

The Leys Community Insight Profile (Update 2024)

Summary

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1 Introduction

This summary of findings is an update to the 2022 Community Insight profile focused on two wards – Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook, which due to shared community infrastructure were combined into a joint profile named ‘The Leys Community Insight Profile’.

The [Oxfordshire Director of Public Health Annual Report 2019](#), highlighted 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) and are most likely to experience inequalities in health. Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook both contain areas that fall within this range.

To better understand the needs and priorities of these communities, Oxfordshire County Council’s Public Health team undertook a programme of work with local partners to create a community insight profile for the Leys, to provide an in-depth understanding both of local health needs as well as supportive community assets. The community profile used local data and community insight that is based on an asset-based community development model (ABCD).

The profile aimed to:

- Understand the experiences of those living in the Leys in relation to health and wellbeing
- Outline the health outcomes and the factors which can influence these and bring this to life through the voices of the community
- Provide information and recommendations for local organisations, stakeholders and residents working together to improve health and wellbeing in the area

Note that this report is a summary and highlights the key findings from two in-depth reports:

1. *The Leys Community Insight Project Report* by Oxford Hub published in 2022,
2. *Community (data) profile of the Leys* (Census 2021 update) compiled by the Public Health Intelligence team of Oxfordshire County Council.

This summary contains quotes from Community insight gathering in 2022, these quotes have been edited to aid readability and identifiable information has been removed to anonymise the respondents.

With thanks to Oxford Hub for the work published in 2022, Oxford City Council, the Leys Community Health Development Officer and the Leys Community Insight Profile Steering Group who have continued to support the work to action the recommendations of the community insight through the Leys Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

2 Profile update

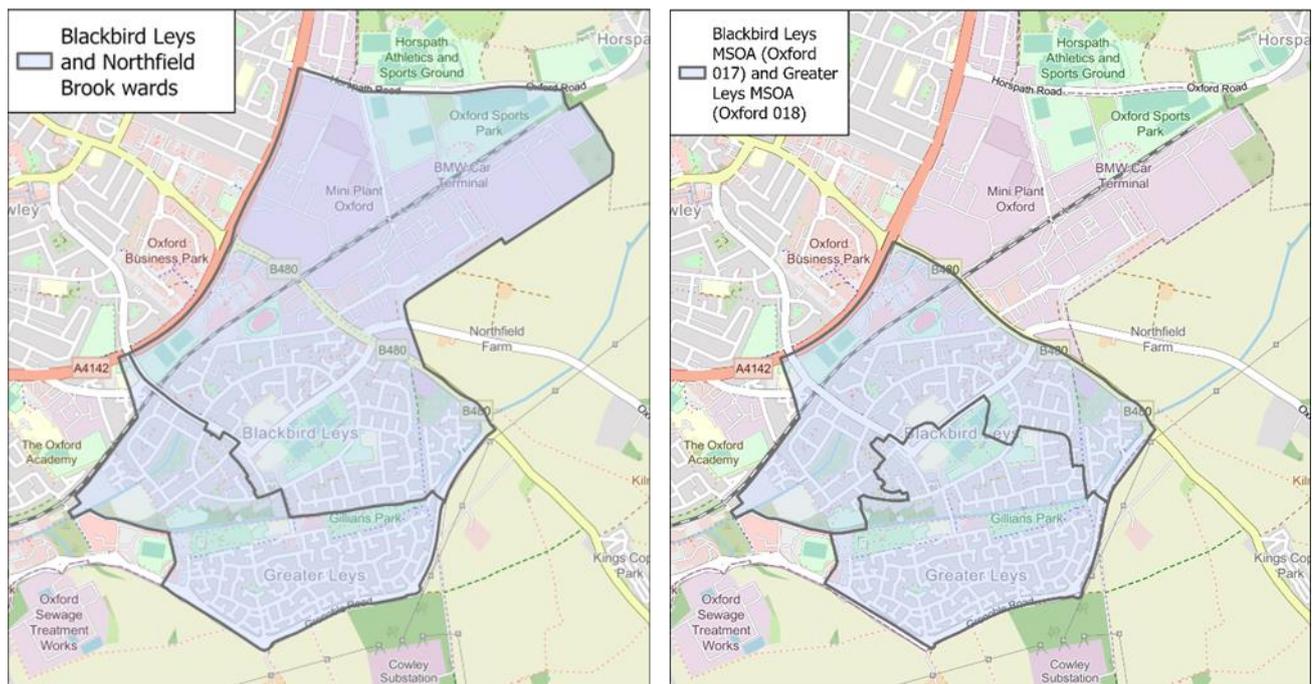
An initial Community Insight Profile for the Leys was published in September 2022, combining both the quantitative data and the qualitative community insight into a single report. To aid accessibility, improve accuracy and create consistency with other profiles, an updated data pack has been developed to incorporate Census 2021 data, as well as this summary report which highlights findings from both the 2022 Community Insight report and the 2024 community data profile report.

3 Location

Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook are wards in the south east of Oxford. Northfield Brook ward is often referred to as Greater Leys, and both areas together are referred to as 'the Leys'.

The original community insight report focused on the two ward boundaries, Blackbird Leys ward and Northfield Brook ward to make up The Leys, as shown in the image on the left below. For the purposes of statistical comparison, the refreshed data report uses the Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOA) boundaries shown in the image on the right - Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys MSOAs, due to 2015 boundary changes in the Blackbird Leys ward. This is explained in further detail in the data profile report.

