

Bicester West 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 areas in Oxfordshire where residents are most at risk of experiencing poor health or 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 have been created for selected areas in the county identified as falling within the 30-40% most deprived nationally according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), and where local partners feel there would be added benefit to developing the profile. This profile focuses on Bicester West, which contains two small areas that fall within this category.

Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health team have worked 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 Bicester West 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 on local assets and offer 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 key findings from two in-depth reports:

1. *Bicester West Community Insight Project Report* by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO),
2. *Community data profile of Bicester West* 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.

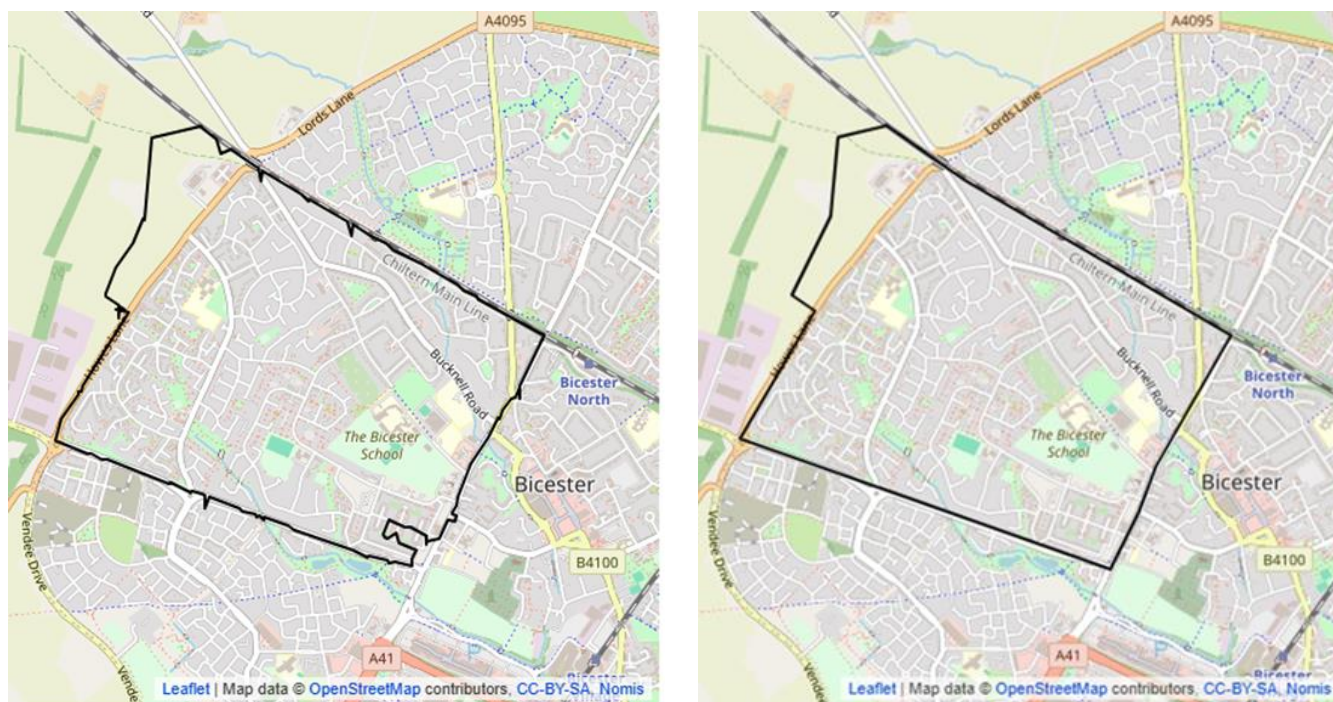
With thanks to Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) for the work to produce the Community Insight report, the Bicester West Community Insight Profile steering group, Cherwell District Council and especially to the residents of Bicester West who readily and enthusiastically gave their time to talk to CFO researchers.

2 Location

Bicester West ward covers the northwestern part of Bicester. It is bordered to the north by the railway line and to the west by Howes Lane and includes The Bicester School. Bicester West is located within the district of Cherwell and is 11 miles north of Oxford and 17 miles south of Banbury.

In 2015, the Bicester West ward boundary changed and the image below on the right shows the new ward boundary. For the purposes of statistical comparison, the data report uses the Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) boundary, shown in the image on the left, which has remained unchanged. For further detail on the geographical boundary selected, please visit the full data report.

