it particular areas for consideration, and particular advantages: the way in which the faith basis is expressed; the freedom to help in their local community in whichever way they wish; and the longevity of commitment that faith communities are able to make to community projects. Each of the case study organisations is explicitly non-proselytising. For The Gatehouse and Bicester Food Bank, matters of spirituality are discussed with beneficiaries only if they are asked about.

Importantly, these faith-based organisations are not driven by qualifying tests or requirements in ways that other agencies may be. The case study organisations were driven by the desire to meet the needs of their communities. Where others may be bound to provide only for clients, tenants, or constituents, these organisations began their work with the desire to simply serve those who were in need. Similarly, other service providers may be required to meet certain targets in particular ways, or be bounded in the type and extent of work they can do with individuals. Importantly however, the faith communities involved at the beginnings of these case study organisations had the freedom and flexibility to choose exactly what their work would be and how it would be delivered. Faith communities can also make long-term commitments to their communities and affiliated organisations, providing much needed stability and security whilst projects establish themselves and grow.

“The church alone can say, because of its constitution, given by God, we are here, yes, to serve our members and congregation, but we are not limited to that, our members know that our calling is to serve others, to serve the needy, to serve the wider community, and that calling is never conditioned by or limited by the need to serve the church’s own members.”

5.6 Challenges facing semi-independent faith-based organisations

The experiences of the three case study organisations identify a number of broad challenges facing semi-independent faith-based organisations throughout their journey of establishment and growth. These challenges, both internal and external, have potentially profound impacts upon whether organisations are able to realise their potential. Challenges include: managing the transition to independence; the importance of establishing governance and leadership mechanisms; funding; and the wider policy and practitioner contexts within which the organisations are working.

Semi-independent faith-based organisations have to work within an ever-changing policy context which heavily influences how their work is viewed. These policy contexts, through funding opportunities and public sector priorities, determine how certain sets of objectives and ways of working are assessed and valued. Where faith-based organisations are focused upon meeting the needs of their local communities in the ways they see best, they can be met with scepticism by funders and other practitioners when they are seen not to be striving for current policy objectives. In this way, policy can potentially restrict the important work and contribution of faith-based organisations by prohibiting opportunities for growth and development, or forcing changes in the way that they work.

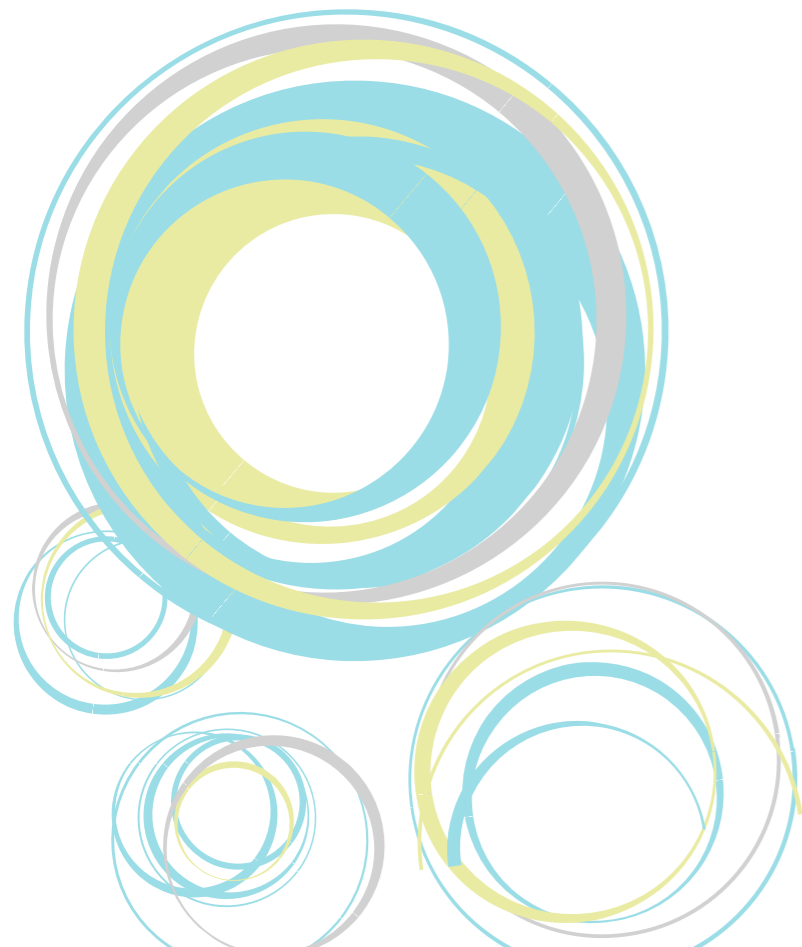
“[we] can quite honestly make, I feel, a commitment between 10-20 years which is often what’s needed, whereas nobody else can talk longer than 5 years really, in terms of organisation and of course when it comes to funders, three years is usually the maximum.”

Obtaining funding from some providers can also be a challenge for semi-independent organisations due to negative perceptions of their faith background, although gaining charitable status can help to negate this. The short- and medium-term nature of funding grants can also present challenges to these organisations, who are seeking financial security in order to pursue their long-term goals.

Issues of change and transition are central to the experiences of growing organisations. One important challenge for faith-based organisations is the question of when is an initiative, which has been established, fostered and supported by one or a small number of faith groups, ready to be ‘set free’? And how is this done? The moment and process of transition to independence is crucial to the long-term success of organisations and must be navigated with care.

This research also highlights that formal governance and management procedures are central. If such procedures are not put in place, faith groups can become overwhelmed by the financial and staffing demands of a thriving and growing community organisation, and it can consume their capacity for community development work. Bicester Food Bank, in establishing Bicester Christian Action, is a good example of an organisation which was quick to establish formal leadership and governance arrangements in anticipation of such challenges. Establishing these mechanisms was identified as central to the healthy and secure development of the project, and to the protection and support for volunteers.

Reflecting on these challenges indicates that the success of semi-independent faith-based organisations is influenced by a number of key external and internal factors. A supportive policy environment is crucial: one which recognises the work of such initiatives and appreciates how it is located within close understandings of local community needs. Organisations themselves need to be established along with formal governance and leadership processes. These provide important protection to the organisation, the faith group(s) which establish them and the volunteers and staff that run them.



6.0 Getting on Together

Since the turn of the millennium, national and local attention has been focused on how we get on together, in our neighbourhoods, towns and cities. This concern has been generated by events such as disturbances on the streets of some northern English towns, evidence of racism and hate crime, and worries about the potential for terrorist activity. Behind these headlines an awareness of the fault lines and divisions in our society has led to policies designed to encourage people of different backgrounds to cohere more positively. Whether differences relate to ethnicity, culture, faith, generation or economic status, government policy on community cohesion and local initiatives to aid the creation of sustainable communities are high on the political agenda.

Public sector agencies have statutory responsibilities in these areas. Local authorities, the police, schools and the primary care trusts are tasked with monitoring national indicators and devising strategies and targets that will contribute to improvements in local well-being. The general public's perceptions about cohesion are obtained through regular surveys where questions are asked about whether there is:

- agreement that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (National Indicator 1) and
- whether there is a problem with people not treating each other with respect and consideration in the local area (National Indicator 23)

The Place Survey 2008³⁴ reveals that 81% of Oxfordshire's residents feel that people of different backgrounds do get on well together, with 24% thinking that there is a problem with people not treating each other with respect and consideration. These are slightly better results than those for the South East region as a whole. Within the County's five district council areas, four are slightly above the County averages and one slightly below. Marginally more people in the City of Oxford believe there is a problem with a lack of respect and consideration.

Data from the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey of worshipping communities show 40 responses (almost 20% of the total) indicating that a 'lack of belonging and support in the community' is a key need of their neighbourhood, whilst 60 groups are already active in work defined as contributing to 'community integration and well-being'. A similar number aspire to make a more positive contribution towards the life of their communities. As suggested in Chapter Four the quality of community life is an important consideration for many worshipping communities whether in village, town or city.

This chapter opens windows on four situations where worshipping communities are engaged with the thinking and practice of working with others in their neighbourhoods, for the benefit of all. Initiatives are introduced, their value is identified and challenges are noted. The cases are as follows:

- Oxford Pastors' Forum
- Oxford Jewish Congregation
- Muslim communities in East Oxford
- Wantage and Grove Street Pastors

The choice is highly selective, based on a desire to present a variety of perspectives. There are both encouraging stories to tell and continuing challenges to face.

³⁴ More Details available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/localareaagreements/placesurvey/>.

6.1 Oxford Pastors' Forum

In addition to the longer-established Christian denominations (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed, for example) with histories spanning the centuries, many others now have a significant presence in Oxford. Following immigration from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s, the New Testament Church of God and the Church of God of Prophecy were formed. The Charismatic and House Church movements of the 1970s and 1980s produced the Oxford Community Church and the Oxford Vineyard. Chinese and Asian Christians set up churches for their own communities often using the premises of established denominations. In addition, further migration over the last decade has added another layer of Christian churches, many independent of formal denominations, yet with supportive informal networks between them.

