Witney Central Community Insight Profile
Summary

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1 Introduction

Community Insight profiles are being created to ensure that we understand as fully as possible the health outcomes, and factors that influence these outcomes within wards in Oxfordshire where residents are most at risk of poor health or experiencing health inequalities.

Ten wards were identified in the Oxfordshire Director of Public Health Annual Report (2019) as having the greatest number of small areas that were listed in the 20% most deprived in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation update (published November 2019). Profiles for all of these areas are now published.

Further community insight profiles are now being created for areas across the county identified as falling within the 30-40% most deprived nationally according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2019) and where local partners feel there would be added benefit to developing the profile.

Witney contains three small areas listed in the IMD 2019 that fall within the 40% most deprived in England. However, after discussion with the steering group and based on local need to complement existing work in Windrush Valley Estate, this profile focuses on two of the three areas listed. Additionally, it incorporates a further small area covering the Windrush Valley Estate aiming to target support to some of the most deprived areas in Witney.

Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health team are working with local partners to develop the community insight profiles, which give a detailed picture of both the health needs and the supportive resources in the community. The community profiles use local data and community feedback following an asset-based community development model (ABCD).

The aim of this profile is to:

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

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

1. *Witney Central Community Insight Project Report* by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO),
2. *Community data profile of Witney Central* compiled by the Public Health Intelligence team of Oxfordshire County Council.

This summary contains quotes from community insight gathering, these quotes have been edited to aid readability and identifiable information has been removed to anonymise the respondent.

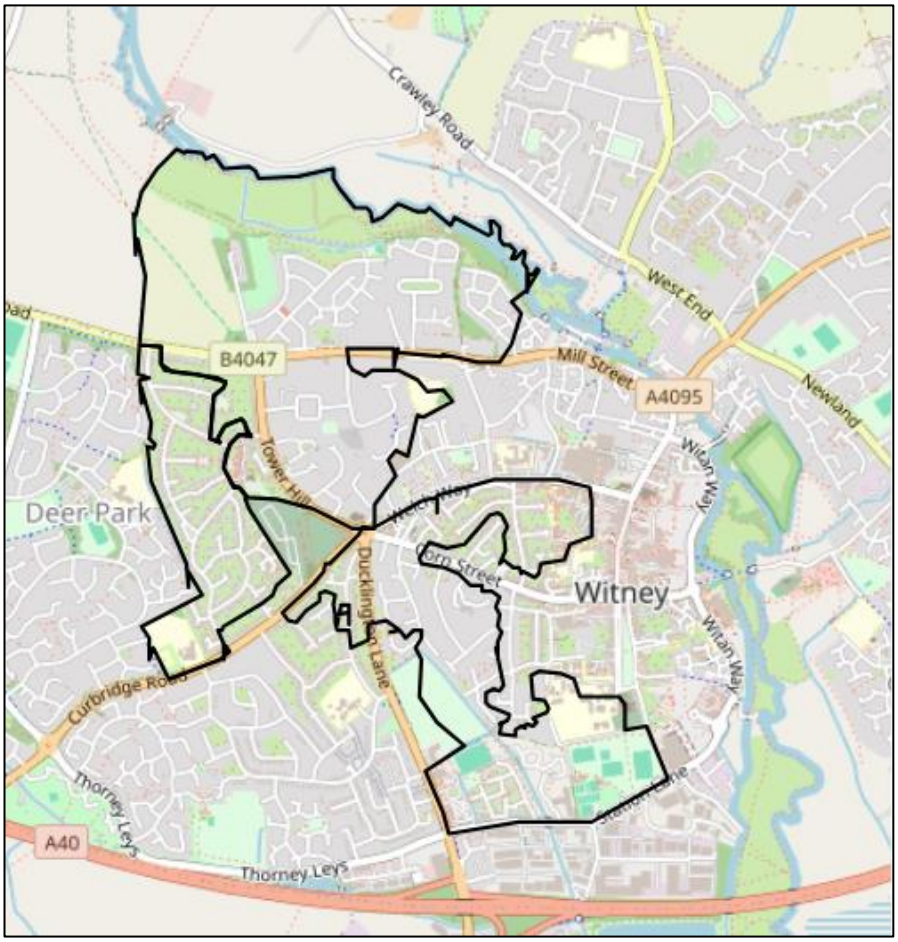
With thanks to Community First Oxfordshire (CFO), West Oxfordshire District Council and especially to the Witney Central Community Insight Profile Steering Group who provided a wealth of knowledge and influence at every stage of the profile's development.

2 Location

Witney is a town and civil parish situated in the district of West Oxfordshire, around 12 miles west of Oxford.