Figure 1 Maps showing wards and MSOAs covering the Leys



Mapping by Oxfordshire County Council

4 Summary of population and health data

Population and housing

- According to the latest population data (mid-2022 population estimate), the Leys has a resident population of 13,434. The Leys has a higher proportion of young people and a lower proportion of older people (aged 65+) compared to the Oxford and Oxfordshire averages.
- Between the 2011 and 2021 Census surveys the total resident population in the Leys increased by 3%. This was well below the percentage increase across Oxford district (7%) and Oxfordshire (11%).
- The change in the Leys population by broad age band between 2011 and 2021 shows a large decline in the younger population aged 0-19 years.
- The Leys is a more ethnically diverse area compared to Oxfordshire as a whole, with a higher proportion of residents from a Mixed and a Black ethnic background.
- The proportion of social rented housing in the Leys was over double that of the averages for Oxford and Oxfordshire.

Health and Wellbeing

- The two areas making up the Leys had much lower averages of Life Expectancy at birth than the Oxfordshire and England averages.
- Out of 32 local health and wellbeing inequalities indicators, the Leys has 21 indicators in total ranked as worse than the England average including:
 - Emergency hospital admissions for self-harm, where Greater Leys MSOA had a rate that was over three times higher than the Oxfordshire and England averages.
 - Emergency hospital admissions for all causes, where both areas in the Leys had the two highest rates in Oxfordshire.
 - Emergency hospital admissions for COPD, where both areas in the Leys had a rate that was over two times higher than the Oxfordshire and England averages.
- There were 17 health and wellbeing indicators where either one or both MSOAs in the Leys area, had the highest rates in Oxfordshire compared to all MSOAs in the county.
- The rate of adults receiving structured drug and alcohol in the Leys was over double that of the Oxfordshire average.
- Blackbird Leys had the highest prevalence of children classified as overweight (including obesity) in Year 6 in Oxfordshire, a rate which was statistically higher than both the averages for Oxfordshire and England.
- The prevalence of obesity, diabetes and depression among patients registered at the Leys Health Centre was well above that of the average for Oxfordshire.
- A higher proportion of adults in The Leys were (self-declared) long term sick or disabled according to the 2021 Census.

Employment

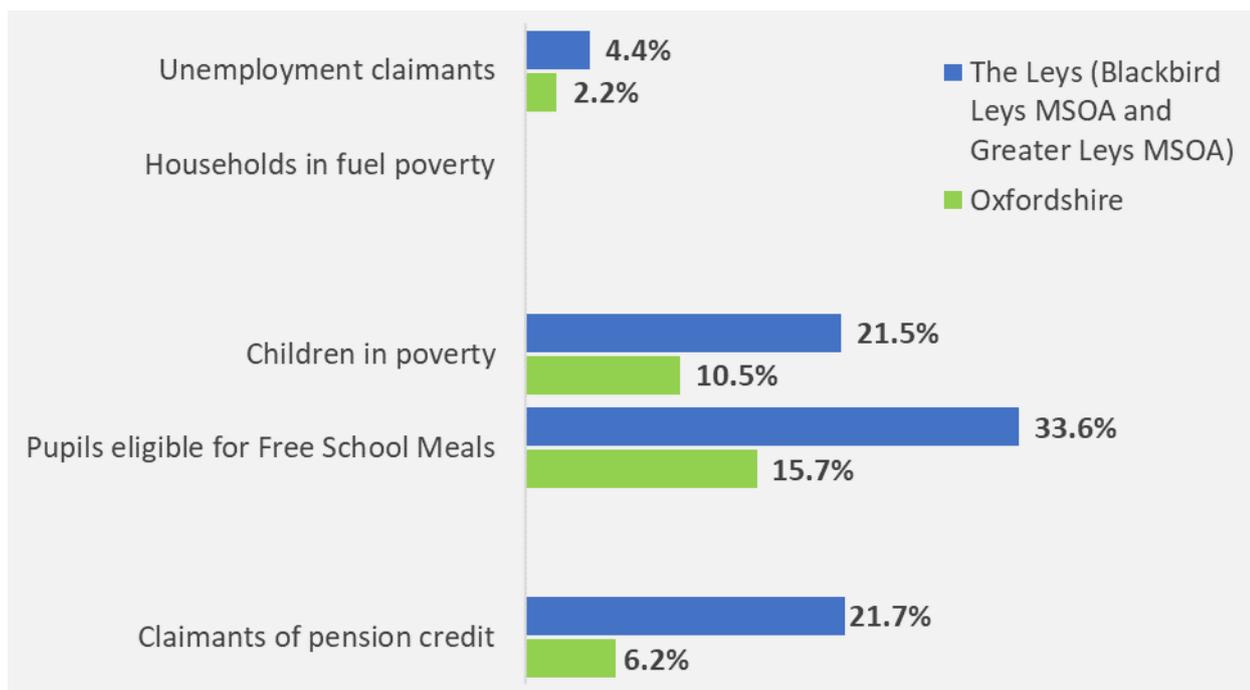
- The Leys has a higher proportion of residents looking after their home or family (therefore not in employment) compared to the Oxfordshire average.
- A much higher proportion of workers in the Leys were in the (generally lower paid) caring, leisure, process, and elementary occupations compared to the Oxford and Oxfordshire averages.

Poverty and deprivation

- The Leys has a much higher proportion of households classified as deprived according to the 2021 Census than the averages for Oxford City and Oxfordshire.