Figure 1 Maps showing Bicester West MSOA and ward area



Maps from www.nomis.co.uk

3 Summary of population and health data

Population and housing

- According to the Mid-2022 population estimates, Bicester West MSOA had a resident population of 8,863. The area had a slightly older population than the Oxfordshire average.
- Between the 2011 and 2021 Census surveys, the total resident population in the Bicester West area declined. This was different to Cherwell district and Oxfordshire where there was an increase in population.
- The change in Bicester West's population by broad age shows a 16% decline in the younger population aged 0-19 years, an 8% decline in the working age population aged 20-59 years, and an above-average increase in the older population aged 60+ of +26%.
- The Bicester West area is slightly less ethnically diverse than Oxfordshire as a whole, with 11% of residents from a non-white background in the area, just below Cherwell (12%) and Oxfordshire (13%).
- The proportion of social rented households in Bicester West was above the district average (15% vs 13%) and private rented households was below district and county averages.

Health and Wellbeing

- According to the 2021 Census, there were 1,425 residents (16%) in Bicester West MSOA with a (self-reported) disability, which limited day to day activities "a lot" or "a little". This was just above the rate for Cherwell and Oxfordshire.
- Out of 32 local health and wellbeing inequalities indicators, compared with England, Bicester West had 15 indicators which were ranked as similar, 14 where outcomes were better than average and 3 where outcomes were worse as below:
 - Emergency Hospital Admissions for 0-4 Years
 - Emergency Hospital Admissions for all causes
 - Emergency Admissions for hip fracture (over 65s)
- Compared with Oxfordshire, Bicester West MSOA had 7 health and wellbeing indicators, where outcomes were worse than average.
- The proportion of adults receiving structured treatment for drugs or alcohol in Bicester West was above the Oxfordshire average.
- The prevalence of children classified as overweight (including obese) at aged 4-5 years and aged 10-11 years were each similar to Oxfordshire and England. Just over a third of children aged 10-11 years in the areas were measured as overweight or obese.

Employment

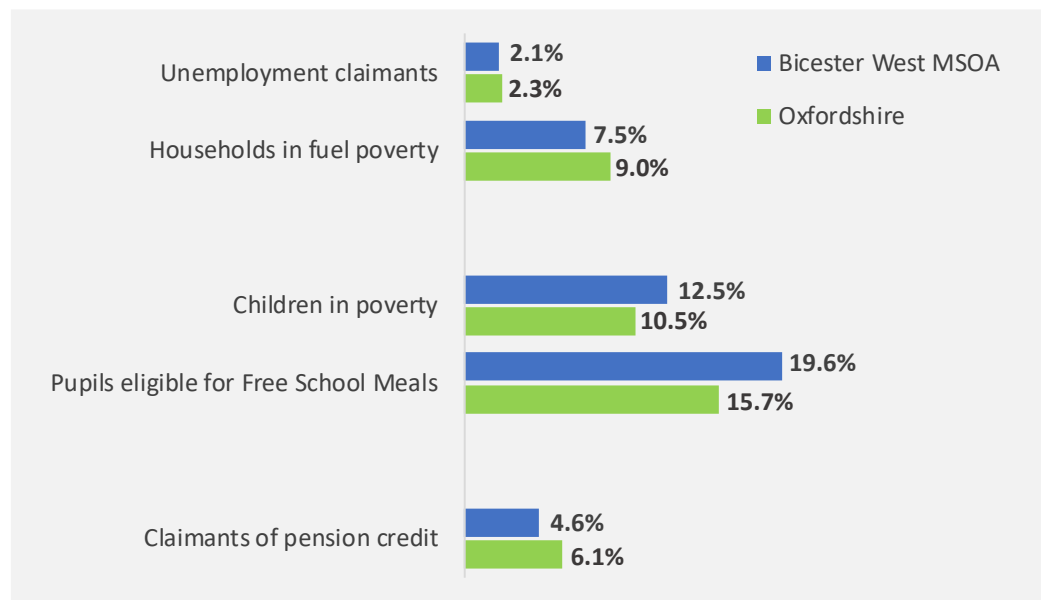
- Bicester West had a similar profile of economic activity to the Cherwell district average (Census 2021) with a slightly higher proportion who were retired.
- Workers in Bicester West were less likely than the Oxfordshire average to be in managerial and professional occupations and more likely to be in routine and elementary occupations. The proportion working in a retail occupation in Bicester West was above average.