The Witney Central Community Insight area included in this profile is based on a geographical area built from smaller Output Areas (see Figure 1), focusing on the areas just outside the high street surrounding the town centre. This area is referred to in the Community Insight profile as the 'Witney Central Community Insight area' and further detail on this boundary can be found in Annex 2 of the data profile report.

Figure 1 Map showing Output Areas selected for the Witney Central Community Insight area



Map from www.nomisweb.co.uk

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3 Summary of population and health data

Population and housing

- According to the latest Office of National Statistics (ONS) population estimates (mid-2022) the Witney Central Community Insight area had a resident population of 5,703 residents.
- Between the 2011 and 2021 Census surveys, the resident population of the Witney Central Community Insight area increased by 22%. This was more than double the West Oxfordshire increase of 9%.
- The population by broad age in the Witney Central Community Insight area grew between 2011 and 2021, with a 25% increase in children, a 24% increase in working-aged people, and a 15% increase in people aged 60 and over.
- The proportion of social rented housing in the Witney Central Community Insight area (39%) was more than double the average for West Oxfordshire (13%) and Oxfordshire (15%).

Health

- The prevalence of hypertension, obesity, depression and osteoporosis among GP patients reported from the two GP practices located in or close to the Witney Central Community Insight area, were well above the NHS Oxfordshire and NHS England average.
- 2 out of 32 local health and wellbeing indicators from the Witney Central (MSOA[1]), were ranked as worse than the England average. These were:
  - Emergency hospital admissions for injury, ages 15-24 years
  - Emergency hospital admissions for self-harm (All ages)
- The proportion of adults receiving structured treatment for drugs or alcohol in the Witney Central Community Insight Area was higher (worse than) the Oxfordshire average.
- The rate of people per 1,000 population (16+ years) who are entitled to claim personal independent payment due to mental health in the Witney Central Community Insight area remained higher than the rate for Oxfordshire since March 2021.

Employment

- A much higher percentage of people in employment in the Witney Central Community Insight area were in the (generally lower paid) caring, leisure, sales, process, and elementary occupations.
- A quarter of the residents in the Witney Central Community Insight area were retired and this is similar to the average for West Oxfordshire.