- The proportion of residents claiming unemployment-related benefits in the Leys was double that for Oxfordshire.
- A similar proportion of households in the Leys were estimated to be in fuel poverty to that of Oxfordshire.
- Rates of child poverty and pupils eligible for free school meals in the Leys were each over double the average for Oxfordshire.
- The rate of older people in poverty and claiming pension credit in the Leys was three and a half times that of the Oxfordshire average.
- According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), five LSOAs within the Leys are ranked within the 10% most deprived areas in England for the education, skills and training IMD Domains.

Figure 2 Indicators of low income¹



Crime and community safety

- The overall rate of crime in both Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys was well above (worse than) the Oxfordshire average.

Living environment

- Mapping by Natural England shows that the Leys has several public parks, play space provisions, allotments and a sport facility. The area is also surrounded by small areas of woodland however these appear to be inaccessible according to Natural England.
- A study on greenspace-deprived neighbourhoods, identified three neighbourhoods (LSOAs) within the Leys area as high priority neighbourhoods meaning that they are both

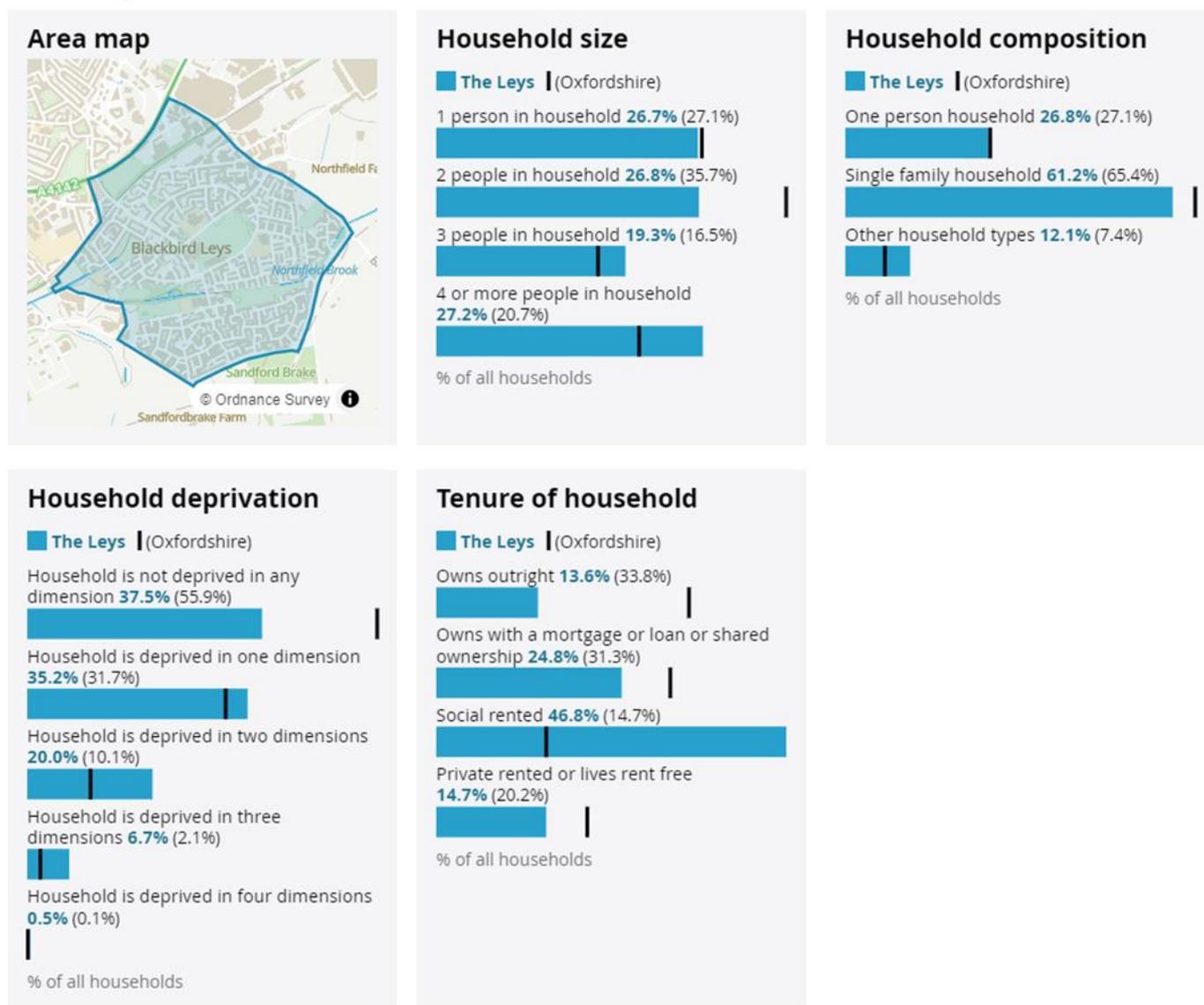
¹ Sources: DWP claimant count March 2024 from nomisweb.co.uk, Claimant count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, based on administrative data from the benefits system; Sub-regional fuel poverty data 2022 Dept for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, fuel poverty refers to households living in a property with fuel energy efficiency rating of band D or below as well as households which after paying their energy bill to heat their home the residual income is below the official poverty line; Child poverty from DWP statXplore, children aged 0-15, 2022/23; FSM from January 2024 pupil census, Oxfordshire County Council; Pension credit from DWP statXplore as of August 2023.

relatively socio-economically deprived and have relatively poor provision of local, accessible greenspace.