Poverty and deprivation

- According to the 2021 Census, Bicester West has a higher proportion of households classified as deprived than the averages for Cherwell district and Oxfordshire.
- The proportion of residents claiming unemployment-related benefits in Bicester West was below the average for Oxfordshire.

- There is a lower proportion of fuel poverty in Bicester West households than average for Oxfordshire.
- Rates of child poverty and free school meals in Bicester West were each above (worse than) the average for Oxfordshire.
- The rate of older people in poverty and claiming pension credit in Bicester West was below the Oxfordshire average.

Figure 2 Indicators of low income¹



Crime and community safety

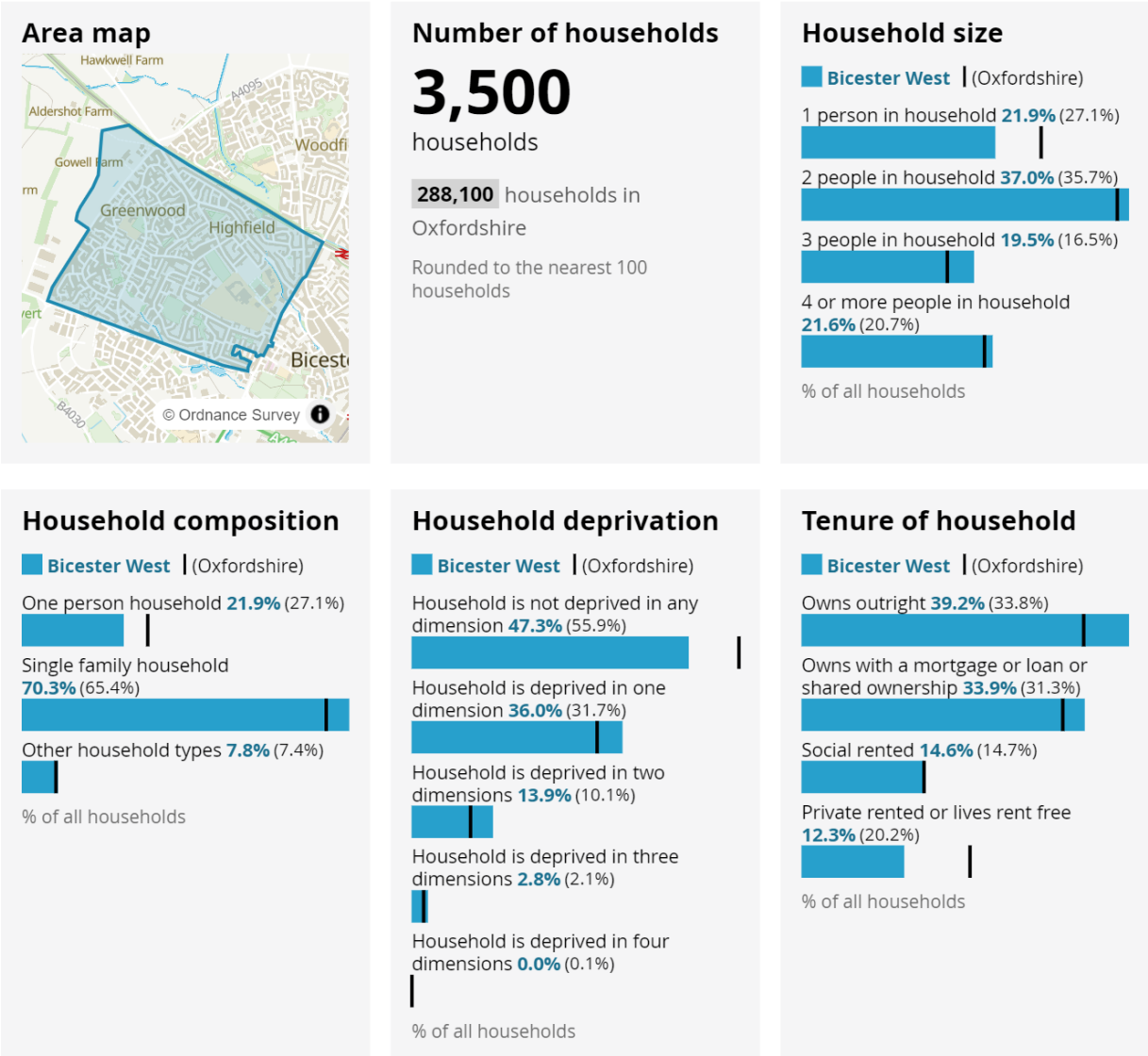
- The overall rate of crime in Bicester West was above (worse than) the Oxfordshire average.