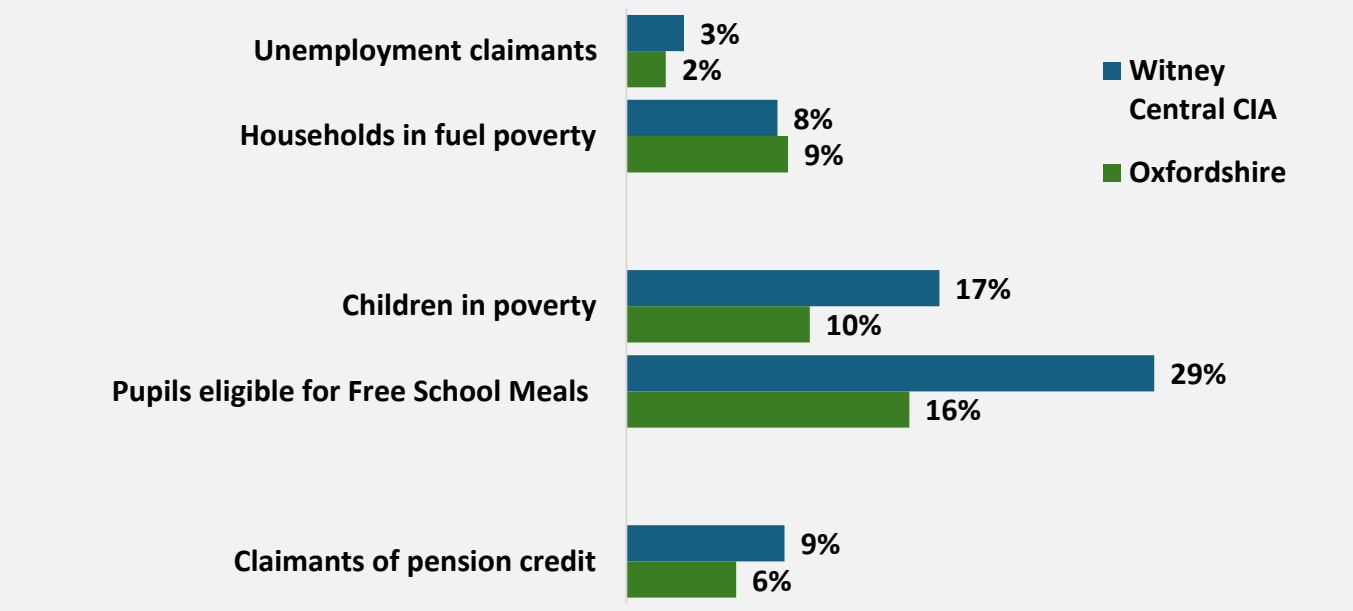
Poverty and deprivation

- According to the 2021 Census, the Witney Central Community Insight area has a higher proportion of households classified as deprived at 55% than the averages for West Oxfordshire at 43% and Oxfordshire at 44%.
- The Witney Central Community Insight Area has a higher proportion than average of residents living in poverty compared with Oxfordshire for the following:
  - A higher proportion of working aged residents were claiming unemployment-related benefits.
  - Higher rates of child poverty and of pupils eligible for free school meals.
  - A higher rate of older people in poverty and claiming pension credit.

[1] Middle Layer Super Output Area, 87 in Oxfordshire, average population of 7600

- The Witney Central Community Insight area has a lower proportion of households estimated to be in fuel poverty compared to the Oxfordshire average. However, one small area within the Witney Central Community Insight area has a much higher proportion of households estimated to be in fuel poverty compared to Oxfordshire average.

Figure 2 Indicators of low income[2] Witney Central Community Insight area



Crime and community safety

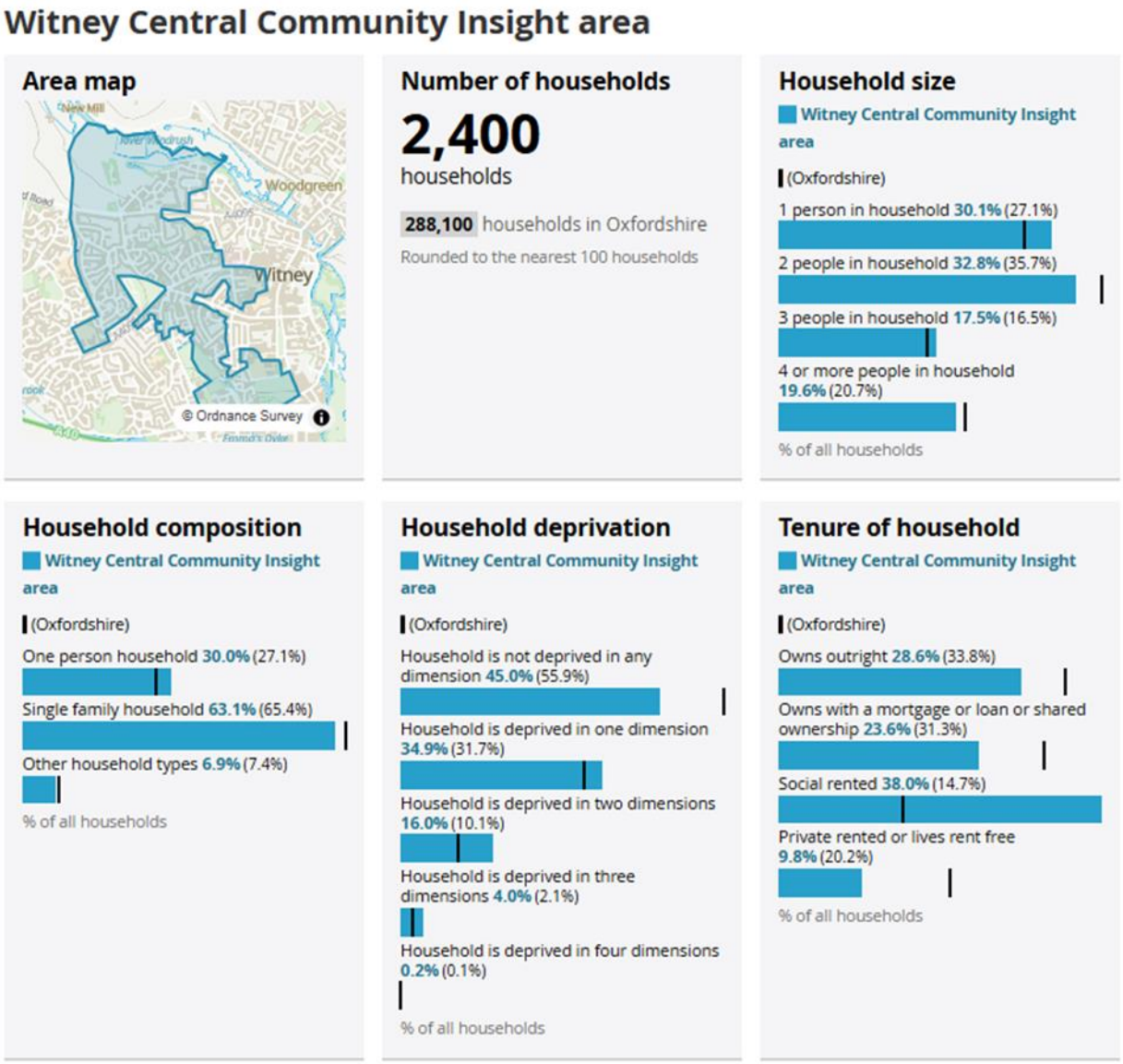
- For the period 2022, the overall rate of crime in the Witney central MSOA area was higher than the Oxfordshire average.