The Oxford Pastors' Forum is one such network, formally launched in 2009. The Forum has eight member churches who aim to 'share knowledge, pray together and to provoke one another unto good works'. They wish to build unity so that they can be willingly accountable to each other and 'act as a platform to express desires and interests from an independent church group perspective'. These churches have multi-cultural memberships. For example the Christian Life Centre formed in 1996 and meeting in Oxford Road, Cowley has members from 26 different nations. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, meeting at Barton Neighbourhood Centre, has members whose roots are in Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and the Caribbean, amongst others. This church has approximately 100 members who travel from both within Oxford and across the County; it was formed in 2007.

The churches of the Forum see themselves as community churches who wish to respond both to the needs of their own members but also to those of the areas where they worship. The first anniversary of the Forum's creation is providing a focus for learning about practical engagement with their neighbourhoods. This is exemplified by Word Fountain Christian Ministries, meeting in Hollow Way, Cowley, which sets out 'to promote and celebrate the richness of human diversity'. Over recent years its activities have included an economic empowerment day, a parenting club funded by the County Council and play days funded by Oxford Play Association.

They have created a programme for parents and children called Family Arena financed through Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action's Migration Impacts Fund and are in negotiations about a youth mentoring and engagement scheme with a local residents association.

“The Forum has eight member churches who aim to share knowledge, pray together and to provoke one another unto good works.”

As a group, Forum members are developing their connections with public sector agencies and with other Christian networks. The Love Oxford event on a Sunday morning in May each year draws Christians together for worship, prayer and mutual encouragement in contributing to the life of Oxford. In 2009 about 3,000 people from over 40 churches participated in South Parks, including members of the Pastors' Forum churches. Similarly, they supported the Big Breakfast Day on 30 January 2010, organised by Street Prayer where 'Oxford and Oxfordshire people were encouraged to meet in homes and halls to celebrate the love of Jesus Christ, to get to know neighbours and to pray for the area in which they live'.

Value to local neighbourhoods is seen in many of these activities and has considerable potential for further development. Nevertheless, interviewees suggest that challenges are experienced. Some of these churches receive new migrants to the UK. Pastors and senior leaders provide advice and information about housing, employment, schools and citizenship, sometimes struggling to do so. The unseen day-to-day pastoral care, undertaken by leaders in all churches, has extra dimensions for multi-cultural congregations. These pastors also find their time and funding limited and would like to feel that their work is recognised and their community activities supported more openly by public agencies. One pastor comments that the capacity for diverse groups to meet weekly, for worship, is one of the best ways of encouraging cohesion and integration. If the statutory sector wants to reach these 'hard-to-reach people' they might like to take the opportunity to come along on a Sunday morning.

6.2 Oxford Jewish Congregation

The 'pioneering' independent churches discussed above have all been established in recent years. In contrast, Oxford Jewish Congregation (OJC) was founded in 1842, the present Synagogue and Jewish Centre being rebuilt in the 1970s with further work completed in 2004. Over 50 people from across Oxfordshire meet regularly on a Saturday, when all forms of Jewish worship are practised. 'We encompass under one roof Orthodox, Masorti and Progressive forms of prayer, sometimes simultaneously in different parts of the building. The OJC is a "do-it-yourself" congregation which does not employ a rabbi and is responsible for conducting its own affairs and services', relying totally on volunteer activity in order to keep the institution going.

The Oxford Congregation's commitment to encouraging good relationships between people of different backgrounds is premised on an understanding of Jewish history over the generations, and in particular often 'being a minority community surrounded by others who are not necessarily friendly'. Indeed, international terrorism and related anti-Israeli sentiment mean that issues of security remain prominent even today in the minds of those members of the OJC interviewed as a part of this research. It is in this context that the Congregation are thoroughly committed to working with schools, aiding their delivery of the religious education syllabus. It is estimated that approximately 2,000 children visit the Synagogue each year, and through this service they hope to enable children to develop an understanding of both Judaism and the lives of ordinary residents of Oxford who are also Jewish. Participation in the annual Oxford Open Doors event, where members of the public are invited to look around the Synagogue also contributes to these aims and promotes dialogue between communities.

The OJC is keen to build bridges with people of different backgrounds and is fully committed to the recently created Oxford Council of Faiths. The Council is still in its infancy, but it aims to make an impact in local communities. An interviewee commented that, 'I don't think we have got there yet ... especially in relationships between Muslim and Jewish communities at the moment. A good way to build up friendships is to share some activity that is helping others'. The Congregation has also passed a resolution in support of Oxford becoming a 'City of Sanctuary'. The Jewish Congregation is one of five worshipping communities promoting the initiative, a cause which resonates particularly strongly with many local Jewish people who are themselves the descendants of refugees who fled to Britain to escape persecution in mainland Europe in the decade before the outbreak of the Second World War.

“**The Congregation are thoroughly committed to working with schools, aiding their delivery of the religious education syllabus.**”

Challenges faced by the Congregation are common to established Christian Churches: too few people and not enough time. The age profile of the Congregation has a gap amongst those who wish to volunteer in the 30-50 age group. In addition, events and activities initiated by and with other groups are often planned for Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath. Invitations to community litter picks or neighbourhood fairs, for example, often cannot be accepted because of this, despite keenness on the part of the OJC to be involved. However, whilst those participating in the Oxford Pastors' Forum want to be recognised by the authorities and local people for their community activity, the Jewish community has mixed views about its public profile. 'There are times when we would much rather be low key and unnoticed, but equally, you know, we don't not want to be noticed'.

6.3 Muslim communities in East Oxford

The area to the east of Oxford city centre along the Cowley Road has been a place of transition for many decades. First developed over 100 years ago, it initially provided accommodation for working families with services close at hand, whether shops, schools or churches. In the second half of the twentieth century the role of this neighbourhood began to change, a process which continues. It is a place where studentification has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of houses sub-divided for multiple occupation, and non-residential buildings reflect the cultures of different communities from around the world.

The 1960s and 1970s saw male migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh responding to invitations to come to the UK to work. Families followed and houses were purchased in the same streets. It was in this area that migrants from the same places in Pakistan and Bangladesh came to join their cousins. With hard work and targeted savings they provided places for worship and meeting community needs. The City Council made land available for the construction of a purpose-built mosque to the north of Cowley Road on Manzil Way. Shops and other services were established to serve the needs of this new and growing community. Some migrants moved on when resources allowed; some long-term residents did so, as well. White families that had rented in these streets became eligible for new council houses being built in Blackbird Leys and Barton. The United Reformed Church closed and the Anglican and Methodist churches continue to occupy large Victorian buildings with smaller congregations.

It is against this background and the overall growth of the city, its business and especially its universities, that the contemporary character of Cowley Road can be appreciated (see Chapter Three for more details). It is a place of many separate groups of people, with internal networks that are strong, but not necessarily with the people next door. The neighbourhood is diverse, it has many centres; there is little sense of it being one community or of unified leadership. East Oxford Action (2001-2007) was set up by the Council to improve the area, but the Cowley Road Carnival which it established, though popular for a few years, lost much in terms of its impact on neighbourhood identity and good community relations following its move to a static event in nearby South Parks.

People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, first, second and third generations, live here or make use of its services, visiting family and friends. Estimates of numbers are difficult to verify, but the population is suggested to be about 6,000 people. There are three mosques: Central Mosque in Manzil Way, Madina Mosque in Stanley Road and the Bangladesh Education Centre (Masjid) in Cowley Road. In addition there are other meeting places centres established by the various Muslim communities. Different nationality, place of origin, language and theology create a complex set of relations, not dissimilar from the complex pattern of Christian churches. In this sense, the concentration of Muslim worshipping communities in East Oxford is dissimilar to many other minority faith groups who, as noted in Chapter Two, typically travel greater distances to worship than do members of Oxfordshire's Christian communities.

For many Muslims coming to the city, a welcome from established family, friends and fellow believers was a necessity. Such relationships were important for settling and prospering. Social capital that helps people bond with those of similar background, lifestyle and belief has been strong. The challenge now is to develop the desire and the ability to create social capital which bridges to people of different backgrounds and cultures. Whilst some remain to be convinced, others are making strenuous efforts to create the right atmosphere for community cohesion. Participation in the Council of Faiths and the activities it promotes is one indicator. Many services are provided within the Muslim community that could be made available to wider groups of people. There is a growing awareness that for the well-being of these communities there are challenges presented by some cultural and religious practices. In addition, the recession, low wages, criminal activity related to gang cultures and the sale of drugs and the stereotypical attitudes of others provide yet more unwelcome barriers to the formation of communities where people of different backgrounds get on well together and where people treat each other with respect and consideration.

“There is a growing awareness that for the well-being of these communities there are challenges presented by some cultural and religious practices”

6.4 Wantage and Grove Street Pastors

In Oxfordshire County, as revealed by the Place Survey 2008, 14% of the population think that there is a problem with anti-social behaviour in their local area. Nearly 24% think that drunk and rowdy behaviour is a problem, including those in the Vale of White Horse district. The measurement of these public perceptions contributes to national indicators of community well-being (National Indicators 17 and 41).