- The findings from an Active Neighbourhood Scan undertaken in Blackbird Leys, highlighted a number of assets within the area which enable residents to be active, these included: Gillians Park, outdoor gyms in Blackbird Leys Park and Gillians Park and Spindleberry Nature Reserve. However, the report also highlighted a few barriers to being active in the area including litter, lack of lighting and poorly maintained paths.
- There are three pharmacies and one GP practice located within the Leys area. The whole area is within a 20-minute walking time to the nearest GP practice and also within a 20-minute walking time to the nearest pharmacy site.

Figure 3 Census 2021 profile for the Leys

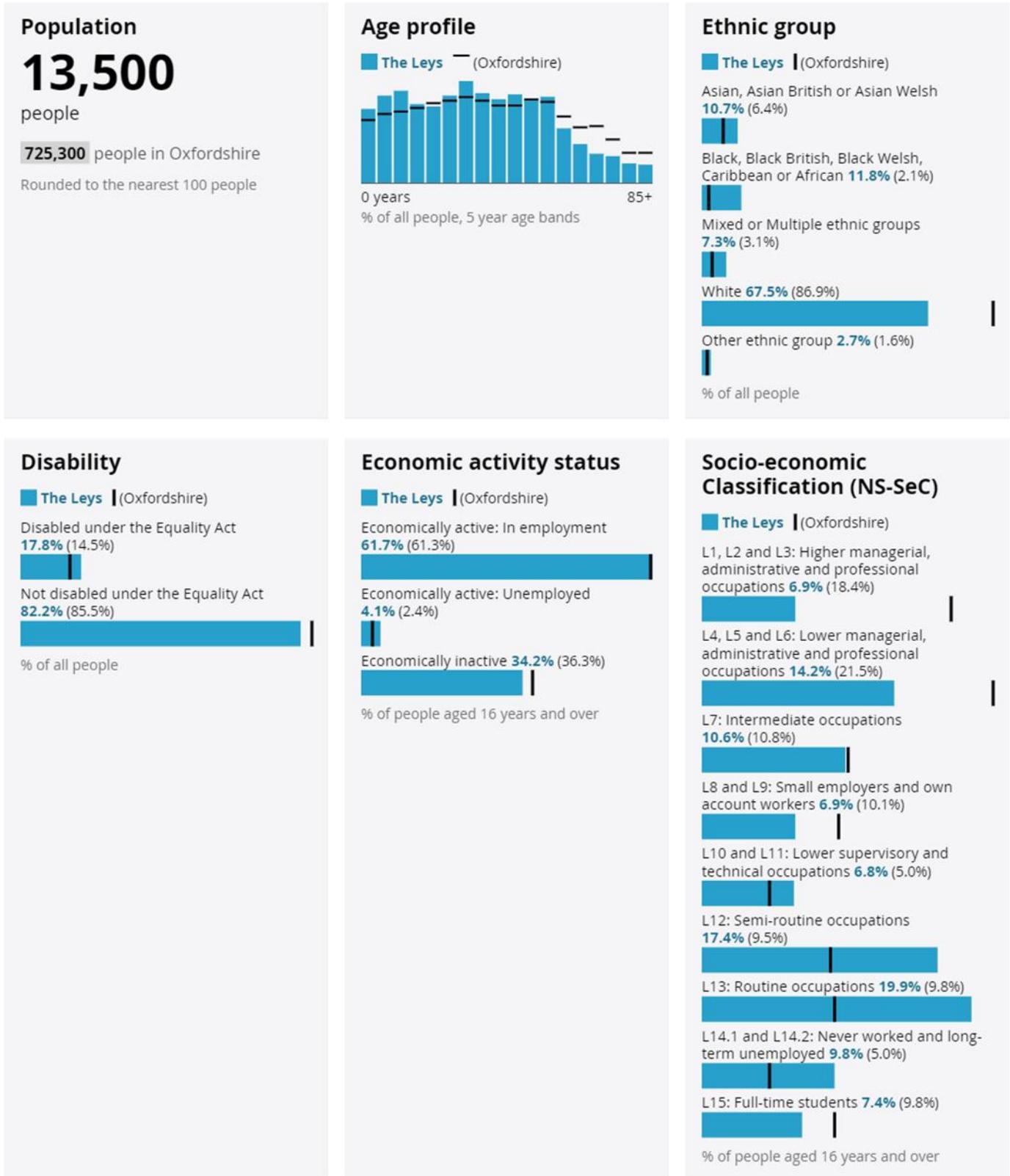
The Leys



From [Build a custom area profile - Census 2021, ONS](#)

Figure 4 Census 2021 profile for the Leys continued

The Leys



From [Build a custom area profile - Census 2021, ONS](#)

5 Community assets and local groups

As part of the insight gathering process in 2022, Oxford Hub conducted a local asset-mapping exercise. A range of assets were identified which support and enable the health and wellbeing needs of the community within the Leys. Amongst these were activities based at Blackbird Leys Community Centre, Leys Pool and Leisure Centre and Agnes Smith Advice Centre.

A map of assets, including local venues and a table of local groups as of 2022 can be found in the *Leys Community Insight Report*. At the time of publishing this update, there is a regeneration project underway in Blackbird Leys where significant improvements are planned for the area affecting a selection of the community assets including the community centre which has since been demolished.