Access to green space

- Mapping by Natural England shows that the Witney Central Community Insight area is surrounded by accessible natural green and blue spaces including woodland, playing fields and other sports facilities.

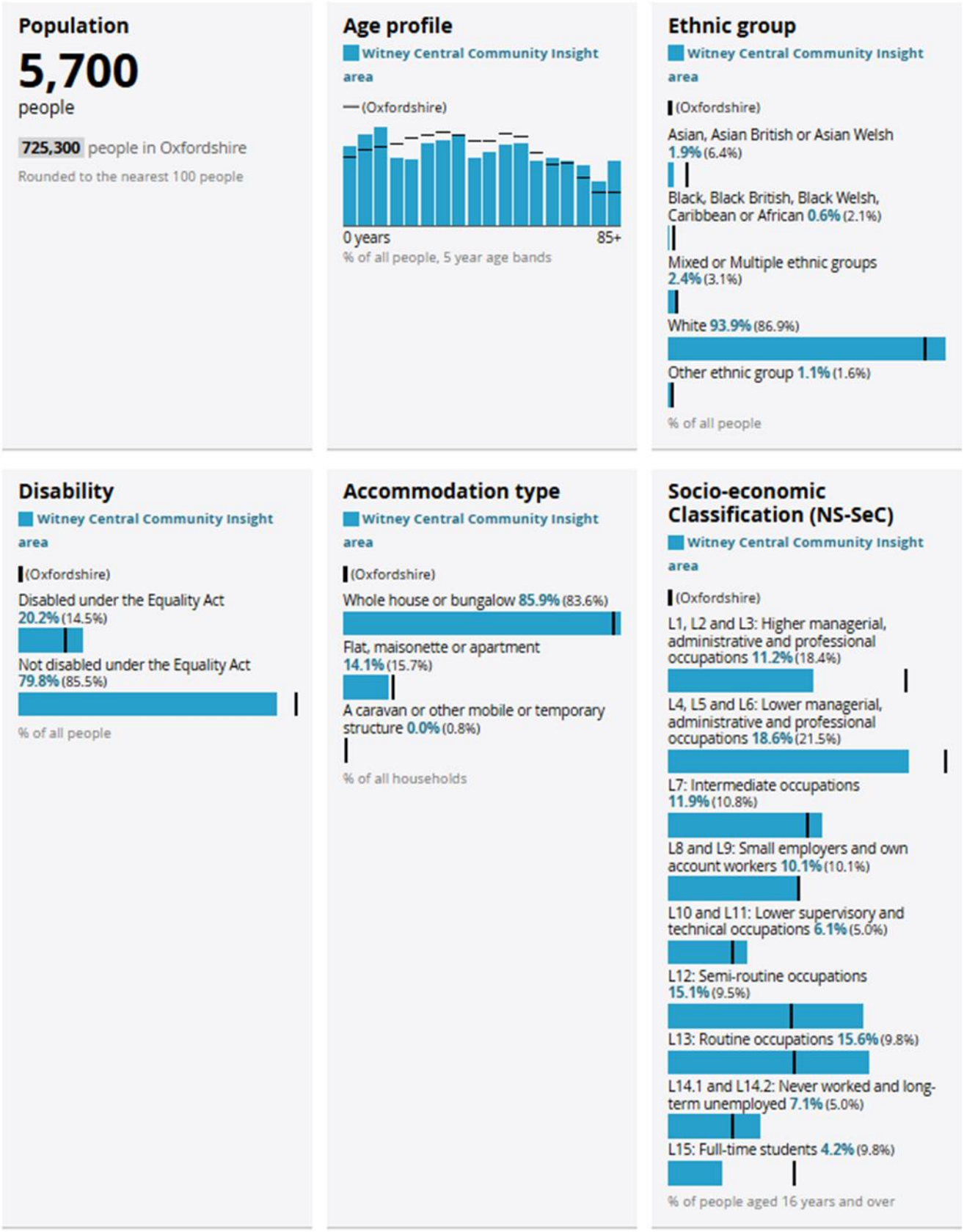
[2] Sources: DWP claimant count December 2024 from nomisweb.co.uk, Claimant count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, based on administrative data from the benefits system; Sub-regional fuel poverty data 2022 Dept for Business, Energy 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 (May 2024) from DWP statXplore as of February 2025.