A newspaper article recorded the first weekend of a new initiative in Wantage town centre, between 10.00pm on Friday night and 2.00am Saturday morning. People in pairs were on the streets wearing dark blue coats emblazoned with 'Street Pastor', arming themselves with lollipops to dish out to those having drunk too much and flip-flops for women struggling to walk in high heels. One of the Street Pastors commented that, 'this is not a bad town, but if we can make it a bit safer then it is worth it. I think we will have a calming influence'. The police commander for the Vale commented to the Herald newspaper that, 'it is an excellent way for members of the community to work in partnership with the police in making town centres safer environments and helping those who are vulnerable on a Friday night'.

Using a model developed by the Ascension Trust, Street Pastors is an interdenominational church response to urban problems, engaging with people on the streets to care, listen and promote dialogue. The model was pioneered in London in 2003 and has seen some remarkable results, including drops in crime in areas where teams have been working. There are well over 100 such volunteer teams operating in the UK.

In Wantage and Grove, initial discussions amongst church leaders, the police, the town council, the district council, the county council and the Vale Local Strategic Partnership started in 2008. Of the 11 churches in the local area, 10 are actively involved in providing volunteers on the streets or as prayer partners. Start-up funding for training and equipment came from the district council, town council and the churches themselves. A commissioning service involved all the church leaders; and active engagement in Street Pastors has renewed relationships across the churches. Initial responses

from the late Friday evening revellers have been very positive and, although it is too early for monitoring data to be available, there is the suggestion that both disturbance and criminal activity have been significantly reduced. The fact that the Street Pastors are volunteers and that they are not authority figures seems to be important to building trust and to changing the atmosphere on the street. The work is seen by these volunteers as a practical expression of their faith, contributing to improving neighbourhoods and helping people get along better together.

“Christians took the church - and lollipops - to the streets of Wantage for the first time at the weekend to spread calm among the late night revellers’, so said the Oxford Mail, 11th October 2009.”

As with other community initiatives, there are and will continue to be issues of funding and making sure that people continue to volunteer. However, those involved see this as long-term activity, until there is evidence that it is no longer needed. One interviewee's comment that, 'the nature of church as independent of authority structures, that the church can do things and be accepted for it by the community that were it to be attempted by an authority body, would not be acceptable', demonstrates that social capital is being created that both bridges between the generations and links between public and voluntary agencies.

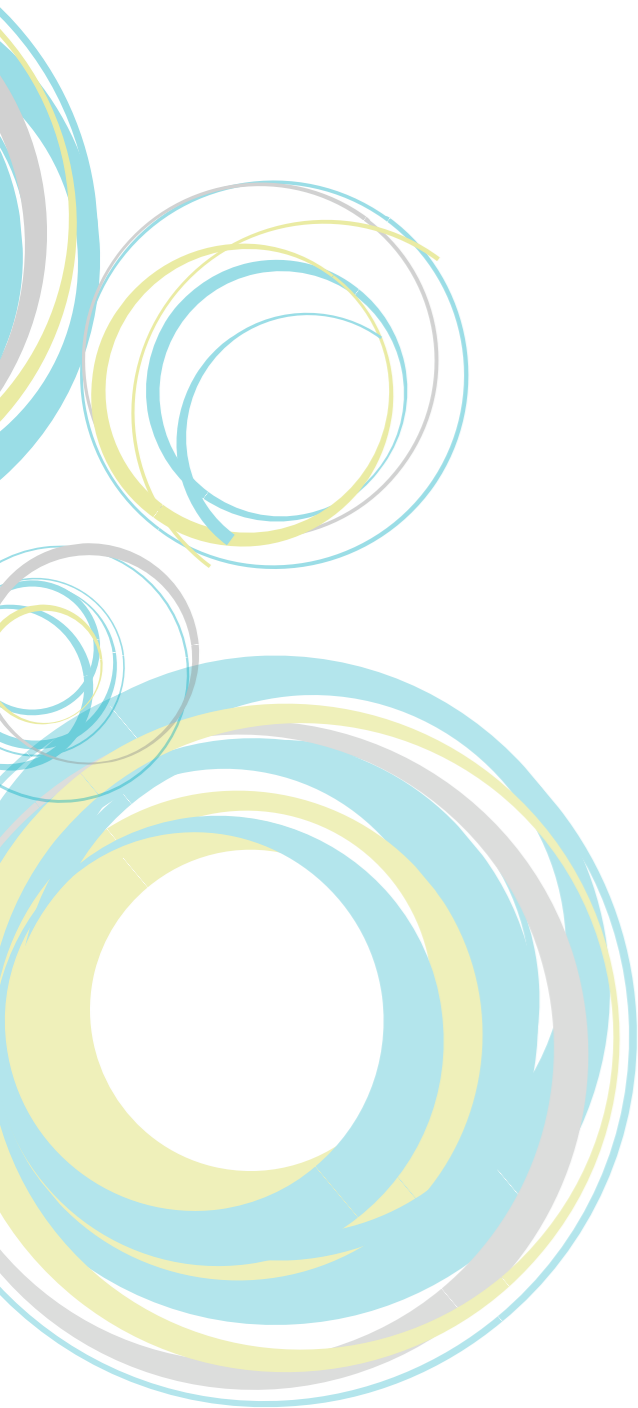
6.5 Community impact

Enabling people to 'get on better together' is a widely held aspiration for politicians of all mainstream parties. It is translated into policies that are monitored through national indicators, applied both nationally and locally by public sector agencies and supported by the voluntary sector, including many worshipping communities. Legal and policy frameworks for community cohesion are a necessary but not sufficient condition for people to get on better together; active grass roots initiatives as part of everyday life in neighbourhoods are essential. Respondents to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey confirm that many, if not all, have a commitment to engage with their neighbours in constructive, community building ways.

This chapter has provided windows onto the situations of four very different worshipping communities in Oxford and Oxfordshire, the challenges they face, the activities in which they engage and the community impact. Drawing upon insights provided by other research on social capital³⁵ this contribution may be summarised under five headings:

- Initiatives are taken to create **new organisations**, such as the Wantage and Grove Street Pastors.
- **Networks** are grown, formally and informally, between people who recognise their value, such as the Oxford Council of Faiths and the Oxford Pastors' Forum.
- **Resources** available to worshipping communities are used in many ways: sometimes finance is provided, often buildings give opportunities for use that benefits the wider community and, regularly, volunteer time and energy makes things happen. All the examples introduced here bring these multiple resources to the community table.
- Most worshipping communities are involved in **delivering services** to members and non-members, many are prepared to get involved in **consultations** with the public and voluntary sector, and some are active contributors to **governance** in their localities, through schools, neighbourhood management and elected councils. The Oxford Jewish Congregation is a prominent example amongst many.
- Finally, the **everyday life** of worshippers provides the care and support that family and friends need in all religious traditions. This necessary bonding can and often does lead to bridging to those in the neighbourhood who do not share the same ethnicity, culture or religion. This is the essence of **citizenship**.

³⁵ Furbey, R., Dinham, R., Farnell, R., Finneron, D. and Wilkinson, G. (2006) Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or dividing? Bristol: Policy Press.



7.0 Faiths and the Public Sector

The Building Better Neighbourhoods survey reported in Chapter Two highlighted some of the benefits that worshipping communities gain through their work with external organisations, as well as a number of barriers which hamper such partnership working. Benefits noted included gaining access to resources and training and being better able to support the wider community, whilst barriers focused on a lack of capacity within worshipping communities themselves as well as perceived suspicion of faith organisations on the part of some public agencies. In exploring some of these benefits and challenges further, four public sector organisations were selected as case studies: Thames Valley Police; Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust; Cherwell District Council; and Hook Norton Parish Council. Amongst all stakeholders interviewed there was consensus that faith sector engagement by public sector organisations was important, and had become an increasing priority over the last five years. In particular, it was suggested that a number of distinct drivers have resulted in such engagement being recognised as ‘part of, but distinct within’ the wider voluntary, community and third sector. In particular, the following 11 factors were considered crucial in this process:

- Personal relationships between people of faith
- Central government policies
- The interpretation of policies locally via strategy and delivery
- The willingness of faith groups to engage with public sector organisations
- A strong history of community activity by faith organisations in Oxfordshire
- Positive experiences of collaboration between faith groups and the public sector
- The breadth of benefits for public organisations and faith groups
- The ability of faith organisations to ‘mobilise’ its communities into action
- Faith groups’ access to wider communities and communities that services find ‘hard to reach’ or are identified as ‘vulnerable’
- Making agencies more accountable to communities
- Increased capacity for operational activity and strategic decision making

All public sector organisations aim to serve the needs of their communities. However, organisations involved in different sectors of public service provision have different policy frameworks. ‘Locating’ the engagement of faith organisations within such policy frameworks has been a major task for public sector agencies. Here we explore the realities of this task for various public sector agencies via a case-by-case approach, examining what policies drive faith engagement, examples of how such engagement is supported by agencies, the benefits of and barriers to such engagement.