6 Community Research

6.1 Research methodology and sample

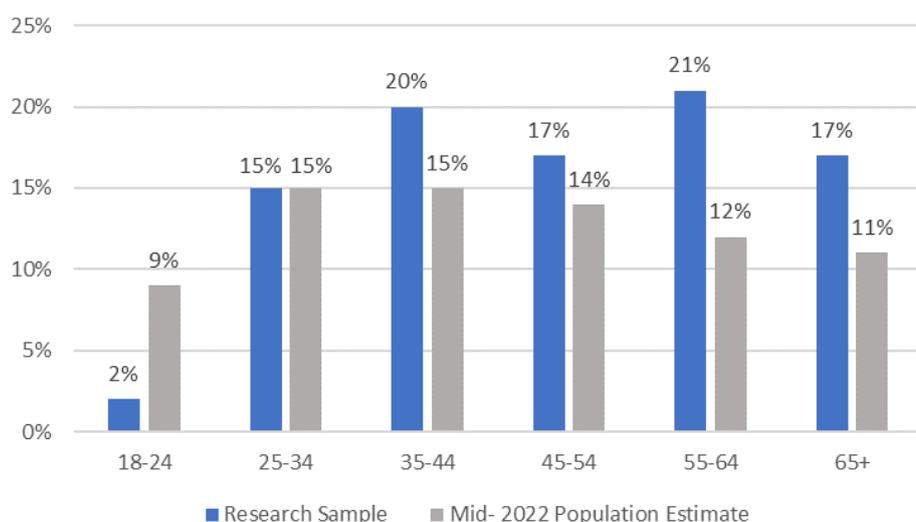
Oxford Hub used a mixed methods approach to achieve both reach and depth in their community insight research from June to July of 2022, which included:

- An online survey completed by 201 respondents
- 54 in person surveys through a combination of drop-ins
- 4 focus groups attended by 30 participants
- 8 one-to-one interviews with local residents

The majority of online and in-person survey respondents were from Greater Leys (52%) and a slightly lower proportion were from Blackbird Leys (48%).

When looking at only the age profile of the survey respondents, young people were underrepresented, and older people were overrepresented. This is based on the mid-2022 population estimates of the Leys resident distribution. For example, only 2% of survey respondents fell within the 18-24 age group, lower than the percentage of residents aged 18-24 years in the Leys (9%). However, 21% of survey respondents were in the 55-64 age group, much higher than the percentage of residents who make up this age group in the Leys (12%).

Figure 5 Proportion of residents of the Leys insight survey research by broad age vs split age of total population of the Leys MSOAs



Research sample = 255 survey respondents in total (excluding interview and focus group participants). ONS mid-2022 population estimates; ONS mid-year population estimate for the Leys MSOAs from Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).

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According to the Census 2021², the Leys MSOAs have a higher proportion than Oxfordshire of residents from a Black ethnic background and this group was well represented in the survey.

- When comparing survey respondents and Census 2021 data for the Leys MSOAs, 10% of respondents to the survey were from Black ethnic backgrounds and Census 2021 data shows that 11% of the Leys resident population aged 18+ were of a black ethnic background³.

6.2 Living in The Leys

Participants reported many positive aspects of the Leys as an area to live, citing access to green spaces, affordable housing and sense of community.

- 39% of survey respondents (base=255) stated access to green spaces as something they liked about living in the Leys
- The majority of survey respondents (79%) agreed it was easy to access green spaces
- 38% of survey respondents highly valued being near to family and friends, particularly those aged 18-34 (47%) and males (44%)

"I've lived in Blackbird Leys all my life. I love it here, all my family live here and its great community spirit"

"Exercise machines in all the parks all free so very good"

What survey respondents liked about living in the Leys varied by location:

- 26% of those in Blackbird Leys chose 'sense of community' compared to only 16% of those from Greater Leys
- Access to services was chosen by 37% of those in Blackbird Leys and 21% in Greater Leys
- 'Affordable housing' was chosen most often by those from Greater Leys (34%) compared to 19% from Blackbird Leys

Crime and safety

Residents highlighted crime and safety as a prominent concern, frequently mentioning drug problems and anti-social behaviour. This is reflected in the 2022 police recorded crime data which shows Blackbird Leys MSOA and Greater Leys MSOA ranked as 7th and 16th respectively out of the 86 MSOAs in Oxfordshire on overall rate of crime⁴.

- Several interviewees reported that they did not feel safe at night
- Conversely, around half (47%) of survey respondents agreed that they felt safe in the Leys neighbourhood
- The presence of gangs and drug dealing were also mentioned as a concern by several respondents
- The lack of trust between the police and local residents came up as a point of discussion by a number of respondents

² ONS Census 2021 table TS021 from <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk> for the two Leys MSOAs

³ Note that for the purposes of this comparison, only the Census 2021 18+ age group ethnicity data has been used, as the survey was limited to reporting only the 18+ age banding.

⁴ [Community safety Oxfordshire | Insight Crime Dashboard](#) with data from police.uk

"I do not feel safe living in [tower block], however I have previously private rented in 2 different properties in greater leys and grew up in [street] in greater leys and felt safe."

"I've never felt safe here I'm always on my guard. There's so much anti-social behaviour."

"Drug dealers and addicts on every corner, in every park. I can't go out at night! People causing problems every day"

Sense of belonging, diversity and identity

The Leys seems to have a high level of social and cultural diversity that fosters a feeling of connection and community. However, some of the main issues that were identified were the lack of social integration and limited opportunities for certain demographics.