Figure 3 Census 2021 profile of the Witney Central Community Insight area



From [Build a custom area profile – Census 2021, ONS]

Figure 4 Census 2021 profile of the Witney Central Community Insight area continued



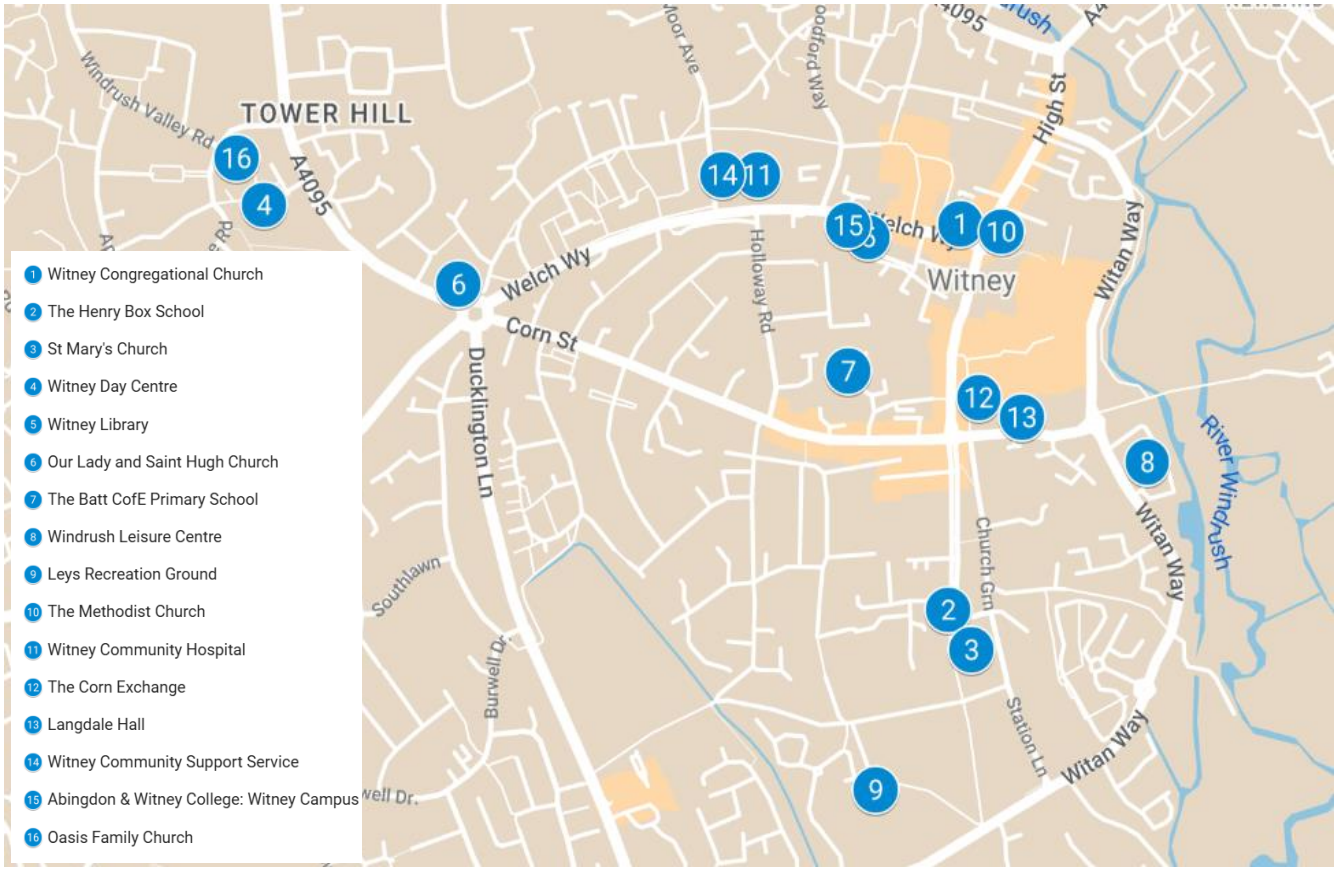
From [Build a custom area profile - Census 2021, ONS]

4 Community assets and local groups

A local asset-mapping exercise was carried out by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) from September to December 2024 to identify key community-based groups, organisations and agencies which are active in the area.