7.1 Cherwell District Council

The umbrella policy that has driven faiths engagement at Cherwell District Council is that of ‘local government modernisation’. Essentially, the modernisation agenda encourages local authorities to think and act increasingly as strategic ‘enabling’ organisations in order to meet the needs of their communities. As one stakeholder put it: ‘Well, our job is to engage with people to understand community needs and then that engagement steers the spending of our money’. This involves activities such as:

- Gaining a greater and better understanding of their communities via evidence
- Commissioning of services that best meet communities’ needs
- Improving democratic and engagement processes
- Increasing appropriateness and effectiveness of services
- Improving value for money and efficiency

In Cherwell, willing and able faith groups have been engaged with these policy developments and activities. For example, a newly established Inter-Faith Forum aims to provide the council with a more informed understanding of particular communities and of community cohesion locally.

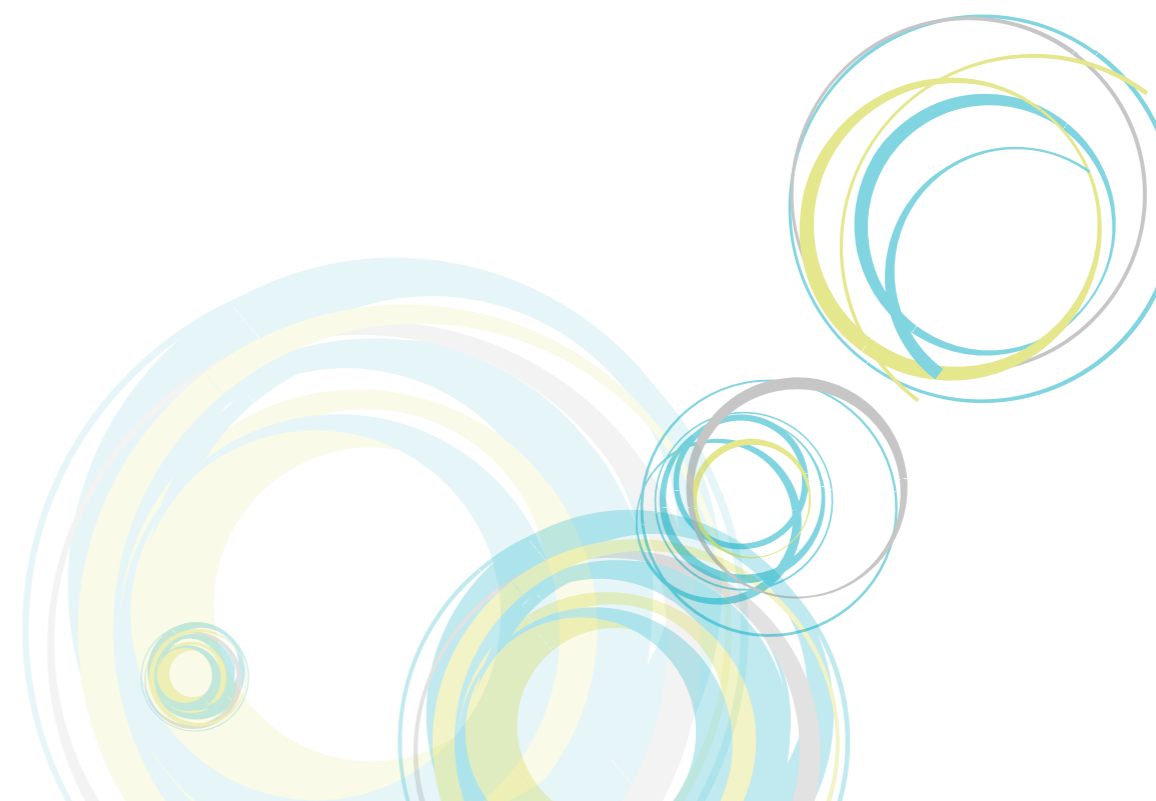
As part of the modernisation agenda, local authorities and their partners have been required to improve their democratic mechanisms and devolve decisions as far as possible. On top of this, there is now a statutory duty to inform, consult and involve communities in the work of local authorities and their partners. In this particular council, faith-based organisations are becoming more involved in influencing decisions, with others, around ‘community cohesion’ and ‘equalities’ activities.

“... the benefit is that we’ll have a level of expertise from that group of people... So the idea for setting up a Faith Forum is almost to hand the “cohesion” agenda on to people that are more expert in it than (with the greatest will in the world) local government officers”

Faith communities have also been increasingly recognised by Cherwell District Council as ‘hugely useful’ in enabling access to more people within the community. In support of this, quantitative data from the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey of faith communities in Oxfordshire suggests that the key reasons for faith group engagement with public sector organisations is to increase wider community awareness, as well as improving wider community involvement in public sector activities. Developing good relations and mutual support and shared resources were also considered to be important reasons for people of faith to engage with the public sector. Interviewees recognised that faith organisations have regular contact and good links with groups and individuals that services find ‘hard to reach’. Thus, the engagement of faith groups in particular, amongst the voluntary, community and third sector ensemble, was seen as crucial to meeting communities’ needs. An example of this (at County level) was consultation with Roman Catholic churches to gather knowledge on the significance of the local Polish population in the area and to inform work with the Polish Association, undertaking community events and providing health and safety advice within building trades: ‘it’s a concrete example of where we’ve engaged with faith communities to find people’.

Within the voluntary, community and third sector, religious organisations were also seen as distinct because of their ability to rally communities in times of need – faith appeared to strengthen the commitment of volunteers. Such mobilisation also links in with the ‘campaigning’ role of many faith groups. However, this campaigning role can create ‘tension’ between worshipping communities and public organisations, because the same faith representatives may be campaigning for better provision or more resources whilst, at the same time, making decisions or even delivering public services directly. Nevertheless, a district council stakeholder suggested that their campaigning activity should be ‘embraced’ as part of the democratic process: ‘And the idea behind diversity is that you bring in different ideas – you get that challenge’.

District councils work closely with a range of local agencies and partners. Many of the issues raised above were common to other local public agencies and these are highlighted below.



7.2 Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust

Within the health sector, specifically the public health inequalities arena, the contribution of the faith groups was also recognised. As one Primary Care Trust (PCT) stakeholder stated: ‘we see the community and voluntary sector as one of the priority areas for partnership work... So I lead on community, voluntary and faith sector, so I think that is a commitment enough to evidence that we are not only entrusted but we are practically doing things to ensure engagement’.

In terms of policy, the importance of the Compact as a set of principles for partnership work between Oxfordshire PCT and its community, voluntary and third sector providers was recognised as a key mechanism for improving engagement with faith groups. A recent example of joint working between faith organisations and the PCT involved the swine flu pandemic. Parish churches were able to rapidly ‘mobilise’ volunteers to ensure that anti-viral drugs were delivered or collected in more remote rural parts of the County, whilst faith organisations assisted the PCT to disseminate information to particular groups in larger towns, through mosques and other faith networks, for example Oxford Council of Faiths. Thus, the faith agencies were able to bolster capacity of public sector agencies at a time of serious capacity constraints.

Oxfordshire was reported, by a number of stakeholders, to have a strong history (dating back centuries) of working for community betterment. This history has enabled public sector agencies and elements of the faiths sector to ‘hit the ground running’ in developing more formal engagement mechanisms:

‘I don’t think it’s ever been seen as unimportant because the one thing about a place like this is, you know, faith communities and rural churches – it’s had that kind of [history]’

Positive experiences of collaboration between faith groups and public agencies has led to such groups often being at the forefront of broader community engagement work. Strategic leadership from people of faith was identified by a PCT stakeholder as crucial to the success of collaborative working:

‘The voluntary sector and faith sector see themselves now, more and more, sitting across the table and negotiating targets, being able to raise their concerns and issues, and being recognised by the public sector that “yes”, you have a role to play’

However, the Primary Care Trust also recognises the barriers to faith groups’ engagement (in the context of wider community engagement). The main issue of concern is that of ensuring the results of consultations are fed back to those consulted – whether there was a positive outcome or not. ‘Closing the loop’ of engagement is seen as an issue that needs to be addressed in collaboration, and might be one factor behind the reported frustration and disillusionment of some faith groups towards partnership with public sector agencies.³⁶ Despite such issues, the antecedent activity of faith communities in building better neighbourhoods has provided a very solid foundation from which to build more formal relationships of engagement and collaboration with public agencies in Oxfordshire, including the PCT. The example of the police will now be explored.

7.3 Thames Valley Police

Within the police, the policy framework around engaging faith groups is arguably the most established. The framework is based around the six diversity strands (age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation and transgender), which gradually developed from recommendations of the Macpherson Inquiry of 1999. Faith is thus located amongst a range of other diversity strands and assumed to be treated on the same footing. However, faith is considered a particularly important strand by Thames Valley Police.

Engagement of faith communities by the police in the City of Oxford has also been driven by the Prevent Agenda.³⁷ Thames Valley Police have identified, and are working with, 24 Muslim communities, including the three largest mosques in Oxford. The agenda has also been widened to take account of communities at risk from far right extremism. Whilst the focus on countering violence is driven by the policies of national government, the police are also interested in supporting other worshipping communities in Oxfordshire. Various officers have attended Diwali and Mela celebrations as part of their community role, to promote a perception of a supportive service, not just a reactive service. Working with particular communities, such as the South Asian communities has also improved intelligence around local issues – one example includes informing families of the risks of burglary whilst a great deal of gold is kept in the house during celebration periods.