Challenges of racism, ableism and other forms of discrimination were explicitly mentioned by some participants:

- A need was expressed for more opportunities and activities accessible to a range of demographics
- Some respondents commented that there is a lack of social integration between different groups in the Leys and their sense of community was mostly limited to intergenerational residents

"There are two tiers when it comes to people who live in Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys. There are people who have always been here, who are like generationally integrated – into the elders and everybody. And then you have the likes of me who have come along – none of that – it doesn't matter what happened, because you don't know about it. And we're like a totally different breed who just – it's kind of like, we live side by side, but our communities don't always mix."

Raising a family

Respondents gave different answers when they were asked about bringing up a family in the Leys, pointing out the benefits of community connections but the difficulties of having few services.

- Concerns were raised about a lack of adequate support for young people's education
- Focus group participants mentioned that racial disadvantage exacerbated the difficulties faced by young people and families, such as facing prejudice in the education system and being at risk of getting involved in criminal activities.

"It's ok but when they grow up, I'm scared of the crime rate and them not having enough to do"

Reputation and community voice

The community insight revealed issues about the Leys' perceived bad reputation and a feeling of being overlooked and disregarded with local opinions not being heard.

- Some respondents criticised the negative reputation of the Leys in the media and were keen to stress that the situation is more nuanced than this
- Several participants felt a sense of resentment against professionals from outside the area and projects being imposed on the local area and seeing no impact

“Reputation that precedes - it is not how it is”.

“There's very little here. We are all barely living. Living hand to mouth regardless of employment status. But none of you actually care about us. This is just a tick box exercise.”

Built and natural environment

Challenges around affordable housing, including a lack of adequate social housing were raised. According to the Census 2021 data, the proportion of social rented housing in the Leys was over double Oxfordshire and Oxford averages.

- Those living in socially rented housing reported challenges such as lack of choice, challenging neighbours and neglect of commercial spaces
- In interviews, young people expressed concerns around the cleanliness and appearance of the area
- Interviewees also commented on the lack of space in the Leys and challenges of the planned development putting additional pressure on the local infrastructure

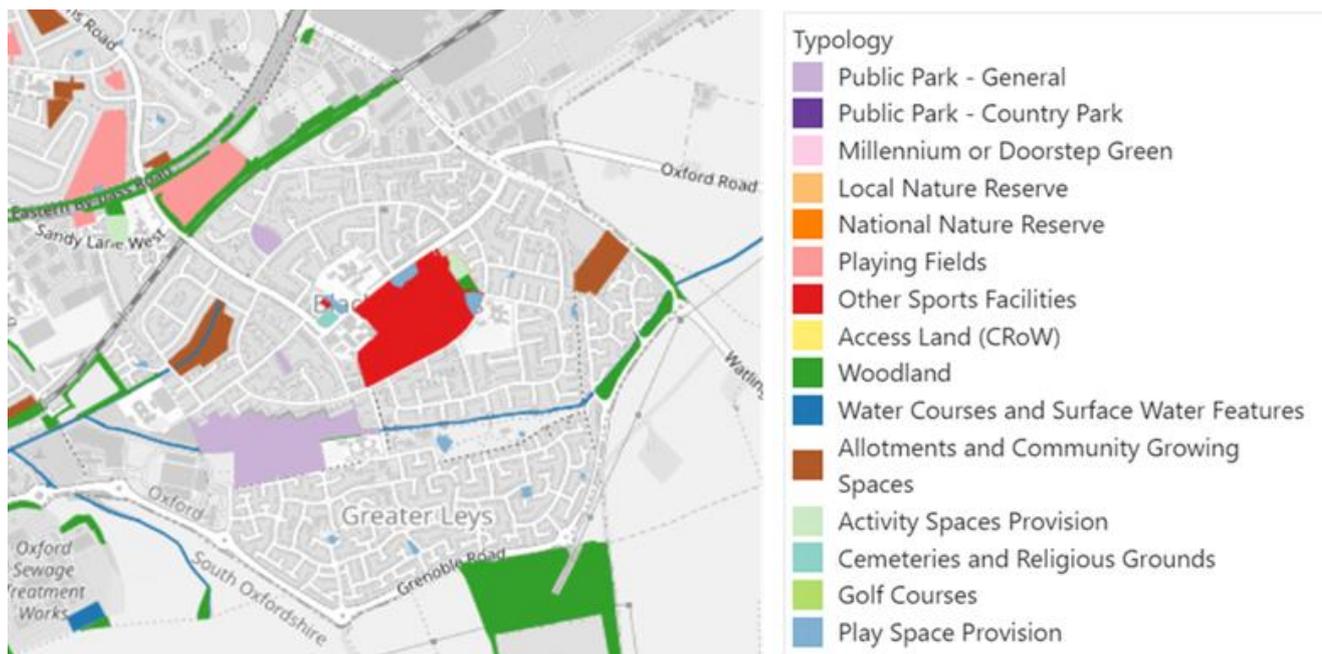
“It's too squashed ..., there's not enough space in that particular part of Greater Leys. It's almost like we are in the middle of the development.”

“The area is scruffy, the walls need cleaning it's looking rough and it makes you feel that way about living here”

Mapping by Natural England shows that The Leys has several public parks, play space provisions, allotments and a large sport facility. The area is also surrounded by small areas of woodland however, these appear to be inaccessible.