The map below displays a selection of the community venues within the Witney Central Community Insight Area. A full list of community assets, including local activities complied by CFO can be found in Appendix 1 of the *Witney Central Community Insight Profile report*.

Figure 5 Witney Central Community Venues



Map created by Oxfordshire County Council using Google My Maps

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5 Community engagement

5.1 Engagement methodology and sample

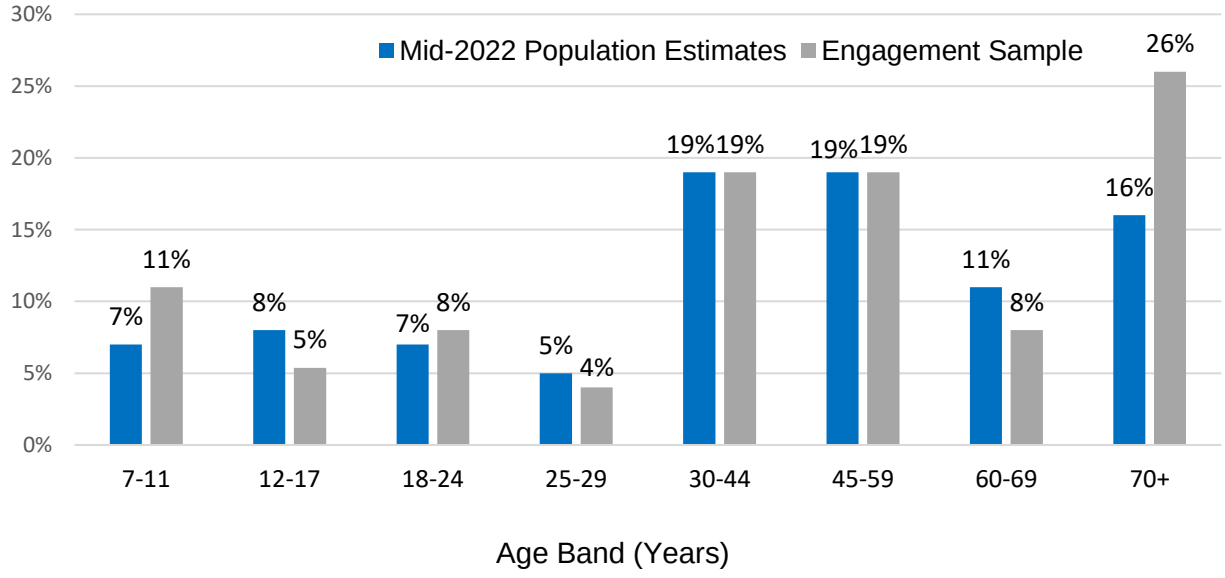
Community engagement by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) reached a total of 167 individuals which included:

- 51 one-to-one interviews with local residents,
- 19 one-to-one interviews with representatives from local groups and organisations,
- An online survey completed by 32 total respondents,
- 4 one-to-one conversations with children and young people,
- 7 focus groups attended by 61 people in total (29 children and young people, and 32 adults).

The proportion of respondents in the 12-17, 25-29, 30-44, 45-59 and 60-69 age bandings were somewhat similar to the age profile of the Witney Central residents according to the mid-2022 population estimates. For example, 19% of engagement respondents were aged 30-44 and 19% of the Witney Central population was aged 30-44.

Additionally, the engagement received an above total population average response rate for the age bandings of 7-11, 18-24, and 70+.

Figure 6 Proportion of respondents to the Witney Central Insight engagement by broad age vs split age of total population of the Witney Central Community Insight area



Research sample = 167 respondents in total. ONS mid-2022 population estimates; ONS mid-year population estimate for Witney Central Community Insight area from Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).

The main ethic group in the Witney Central Community Insight Profile area according to the Census 2021 survey[3] was 'white', and this group was well represented in the survey.

- The proportion of the resident population in the Witney Central Community Insight profile area from a 'white ethnic background' was 94%
- 95% of survey respondents were from a 'white' ethnic background

[3] ONS Census 2021 table TS021 from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk

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Residents from the Asian ethnic group were also well represented in the engagement, with 2% of the resident population and 3% of the survey respondents from an 'Asian' ethnic background. However, the main ethnic minority group (non-white British) in the area was 'Mixed or multiple' ethnic background (3% of the resident population) and this group was not represented in the survey (0% of survey respondents).

5.2 Living in Witney Central

Witney Central as a place to live

Among the online survey respondents (n=26), 42% reported being satisfied with Witney Central as a place to live, while 23% were unsatisfied and 35% remained neutral.