³⁶ Farnell, R. (2009) Faiths, governance and regeneration: a contested discourse, in Dinham, A., Furbey, R. and Lowndes, V. [eds] Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices. Bristol: Policy Press, 183-202.

³⁷ Prevent is one of four strands of the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy. The overall aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.

Local Area Agreements have a major influence over the police's community engagement activity – in particular, National Indicator 35 (building resilience to violent extremism) and National Indicator 21 (public confidence in the police).

National Indicator 21 is seen as a key measure of the effectiveness of the engagement activities of Neighbourhood Policing Teams – if communities feel excluded, confidence measures in such areas will decline. Faith is considered to be a key element in this mechanism – Neighbourhood Policing Teams have Key Individual Networks (KINs) which are the main part of Teams' Engagement Plans. These Networks and Plans are cascaded into a Patrol Plan whereby Neighbourhood Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) aim to engage with local faith leaders and other faith organisations (amongst a broad range of individuals, groups and organisations in the wider community) to discuss needs and concerns. Further grassroots examples include local churches being invited to engage with the 'Adopt a Cop' initiative, whereby a local officer or PCSO and local church are encouraged to develop stronger relationships for mutual benefit.

At a more strategic level, Community and Diversity Officers, in conjunction with Police Inspectors, provide support and training around community relations, community tensions and diversity issues (including faith) to Neighbourhood Policing Teams. On top of this, Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) also operate at the strategic and local force level, to provide expertise and advice to the police on matters around community tensions and community relations – the majority of IAGs have faith representatives on board.

The examples above illustrate that faith groups have been heavily involved in collaboration with the police – it was reported that faith was a strand where good progress has been made, and this somewhat bolstered the importance of religion and belief as a strand. At the same time, however, there is recognition that too much attention on one particular community offers the risk that other communities, groups and individuals might feel excluded:

'If we are not engaging with all our groups and they don't know who we are, and yet others do – and they get a disproportionate amount of attention, those that get the disproportionate amount of attention may feel they are being "targeted", and those that don't get anything will feel neglected – and there needs to be that balance that we're liaising with all groups.'

It appears that the strands framework requires agencies to perform an inherent balancing act.

Internally, Thames Valley Police has a team of chaplains who provide confidential pastoral support to Force personnel and their families. The Force chaplains are independent and represent a range of faiths and denominations. This is symbolic of the police's drive to recognise the importance of faith within their own organisational structures:

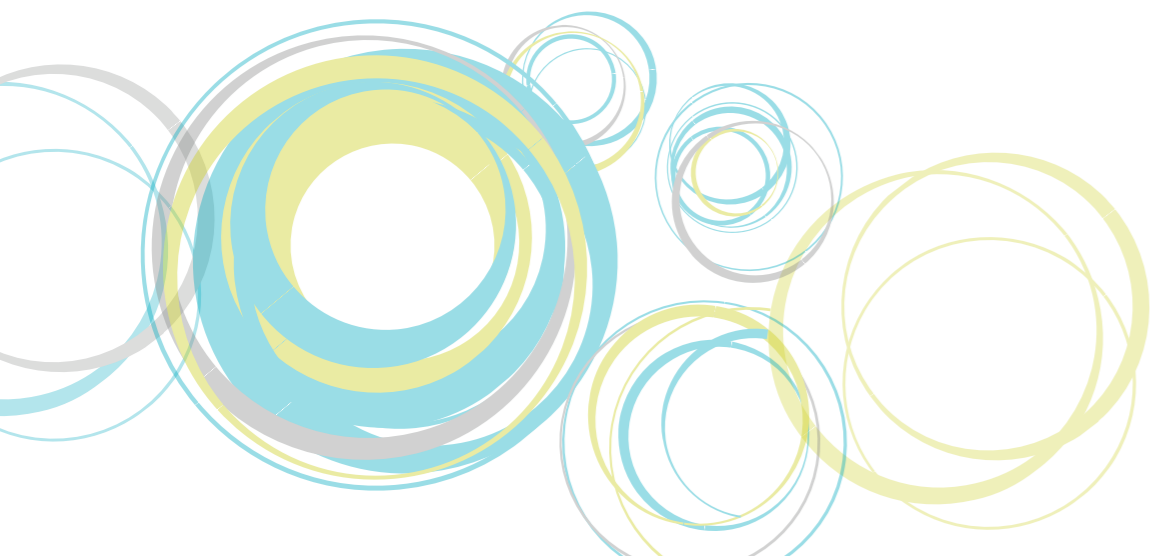
'We understand that, to members of our staff, faith is very important as well in terms of work and life balance. We also have some faith-based staff support networks – we have a Christian Police Association and a Muslim Police Association. So we understand that faith is important to our members of staff as well as an important tool to reach our communities'

The Police stakeholders did not feel that there were any major barriers to engaging with faith communities, and whilst the Prevent Agenda had been challenging, it was now gathering momentum. The only challenge that was recognised was that of ensuring that Neighbourhood Policing Teams were proactive in developing strong relationships with faith organisations as part of their Key Individual Networks, Engagement Plans and Patrol Plans, particularly in relation to consistency across the County. However, a Performance Audit system was in place to monitor this and was currently being used to address this concern.

The three case studies presented thus far in this chapter have been from a more strategic perspective. Now our attention focuses on a more local agency – that of the Parish Council.

7.4 Hook Norton Parish Council

According to quantitative data from the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey, the parish council was the most common public sector agency with which faith communities, almost exclusively churches, collaborated (49.5% of respondents). However, the nature of this engagement with parish councils is clearly informal when compared with relationships between faith groups and the local authorities or the primary care trust. The discussion of the geography of Oxfordshire, in Chapter Three, demonstrates that in small places, the movers and shakers in village life and church life are often the same people. Parish councillors might well be active members of the church congregation as well.



Hook Norton Parish Council did have strong links with its local churches, but these were not formalised in agreements, strategy documents or procedures. As a Parish Council stakeholder pointed out: 'It's all built on individual relationships'. Oxfordshire, like so many other counties, has a strong history of informal community activity undertaken by worshipping communities. In the most resilient communities, this tradition is apparent in the voluntary work and various community events in which worshipping communities are involved – either as a focus for activity or as individuals within community groups and local associations. This has implications for the recognition of faith and the importance of its contribution; at parish council level, personal and individual relationships and networks may fall under the radar of public sector evidence of faith engagement.

Hook Norton Parish Council's functions centre around maintaining the quality of 'amenity' in the village (ensuring street services are delivered including maintenance of local historic and other community assets), as well as discussion of planning applications in an advisory capacity to the District Council. But the Parish Council, via the operation of a local charitable trust (which originated from the church centuries ago to 'help the poor'), also provides a community support function, undertaking and supporting community events, assisting with funding and support for various vulnerable members of the community, and promoting the opportunities on offer to the community. For example, local churches provided lunch clubs for the elderly, play schemes and a crèche for young families, as well as supporting other local groups. Furthermore, many volunteers in the non-church related local community groups were said to be churchgoers. Such activities could arguably be viewed as initiatives which address social exclusion and community cohesion – though, again, they are not formally labelled as such and may not be recognised as such either. In terms of flexibility and formality, this loose network can respond rapidly to events, and the churches are enabled or 'allowed' to do things that public agencies are not – such autonomy thus brings further benefits, particularly for those who may be reluctant to involve public agencies, for example.

No formal partnerships have been developed by this Parish Council – flexible, informal networks with local churches were considered to work well – the Parish Council stakeholder could not identify what added value there would be from attempting to formalise such arrangements. When asked about the risk to such networks of key individuals leaving the area, the stakeholder stated that, in this village at least, the turnover of the population was low and therefore there was stability and a critical mass of people to prevent the networks from such risk. The Parish Council has strong links with the District Councillor and County Councillor for the area, as well as regular contact with the Leader of the District Council and Leader of the County Council.

The campaigning role of some faith groups has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Interestingly, the Parish Council is also an advocate for community, lobbying the District and County Councils (and other services) to ensure that services are delivered and to the correct standard (street services, for example). In this sense, the Parish Council and the churches both have a role to challenge the various public agencies in Oxfordshire, holding such agencies to account.