In December 2023, the Active Neighbourhood Scan conducted in Blackbird Leys by Active Oxfordshire identified a number of strengths allowing residents to be active in Blackbird Leys, such as outdoor gyms and Fry's Hill cycle paths. However, there were also barriers including litter and fly tipping, lack of lighting, poorly maintained paths and lack of safe crossings.

Figure 6 Natural England mapping of Green and Blue Spaces in the Leys area



Source: [Green Infrastructure Map \(naturaengland.org.uk\)](https://naturaengland.org.uk)

6.3 Health and Wellbeing

Participants were asked about both the assets and challenges influencing health and wellbeing in the Leys.

When asked about the main factors supporting resident's health and wellbeing, survey respondents (base=255) selected:

- Friends and Family (61%)
- Green Spaces (57%)
- Healthcare services (44%)
- Leisure Services (30%)
- Local Businesses (24%)
- Community Groups (17%)

Residents' views on what supported their health and wellbeing varied by demographics and location, compared to general responses.

- Those living in Greater Leys were more likely to feel that leisure services (34%) and local businesses (29%) make a big difference to their health and wellbeing
- Green spaces were more valued by males (62%) and those aged 35-54 (63%)
- Most of those living in Blackbird Leys reported that community groups (68%) did not affect health and wellbeing
- Friends and family (67%) scored more highly than average for those aged 18-34

Access to healthy food

Participants and survey respondents were asked how far they agreed that they could access fresh, healthy food in the Leys.

- Around half of survey respondents (52%) agreed that fresh, healthy food was easily accessible
- However, fewer residents in Greater Leys (47%) felt it was easy to access healthy food
- Respondents identified cost as the main barrier to accessing healthy food, alongside the convenience and locality of fast food

"Oh well I can't afford to eat. Oh but there's two for one bag of chips for a quid. Here you are kids, have that."

"Fresh veg is overpriced in local shops (not their fault) but there is no direct public transport to Lidl, Tesco or more distant Sainsburys, only to Cowley Centre"

Poverty statistics for the Leys indicate a much higher percentage of primary and secondary school pupils in the area eligible for free school meals than Oxford and Oxfordshire averages.

Access to activities

Respondents reported access to activities as both an asset and a challenge to health and wellbeing in the Leys.

- The majority of participants (67%) reported that they felt it was easy to be active in the Leys
- Several respondents identified enjoying the free outdoor exercise equipment in the parks
- Some of the barriers to getting active included cost, limited classes available beyond football or dance, difficulty accessing the leisure centre, wait lists, childcare responsibilities and public visibility of the Leys pool

“Interesting that swimming isn’t even mentioned although we have oxfords biggest pool. It’s like it was never meant for local residents to use as it is prohibitively expensive.”

Access to healthcare

Many respondents expressed their frustrations with the challenge of getting access to healthcare, but several also noted they were pleased with the standard of care.

- Comments from participants centred on the difficulty of getting an appointment particularly with a GP but also dentists and CAMHS
- Respondents pointed out the difficulty in accessing Oxford’s hospitals or services by public transport
- Several residents also mentioned the lack of access to mental health support
- However, half of survey respondents (50%) agreed that it was easy for them to access healthcare

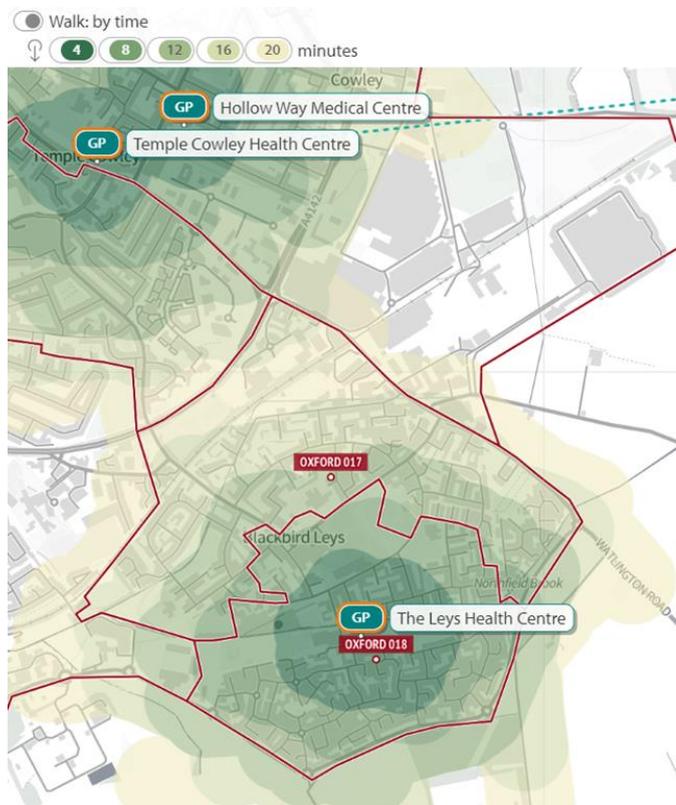
“Doctors clinic is too small to cover the leys area resulting in prolonged waiting times for appointments”

“No direct bus routes from blackbird leys to JR or Churchill hospital”

The map below shows the locations of GPs in the surrounding areas of the Leys and the estimated walking time to these practices.

There is one GP practice located within The Leys MSOAs area and several located in the surrounding areas. The whole of The Leys area is within an estimated 20-minute walking time to the nearest GP practice.