The proportion of dissatisfied residents was higher than respondents to the Oxfordshire residents survey (2024), where 15% of respondents county-wide were fairly or very dissatisfied with their local area as a place to live[4].

The top things that survey respondents (n=22) liked about living in the area were:

- Local shops and services (91%)
- Community feeling (45%)
- Green and open spaces (45%)
- Community groups and organisations (23%)
- Playparks (14%)

Focus groups and interviews highlighted the close proximity to shops and services, as well as the community feel and history within the area.

- *"People are friendly. There are interesting things to do and see in Witney. It's calm and peaceful"*
- *"It's very easy to get into to the town to the doctor's and that"*
- *"I want to say that all the people in Witney are good and kind"*
- *"Witney has a big history. Where I live there used to be a sewing factory"*

Transport

It was felt by respondents that public transport around Witney town is generally good and that the centre is well connected to the outer areas.

- 65% of online survey respondents (n=25) found it easy to get around central Witney
- In interviews and focus groups, West Oxfordshire Community Transport was frequently mentioned as an excellent and much valued service

> *"Since the Stagecoach bus stopped, the community bus is a godsend. Sometimes I use it to go into town and meet people for lunch."* Quote from personal story

When asked which mode of transport on a daily basis 'you/ your household use most often', survey respondents (n=25) selected:

[4] Note that the profile of the sample of the Witney Central engagement survey is different to the weighted sample used in the Oxfordshire residents survey and the question wording was slightly different. Witney Central respondents were more likely to be neutral about their area as a place to live (35% of survey respondents compared with 13% across Oxfordshire).

- Walking (56%)
- Car (40%)
- Bus (16%)
- Wheelchair/mobility aid (8%)

Social and community infrastructure

The community engagement identified that there is a wide range of local groups, courses, classes, community sessions, social and support groups, community venues and clubs available in Witney Central which people use and value.

- Over half of survey respondents (59%) agreed that there are places and spaces where people can meet in Witney Central
- Interviewees mentioned that there is lots available for older people in particular, with less for younger people

> *"There are plenty of support groups if you need it"*

> *"I go to baby groups every day of the week except Tuesday. I like to get out. It's good for me and for the baby"*

Anti-social behaviours

There was some comment from residents about neighbourhood disputes, anti-social behaviour and vandalism, with drug dealing and drug and alcohol consumption also referenced. This is reflected in the corresponding data, which indicated the overall crime rate in the Witney Central community insight area as almost double the Oxfordshire average.

- 87% of survey respondents (n=23) reported noticing people smoking in Witney Central and 78% noticed people drinking alcohol or alcoholic drink litter
- In interviews and focus groups it was mentioned that shoplifting and young people speeding on e-scooters were also ongoing problems

> *"Witney is not a safe place at night. More so at the weekend. My grandson was attacked one night because he wouldn't drive someone to Carterton"*

> *"It is quiet during the day but sometimes busy at night with people taking drugs and alcohol. I can smell weed often"*

5.3 Keeping healthy

When asked 'what do you do to look after your health', survey respondents (n=17) reported various approaches which were also reflected in interviews and focus groups.

- Keeping **active** (73%)

> *"I walk as much as I can. Getting involved in things helps mentally"*

- **Socialising** with friends (68%)

> *"We sit down and talk about our memories. Where we've been and what we've done. I live on my memories of travel and holidays"*

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- Maintaining **healthy habits around food** and eating (68%)

> *"My husband and I are both diabetic, we have to eat healthily"*

For children and young people, various activities were mentioned in focus groups and interviews that support keeping healthy, including spending time with family, having a healthy diet and various sports such as football, running, martial arts and basketball.

5.4 Challenges to keeping healthy

A selection of findings on challenges to keeping healthy are outlined below. For further information on all challenges identified in the community engagement, please see the full Witney Central Community Insight report.

Cost of living

When asked about the challenges faced to health and wellbeing, there was much sustained comment regarding the rise in the cost of living. Related data supports this, revealing that rates of children in poverty in the area were almost double the West Oxfordshire average and higher than the Oxfordshire average. The number of people claiming benefits relating to unemployment was also higher than the West Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire averages.

- 59% of survey respondents (n=17) stated that income made it more difficult to look after themselves
- Local organisations also frequently referenced the challenges regarding the rise in the cost of heating and the impacts on residents' ability to heat their homes

> *"The cost of living is a big problem for me. I can't afford to go out much and I am continuing to cut back on things"* Quote from personal story

> *"You can't buy nicer bread as its way above your budget. You end up having to buy processed bread"*

Housing

Concerns relating to housing were a common thread in engagement discussions. According to the Census 2021 data, the proportion of households in social rented accommodation in the Witney Central Community Insight area was well above the averages for West Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire.