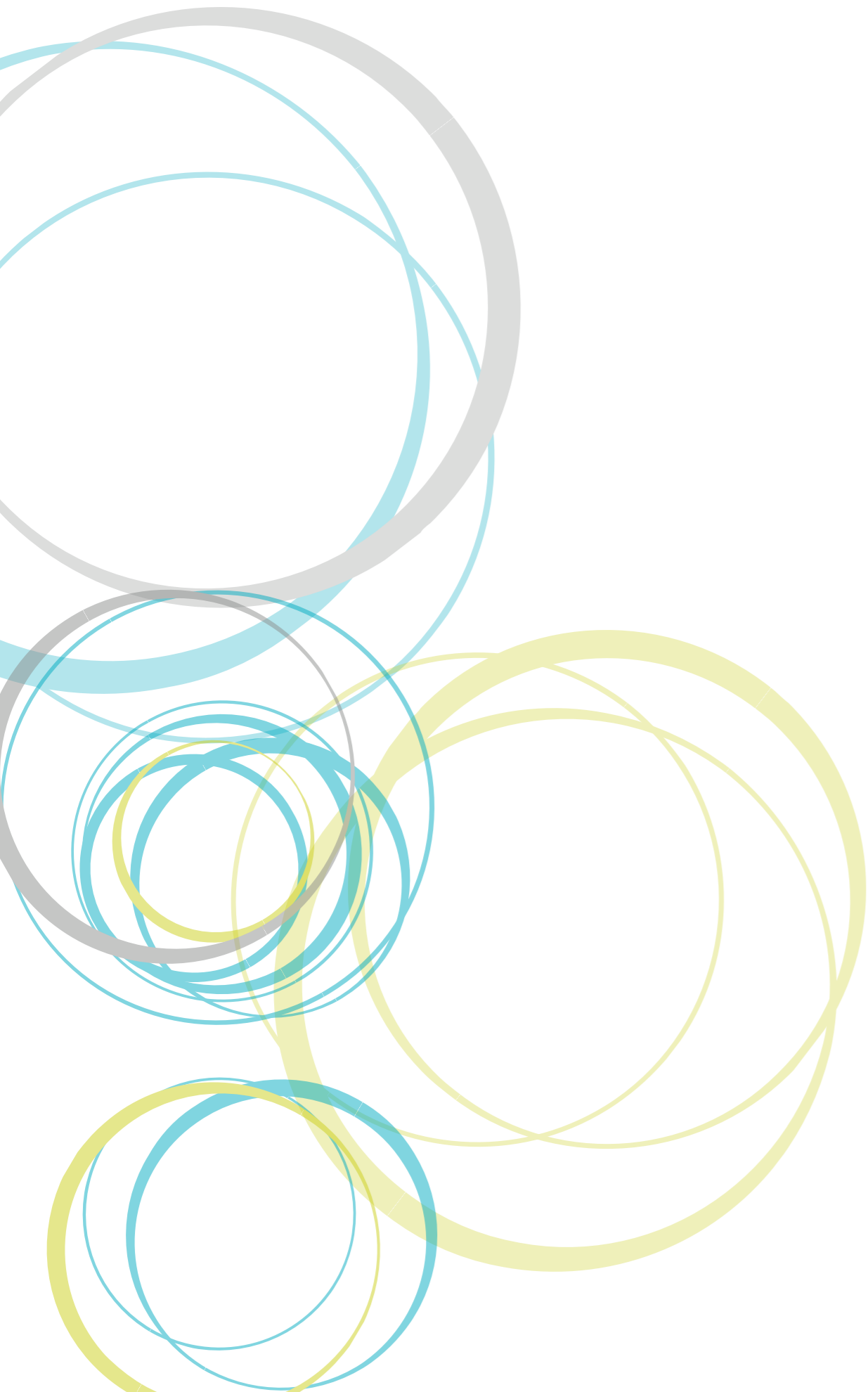
Hook Norton Parish Council engages fully with local faith groups, though not through formal partnerships – it is characteristic of parish councils elsewhere with its complex web of relationships between active local people.

7.5 The future of engagement with faith communities

The combination of drivers and factors outlined above (illustrated through the case study examples) has resulted in an Oxfordshire where worshipping communities are increasingly seen as crucial to the work of public sector agencies, within the broader context of engaging communities. The findings above suggest that local interpretation and implementation of central government policy is vital to establishing an environment where this engagement is able to flourish. Oxfordshire appears to be well placed to maximise the potential of such opportunities – the public sector recognises the unique contribution that faith organisations can provide to achieving common goals. People of faith appear willing and able to take on such responsibilities in order to benefit the wider community.

The different policy frameworks around engaging communities are a major challenge for public sector organisations. However there is clearly common ground, at both strategic level and operational levels, for greater co-ordination of engagement across different public sector organisations. The Duty to Involve is already encouraging Local Strategic Partnerships to develop a more organised approach to public sector engagement with their communities – and faith organisations clearly have a major role to play, as is already recognised and illustrated by the above.

Engagement can result in better outcomes, but engagement costs – in a situation where cost cutting is anticipated there may be threats to this activity. This engagement agenda could be heavily affected by the UK's fiscal position. As a district council stakeholder commented: 'engagement makes business processes take a lot longer. You have to plan it in, and it costs money and it costs time.' Building better neighbourhoods will be impeded if the current momentum for community engagement is lost. People of faith and local public sector agencies need to come together to face such a challenge.



8.0 Summary and Implications

The research presented in this report utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods to map the activities carried out by faith groups or attached to places of worship across the County and to build an understanding of the nature of the contribution of worshipping communities to Building Better Neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. **This work has identified a number of contributions to be celebrated and disseminated and other areas which present challenges for those involved in local governance.** This chapter draws summary conclusions and begins the task of identifying the practical implications that follow.

8.1 Summary

Evidence from both the quantitative Building Better Neighbourhoods questionnaire survey presented in Chapter Two and subsequent qualitative case studies (presented in Chapters Three to Seven) indicates clearly that **worshipping communities of all faiths make a substantial contribution to the task of building better neighbourhoods** across the County of Oxfordshire. People of faith and their institutions make this contribution in various ways. Attending worship is just one of them.

Of particular note is the scale and scope of work that worshipping communities undertake with children and young people in their neighbourhoods. The ways in which the needs of young people are addressed can be

both formal and informal, and ranges from involvement in schooling to the organising of youth and sports clubs and provision of mothers and toddlers groups. Moreover, for some worshipping communities such work is supported through paid employees and represents a quantifiable investment in young people by Oxfordshire's faith communities. At the same time, worshipping communities' aspirations for the future suggest that there is still work to be done in terms of maximising their contribution towards community integration and community well-being. This is an important challenge.

The contribution of paid employees and volunteers which is made by worshipping communities to the task of building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire is considerable. Based on the 192 worshipping communities responding to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey alone, this report estimates a financial contribution through paid employees in excess of £8.5 million each year. On top of this, these 192 communities also give almost 12,500 hours each month in external-facing volunteering. Even at minimum wage, this effort equates to a further £850,000 annual contribution to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire. The fact that these calculations are based on just a proportion of the worshipping communities in the County means that the actual total value of the annual contribution of all worshipping communities through employees and volunteers is even greater. **Aside from people, worshipping communities in Oxfordshire also provide valuable resources in the form of community facilities at their places of worship.** Respondents to the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey identified 221 rooms or halls available for use by the wider community. These are particularly concentrated in the most rural parts of the County and represent a further way in which worshipping communities are able to help support the building of better neighbourhoods in village locations.

Alongside the provision of buildings for use by the wider community, the Building Better Neighbourhoods survey also shows that **environmental projects of various kinds are increasingly important to worshipping communities across the County.** Such projects are often associated with green space attached to places of worship and provide potential as an educational resource for children and young people. The degree to which this potential is understood by worshipping communities and statutory agencies addressing new environmental challenges is unclear and, as such, building links between environmental projects, schools and other agencies is a challenge for the future.

A further way in which worshipping communities contribute to building better neighbourhoods in Oxfordshire is through the tourist economy. The 192 worshipping communities that completed a questionnaire report almost 180,000 visitors to their places of worship each year. The highest numbers of visitors are recorded in the Cotswold areas to the west of the County and in the City of Oxford itself. The economic value of places of worship as visitor attractions is very difficult to quantify but, based on just £10 expenditure per person per visit, amounts to between £1.7 and £1.8 million each year for these 192 worshipping communities alone.

Finally, worshipping communities are working successfully with a range of external organisations and agencies. A number of benefits stemming from these partnerships are identified as well as barriers to their furtherance, most often connected to the limited capacity of worshipping communities themselves. However, it is also clear that many of the activities undertaken by worshipping communities in support of their local communities map closely to the policy agendas of statutory agencies also working to build better neighbourhoods. As such, encouraging the building of mutually beneficial partnerships will help agencies to meet their own targets as well as to recognise, value and support more fully the important contributions being made by worshipping communities.

8.2 Implications and challenges

In addition to mapping and quantifying the activities of worshipping communities in Oxfordshire, through the use of detailed qualitative case studies, the research presented in this report also exposes the complexity of the County's faiths sector and highlights a number of important challenges for those involved in local governance, especially local authorities and parish councils, the wider voluntary and community sectors, and worshipping communities themselves. This section of Chapter Eight uses the framework provided by the five case study themes (Chapters Three to Seven) to underline this complexity and to pose key challenges for the future.