Figure 7 Map showing estimated walk times to GPs serving the Leys area



Source: [SHAPE tool](#)

Cost of living

Respondents mentioned the impact of the higher cost of living on health and wellbeing as a major challenge. The data supports this, as the Leys had more people claiming benefits for unemployment and more children in poverty than Oxfordshire averages.

- Around one third of survey respondents chose cost of living as something they disliked about the Leys
- Those from Greater Leys were more concerned about cost of living (37%) than those from Blackbird Leys
- Participants frequently spoke about the challenges of insufficient wages and qualifications for social housing

“There's very little here. We are all barely living. Living hand to mouth regardless of employment status.”

Impact of COVID-19

When asked about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents highlighted several impacts on health and wellbeing including mental health, relationships, sense of community and provision of services.

- Nearly half of online survey respondents (44%) reported their health and wellbeing worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- The effects of COVID-19 were higher amongst those aged 18-34 (63%), females (48%) and those living in Greater Leys (49%)
- For some participants, both their own health and the services supporting them were affected

“Isolation, poor fitness, poor mental health, lost purpose and connection with the outside world, migraines, mobility issues”

“Lock down affected my child's mental health, we are waiting far too long for our first CAMHS appointment”

6.4 Residents Suggestions

Participants offered many suggestions about how to improve their health and wellbeing and enhance the quality of life in the Leys. A short overview is given below, and further detail is contained in the full Leys Community Insight report.

Healthcare

- More face-to-face GP appointments
- Spreading awareness of mental health
- Drop-ins or clinics for oral health in schools

Healthy food

- Education in schools about healthy eating
- Cookery classes for all ages
- More independent shops
- Needs-first community larder
- Improving economic access to food

Green spaces

- Cutting grass and roadsides
- Ensuring green spaces are not removed due to new developments

Getting active

- Improvements to the Leys Leisure Centre
- Incentives for getting active
- Bike repair drop-ins
- Updates to play parks
- Nature trails in green spaces

Opportunities and community spaces

- Life skills training
- Mentoring scheme for young black and mixed-race men
- Multicultural centre
- Community centre co-produced and run by a community association

Communication

- Reviving the Leys News
- Better communication between different stakeholders
- Digital community page

Residents vision for the Leys

- More facilities and local shops
- Implementing flowers and trees
- Fun areas where kids can be involved in mindful activities

7 Recommendations

The table below briefly outlines some of the recommendations that are discussed in greater detail in the Community Insight report from 2022.

Table 1 Summary of recommendations

Theme	Recommendation
Community Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regeneration of the community centre in the Leys incorporating local voices
Access to Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide accessible information to members of diverse communities• Build on existing work with social prescribers• Explore opportunities for improved access to medical services beyond the Leys• Engage with local health providers to identify solutions to challenges faced by residents regarding access to health centre services• Involve the community when reviewing healthcare services
Getting Active	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity providers and local partners to consider approaches to increasing activity in females

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners to collaborate on physical activity projects to avoid duplication
Leisure Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share findings with Oxford City Council to help support review of the leisure facilities Explore solutions to challenges regarding access, cost and cultural sensitivities of the facility
Green Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the local environment and existing assets and reduce barriers experienced by residents in using local green spaces
Healthy Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand existing community food networks, including exploration of the reopening of the community fridge and opening a food bank Improve awareness of Healthy Start vouchers Connect with partners to explore programmes with the provision of healthy food, including programmes for households not eligible for benefit support
Opportunities and Community Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local partners to adopt an asset-based model to develop activities happening in the Leys to other demographics Local agencies to explore how they can support local groups to establish opportunities in the community Local partners to explore what would support residents to feel safe
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify new and creative ways to communicate what is happening in the Leys (considering digital exclusion) Share findings of the community insight profile with the Leys community
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an action plan and engage organisations to enable delivery of actions
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with residents and diverse communities not able to engage in this report Evaluate the approach for community engagement Embed local people and groups in decisions and next steps Demonstrate the changes as a result of the profile Adopt a multi-system approach to tackling the challenges identified in the community engagement

8 Progress Since Publication

Since the publication of the Leys community insight report, many actions have been taken to implement the outcomes from the research. The Community Health Development Officer (CHDO) for the Leys has created a summary overview of the progress made in a document available as an annex to this update. This was also shared directly with the Leys community.

The progress update details the partnership working, changes to local provisions and other outcomes that have resulted from taking forward the recommendations from the Community Insight report. In summary:

- An action plan has been created with specific tasks to be carried out based on the recommendations and outcomes from the community insight report.

- A Community Health Development officer has been appointed to support execution of the tasks outlined in the action plan.
- A grant fund of £50,000 was established for the Leys, as part of the initiative and has been distributed among thirteen community organisations to implement activities and projects advancing the report's recommendations.
- The insights gathered supported the planning strategy towards tendering for a new leisure service provider.
- Learning from this profile is being utilised to support [The Well Together](#) funding programme from the Integrated Care Board, which is providing further grant funding for activities that address health inequalities in the Leys.
- The planning of a Leys Health Promotion event on 8th March 2024, was influenced by this work, which gathered 30 service providers to exhibit local health and wellbeing support services, including health checks, mental health support, and comprehensive health and wellbeing advice. The event successfully attracted around 225 residents.

The Leys Health and Wellbeing partnership remains actively engaged and continues to support the work to implement the findings from the Community Insight profile. The partnership convenes on a quarterly basis, led by the Leys Community Health Development Officer (CHDO), prioritising the Community Insight profile actions as a standing agenda item to ensure task review and oversight of grant-funded initiatives.