- Only 12% of survey respondents (n=17) indicated that problems with housing made it more difficult to look after themselves
- However, in interviews and focus groups the lack of affordable housing and poor state of housing repair were frequently mentioned as challenges to health and wellbeing
- Interviews with older people on the Smith's Estate noted a lack of interaction between longer standing and newer residents
- Homeless residents also discussed that there is no emergency accommodation in Witney and outlined the challenges in securing housing to meet demand

> *"A lot of the houses on Smith's Estate are getting older. Lots of repairs and maintenance are needed. It's been a sticking plaster approach across the year"*

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"The flooring in my house (Housing Association) and the condition of my house is a challenge. It has mould on one side of the house as it isn't insulated, and the bathroom ceiling is black" Quote from personal story

Mental Health

The community engagement revealed a general sense that there has been an increase in mental health issues since the pandemic and this has been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. This is reflected in data from Personal Independent Payments (PIP), highlighting entitlement to the payment due to mental health in the Witney Central Community Insight area remaining higher than the Oxfordshire rate since March 2021.

- Around half (47%) of survey respondents reported that a health condition (physical and/or mental) made it more difficult to look after themselves
- Local organisations identified a gap in trauma support in Witney based mental health services, as well as confusion around mental health provision portraying in the media as on their knees and people thinking that there are others who are worse off

"People's mental health has deteriorated since the pandemic and with the cost-of-living crisis"

"There are ongoing mental health implications for some people and with the cost-of-living crisis it has been a double whammy"

Challenges for younger people

Younger people (aged 6-11 years) highlighted that limited social and recreational opportunities is contributing to congregation in certain locations. Children also discussed vaping and noted the risk of normalisation of the behaviour, alongside a consensus that young people are not listened to.

"95% of young people would say they have no say [about their lives in general, including what happens in the community]"

"Don't have vaping shops. There's one that has toys in the window and little kids want to go in"

Challenges for asylum seekers

Asylum seekers consulted during the engagement noted several health and wellbeing challenges, including:

- A lack of money to access transport to attend activities
- Limited access to cooking facilities
- Restricted ability to volunteer or work
- The arbitrary nature of eviction to other parts of the country

"It's very difficult for us [asylum seekers] to get around. Can Witney council provide [free] bus passes like they do in Oxford?"

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5.5 What more could be done to support health and wellbeing

When asked about what more could be done to support health and wellbeing, respondents proposed activities/groups for young people, access to health visitors, transport, cooking skills and a range of further initiatives.

- 68% of survey respondents agreed that free or reduced cost access to events and activities would help improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Witney Central
- Around half (47%) of survey respondents reported that more support groups for specific health issues would support their health and wellbeing
- Proposals by interviewees and focus group attendees included:
    - "*Activities that get people out of the house and interacting, e.g. creative things like art, crafts, pottery. Also being with animals outside can have therapeutic benefits"*
    - *"Getting people there is a problem, especially those with physical problems and disabilities. Need transport"*
    - *"I don't just want to meet old people. I want to mix with everybody"*

6 Recommendations

A range of recommendations derived from the community insight gathering are summarised briefly below. A detailed discussion on these can be found in the recommendations section of the full Witney Central Community Insight report.

6.1 Healthcare, access and inclusivity

- Access to healthcare: discussions to explore improvements to local services
- Community-based mental health and associated health and wellbeing initiatives
- Additional support for SEND and neurodiverse needs
- A 'Local inclusivity and accessibility information campaign and audit'

6.2 Community and integration

- Develop a holistic, community-wide communication strategy
- Extend community development worker support
- Anti-social behaviour initiatives
- Extend community development activity on Smith's Estate
- Warm Spaces publicity campaign
- Extension of food bank offer

6.3 Supporting community-based groups and organisations

- Improve joint-working and networking
- Improve grant application processes and explore longer-term funding
- Explore funding opportunities to support extended community action
- Launch a Witney Volunteer Drive

6.4 Community action: meeting identified needs

- Additional support for young people: safe spaces and access to support workers
- Additional support for asylum seekers: transport and exercise

6.5 Community action: improving resiliency and developing skills

- Introduce community-based Life Skills sessions
- Extend befriending and community transport initiatives
- Seek new partnership connections to support and extend innovation in community health and wellbeing

6.6 Public realm, environment and transport

- Local environment/streetscape improvement discussion
- Public transport improvement discussion