Living environment

- Mapping by Natural England shows limited green space within Bicester West. The area is adjacent to an area of woodland to the west, which has limited access to the public.
- There is no GP practice or pharmacy located within the Bicester West area. For most of the ward it is an estimated 20-minute (or more) walking time to the nearest GP practice or pharmacy. The whole of the area is within a 20-minute journey time by public transport to a nearby GP practice or pharmacy.

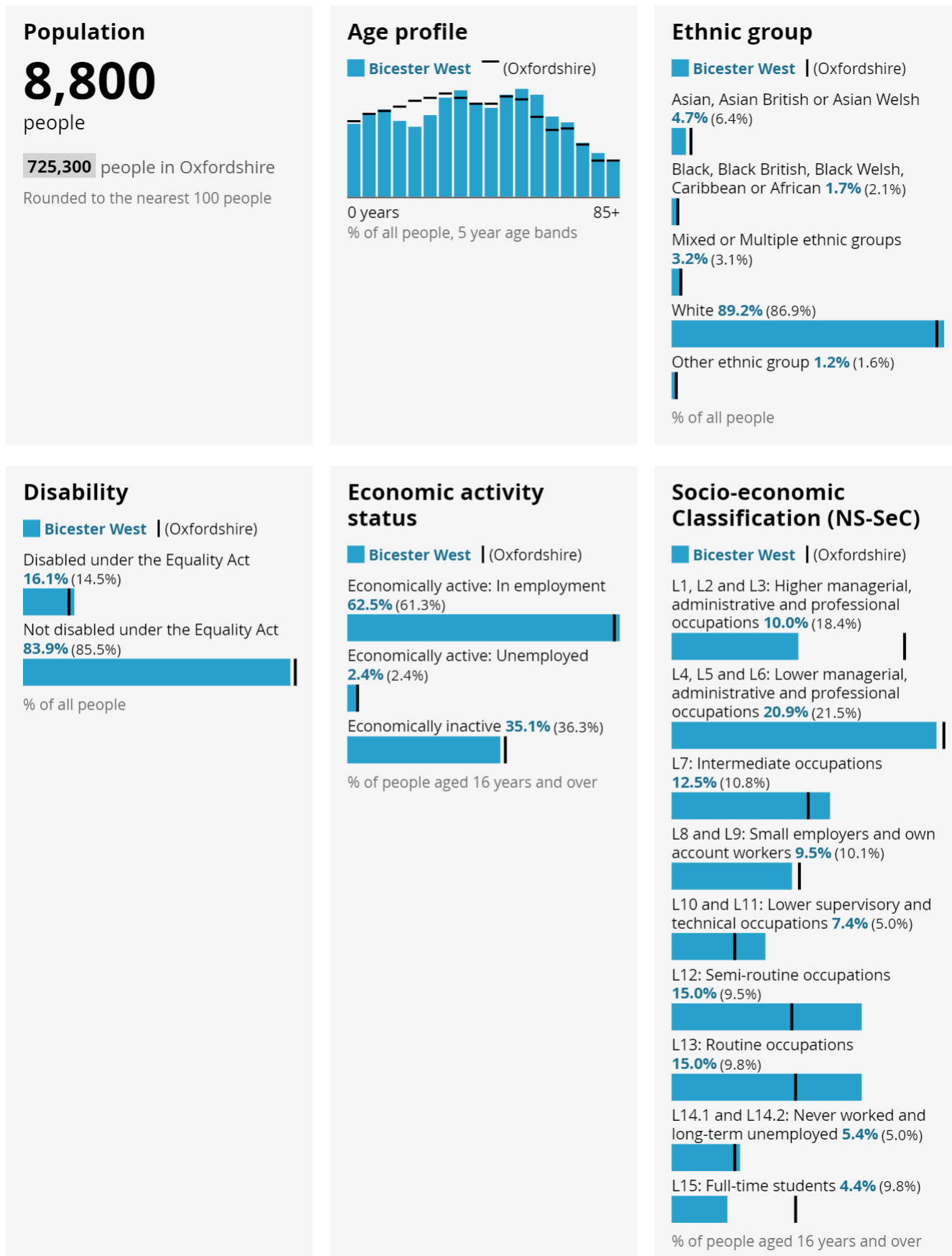
¹ Sources: DWP claimant count March 2024 from nomisweb.co.uk, Claimant count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, based on administrative data from the benefits system; Sub-regional fuel poverty data 2022 Dept for Energy Security & Net Zero, 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. Denominator is ONS 2022 mid-year estimate.