8.2.1 Geography

Exploration of the activities of worshipping communities across different location types (i.e. small villages, market towns and the city) reveals a complex picture both in terms of the paucity of perceived boundaries between faith groups and the wider community, the extent of linkages between worshippers and centres of agency or power, and the nature of activities being undertaken. **Recognising and understanding these important variations across space is a challenge for public agencies seeking to build relationships with worshipping communities.** However, it is also crucial that such agencies appreciate that, despite differences of expression, at a deep-rooted level, the activities of faith communities typically share common motivations or drivers and can be mapped to one of five general categories identified by Farnell:³⁸ networks of informal mutual aid within worshipping communities; welfare services for faith group members; provision of these services to others in the local neighbourhood, often in response to perceived need; local partnerships created to maintain or extend service provision; and activities that address matters of power and politics including, for example, through campaigning.

³⁸ Farnell, R. (2001) Faith communities, regeneration and social exclusion: developing a research agenda, *Community Development Journal* 36(4), 263-272.

8.2.2 Volunteering

Qualitative exploration of volunteering amongst worshipping communities in Oxfordshire provides clear insights into the reasons why people of faith volunteer. These motivations are complex but include: personal experiences of need; seeking an outlet for individual skills and abilities; attentiveness to people in need; and a strong sense of community belonging. Alongside these factors it is evident that, for many, volunteering is a clear expression of faith, and that the structure of worshipping communities prompts and facilitates opportunities for volunteering. This includes **internal volunteering** which, though not measured through this study, helps to maintain the structure, viability and functioning of worshipping communities, and **external volunteering** directed to the task of building better neighbourhoods. The quantitative benefit of external volunteering in terms of the value of hours volunteered each year by worshipping communities in Oxfordshire has already been noted and perhaps warrants greater public recognition from those agencies that benefit, either directly or indirectly, from the activities performed by volunteers. **A further challenge for those agencies seeking to encourage voluntary activity is to recognise that specific faith motivations for volunteering by worshipping communities are not an obstacle to the delivery of beneficial outcomes.** It is also important to note that the pool of volunteers provided by worshipping communities is limited and that the burden of volunteering can often fall upon a core of particularly active or committed individuals.

8.2.3 Faith-based organisations

The development of independent, or more often semi-independent, faith-based organisations may be viewed as an extension of worshipping communities' activities to build better neighbourhoods, and according to this research is relatively widespread in Oxfordshire. Such organisations can often take the form of social enterprises and provide vehicles through which worshipping communities' efforts to address particular needs can be made sustainable, and (if desired) through which growth and greater impact can be achieved. At the same time, however, **a challenge for all semi-independent faith-based organisations of this type is to establish effective governance and leadership mechanisms in order that their potential may be fully realised.**

Whilst such organisations often find themselves working in partnership with public agencies, faith-based organisations benefit from their independence from the statutory sector. Specifically, they are free to determine priorities and ways of working according to their own values, free from the constraints of an ever-changing public sector policy and resource context. Such independence enables organisations to adopt holistic approaches and to meet the needs of communities in the ways which they see best. **A challenge for public sector agencies, therefore, is to recognise the value of such contributions even when they are not seen as aligning to the latest policy objectives.**

8.2.4 Getting on together

As noted elsewhere in this report, enabling people of different generations, backgrounds and cultures to 'get on better together' is a widely-held aspiration for politicians of all mainstream parties and an important element in building better neighbourhoods. Exploration of the ways in which worshipping communities in Oxfordshire are contributing to this agenda has shown how people of faith are making a positive contribution by providing care and support to others both within their own faith tradition and in their wider neighbourhood. **Alongside such good neighbourliness, worshipping communities are instrumental in creating organisations and networks and providing resources and services which help to build bridges within and between people of different faith and people of none.**

8.2.5 Faiths and the public sector

Interrogation of the relationship between worshipping communities and the public sector suggests that there is much to be gained from co-operation on both sides. Whilst worshipping communities are rightly resistant to the notion of incorporation by government, their activities and objectives can gain support and added impact through partnership working. In this sense, co-operation and collaboration helps to create a vibrant civic culture in which the roles and contribution of worshipping communities in building better neighbourhoods are fully acknowledged and valued. At the same time **it is important that challenges to partnership working are acknowledged. Often these relate to the limited capacity of individual worshipping communities** and the need to support faith communities in accessing resources made available to the wider voluntary sector, including via commitments embodied in local agreements such as, for example, the Oxfordshire Compact. **On occasions, however, they can also relate to prejudice against the faith-based nature of activity undertaken** by worshipping communities, and consequent failure to fully recognise synergy between faith-based activity and the aspirations of local strategies and plans.

8.3 Conclusions

This research explores the contribution of faith communities to the ongoing task of building better neighbourhoods. The conclusions reached and their implications are summarised above, but questions are raised which are of broader significance. Over the last decade national government and more local public sector agencies, both elected and appointed, have chosen to talk about engagement with communities, groups and organisations differentiated by religious commitments as 'engagement with the faiths sector'. The notion of a 'faith sector', whilst a helpful shorthand, can lead to unwarranted and unintended assumptions about the nature, structure and character of faith in the United Kingdom.

This research points to some of the limitations of this conceptualisation for the development of policy and practice in relation to public engagement with religious bodies. The reality, demonstrated here, is one of complexity. This complexity of belief, organisation and practice is seen not just between the different religions but also within them.

Within Christianity, for example, there are different denominations with varying priorities. Social, economic, ethnic and historical contexts add to this diversity. The evidence suggests that on some occasions, in meeting local needs, there may be greater symmetry between religious and non-religious groups, than groups within the same religious tradition. Recognising this complexity is a first step towards better engagement.

Secondly, national government has placed considerable emphasis on developing processes of engagement that bring together people of differing religions through inter-faith co-operation. This is exemplified in the Government's policy statement, Face to Face, Side by Side. Government support for a national 'Inter-faith-week' and for the creation of inter-faith forums, both regionally and locally, has contributed momentum to these processes. As seen in Oxford this has already produced valuable outcomes and has considerable potential for the future.

However, this study demonstrates the significance of initiatives to build better communities that originate from within particular faith traditions and, indeed, within particular churches, mosques, synagogues and temples. Energy for building networks across faiths, within faiths and within specific styles of faith is clear from this study, but there are many examples of single groups, large and small, deciding that they can make a difference to the neighbourhood, and getting on with it. Public sector agencies engage with faith communities along many lines and are not limited to just working through inter-faith channels, as this research has shown.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that there are considerable numbers of people in Oxford and Oxfordshire for whom their religious faith is an essential part of their identity. They meet regularly and, as a consequence, provide one of the most easily accessible **Customer** groups for public sector attention. Relevant and improving services come from close contact with the views of customers. **Are there unrecognised opportunities here?**

The study has catalogued something of the projects and activities provided by faith groups in helping to build better neighbourhoods. Some just get on with this, others work together and some work alongside public sector agencies. The latter are already **Partners** with the public and voluntary sectors in the continuing task of building better neighbourhoods. **Is there potential for more partnering?**

Finally, the study reveals that people of faith and their organisations are full and active members of what might be called civil society. They practice their faith in public and by their actions demonstrate their willing participation as **Citizens**. They have a place at the table of public policy making, without preference, alongside every other citizen who is committed to building better neighbourhoods.

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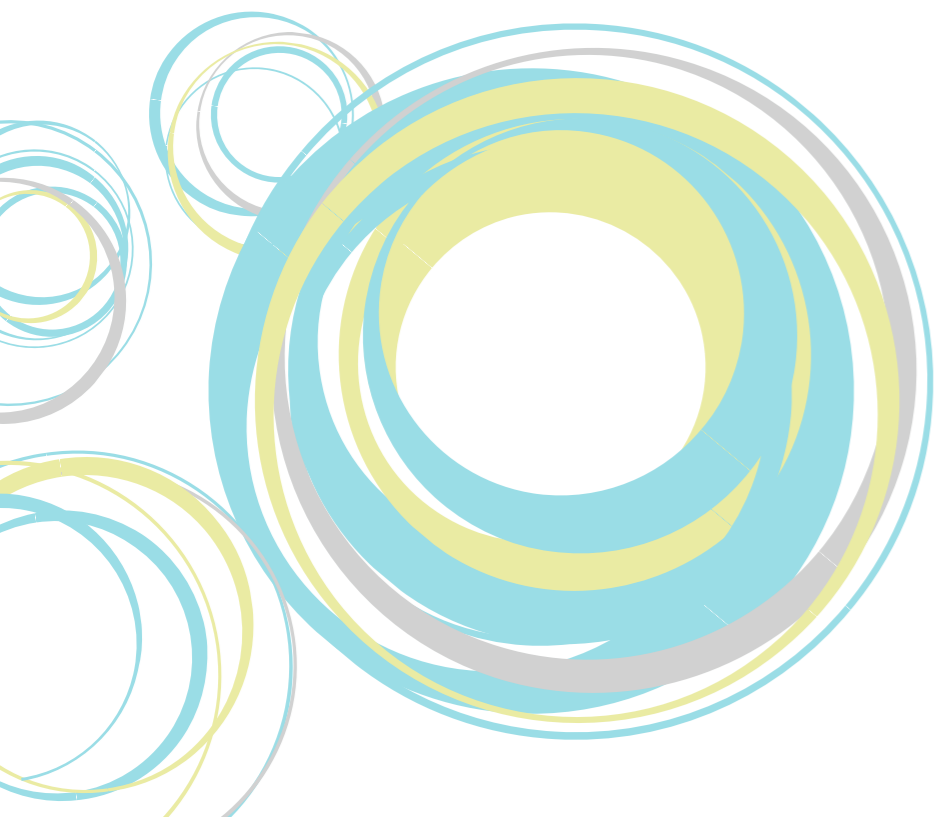
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Appendix Two: Contributors

