

Update for Town/Parish Transport Representative – July 2023

Community First Oxfordshire – Who we are and what we do.

CFO's mission is **Supporting communities to find solutions to their planning, housing, social action, and service needs** - we have a focus on healthy and resilient communities in Oxfordshire. We support communities/neighbourhoods in community development engagement and strategies (such as Community Led Plans), community transport schemes, we support volunteers to run their community shops and community halls with advice and funding support. We support groups interested in Assets of Community Value (CFO is a keen supporter of community ownership and stewardship - ACV is part of this). We run a community bulk oil buying scheme with volunteer coordinators for households reliant on oil (610 members) - we are looking into affordable alternative energy for households reliant on oil. All these actions cannot happen without local people giving time freely to get these actions off the ground, and so our main focus is supporting volunteering (both informal and formal) and the community action projects that develop.

CFO is also heavily involved in placemaking (also called place-shaping) in new and existing communities such as Heyford Park and Woodstock - essentially if new housing development is coming this is a way to get the best from new development for the existing and new communities. Linked to this, we run a town planning consultancy service which includes Neighbourhood Plans and we are the hosts of a support service for community-led housing, called Collaborative Housing.

We are part of a network of similar organisations which are nationally represented by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) – we are committed to raising the profile of rural challenges and strengths, but we work with all communities (and communities within communities) whether they are in Banbury or Oxford as well as the many villages and market towns. CFO is a member of NAVCA and NCVO who in turn provide the national voice for Local Infrastructure Organisations and the 100,000s of volunteers that are involved in community actions and projects.

CFO PTR update:

1. Community transport sector in Oxfordshire

The many community transports schemes in the county are doing relatively well despite the shortage of volunteer drivers – especially minibus/bus drivers who need a D1 (the minimum entitlement) on their driver licence. The other area affecting minibus services are the £2 set fare, which does not cover community minibus schemes, therefore some passengers feel out of pocket when they have to pay the full community minibus fare and not the £2 flat rate. This in turn, affects the minibus schemes reliant on stable passenger numbers. In terms of volunteers, we are raising the profile of these issues and looking at ways that we can help address some of the challenges locally by working on a 'vision' for volunteering with OCVA – a report will be published later this month.

Good news story: Our Bus Bartons successfully applied for funding via the National Lottery for two electric minibuses! <https://www.communityfirstoxon.org/electric-minibuses-are-coming-to-our-bus-bartons/>

2. CTA UK – AMAP Campaign (A Fair Deal for Volunteers)

CTA is leading the AMAP Campaign, calling for the UK Government to increase the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) which is the maximum level at which volunteer drivers can be reimbursed without any impact on their tax obligations or benefit entitlements. The AMAP of 45p per mile has not been reviewed since 2012. For more info: <https://ctauk.org/amap-campaign/>

3. Ukrainian funds for CT schemes (existing and new schemes)

CFO, on behalf of the local authorities has a small pot of funds available for community transport schemes (car and minibus) to help promote their schemes with Ukrainians and offer transport where possible. There is also a small pot of funds for new transport initiatives which help Ukrainians to access work and leisure activities. 15 schemes have been funded so far (between £500 and £3000). Please contact CFO if you are interested in applying.

4. ANPR at the JR (and traffic filters)

A system was created to manage the 100s of volunteer drivers to park at the JR without paying parking charges, however they are trialling a better system to run this 'White List' of volunteer drivers via an online portal, which in theory should assist volunteers to update their information themselves on the day. A similar system could be used when the traffic filters are piloted in late 2024. Access into Oxford remains a challenge.

5. Community Minibus Network meeting

CFO will be holding an online community minibus network meeting on Monday 17 July at 10 am – this for existing or up and coming community minibus schemes to come together and discuss issues and opportunities. If you are interested in joining, then please get in touch with me.