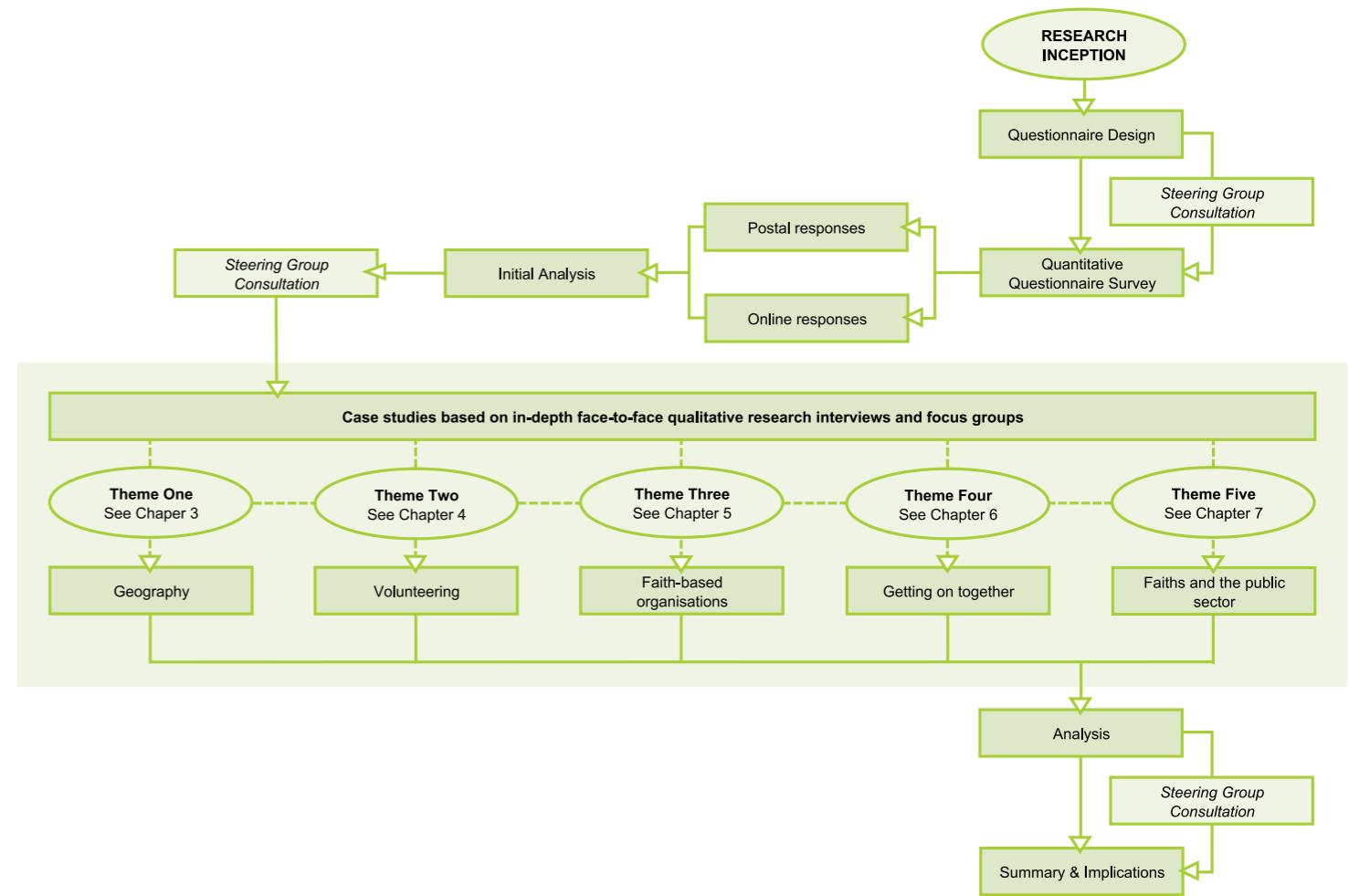
The research team would like to acknowledge and to thank all those worshipping communities and individuals who gave of their time in contributing to this research. In addition to the 192 worshipping communities from across Oxfordshire which responded to the Building Better Neighbourhoods questionnaire (see Chapter Two and electronic Technical Appendix available from <http://www.oxnet.org.uk>), the following individuals are amongst those who made important contributions to the research either by giving of their time to be interviewed, participating in a focus group or providing strategic guidance through the OSCA Project Steering Group.

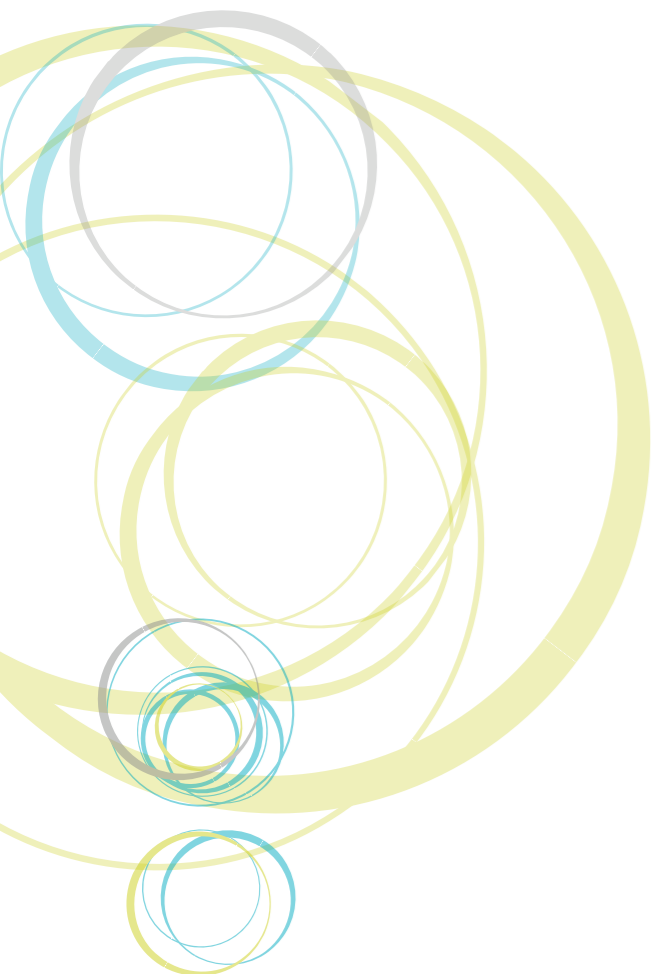
| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| • Jay Andrews | Thames Valley Police |
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| • Gill Crippen | Regional Minister, Southern Counties Baptist Association |
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| • Colin Fletcher | Bishop of Dorchester |
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Appendix Three: Research Framework

The diagram below provides details of the methodology or research framework applied here.





Appendix Four: Research Team

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David is a Senior Research Fellow at Coventry University and Deputy Director of the Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration. He is a registered PRINCE2 practitioner and has undertaken research and evaluation assignments for a wide range of public and third sector organisations. David's research interests span the social and economic dimensions of sustainable regeneration and include, for example, the outcomes of, and policy responses to, economic restructuring, and the contributions of faith communities to both urban and rural regeneration.

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Fran is an experienced social and theological researcher with wide experience of working with academic, voluntary and community sector partners in the areas of: gender relations; community relations; peace-building; equality; human rights; ethnicity and racism; sexual identity; social diversity; and care and disability. Fran has particular expertise of working with the churches sector, for example her 2008 research report, Faith in a Plural Society, explored the response of Northern Ireland churches to minority populations of ethnicity, religion and sexual identity.

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Hannah is a Senior Research Assistant at the Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration, Coventry University. She has worked on a wide range of research projects on social and economic aspects of regeneration. Her recent research has focused particularly on: the role of faith communities in regeneration; the evaluation of area-based regeneration initiatives; participatory approaches to research; the contribution of local food networks to communities; and food security.

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Kevin is a Research Fellow specialising in sustainable communities and neighbourhood renewal. He joined the Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration in 2007 and has 15 years experience of evaluating neighbourhood regeneration programmes and projects, including for example: New Deal for Communities programmes, Sure Start Children's Centres and faith-based initiatives. Kevin also delivers training in 'Working with Communities' as part of a distance learning programme for regeneration practitioners.

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Richard is Professor of Neighbourhood Regeneration at Coventry University and a member of the Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration. Over the last fifteen years Richard's research has focused on neighbourhood regeneration and community development, and in particular the relationship between public sector agencies and faith communities. Richard is currently a member of the Charity Commission's 'Advisory Group on Faith' and Canon Theologian of Coventry Cathedral. In addition, he is a former board member of the Church Urban Fund and former Chair of Midland Heart Housing Association.

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