Figure 2 Census 2021 profile for Bicester West MSOA - households



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

Figure 3 Census 2021 profile for Bicester West MSOA - population



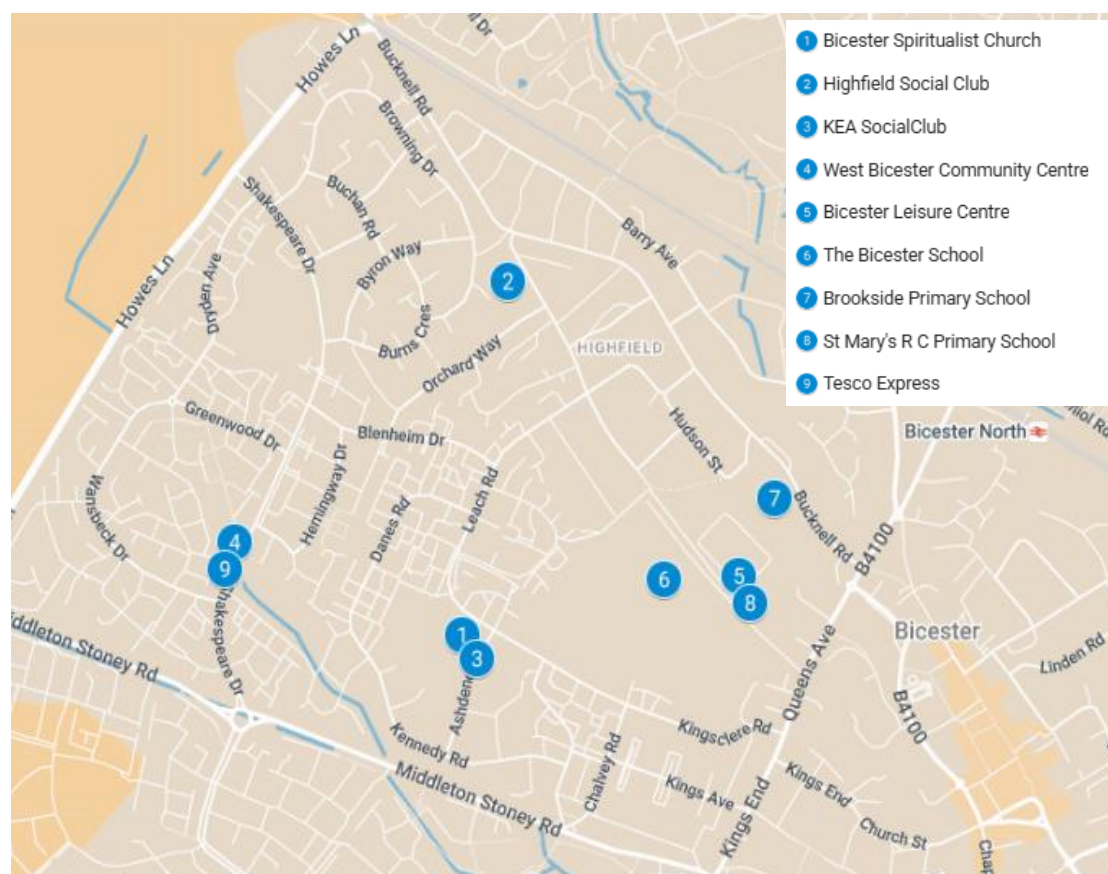
From [Build a custom area profile - Census 2021, ONS](#)

4 Community assets and local groups

As part of the community engagement, a local asset-mapping exercise was carried out by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) between February to April 2025. The asset-mapping exercise aimed to identify key services, facilities, community-based groups, organisations and agencies active in the area.

The map below displays a selection of community facilities within the Bicester West Community Insight profile area. A full list of community assets, including local activities, groups, organisations and partnerships can be found in Appendix 1 of *the Bicester West Community Insight Report*. Some of these assets identified are based directly within Bicester West, while others are based elsewhere in wider Bicester but offer support and services to the residents of Bicester West.

Figure 4 Bicester West Community Facilities



Map created by Oxfordshire County Council using [Google My Maps](#)

5 Community research

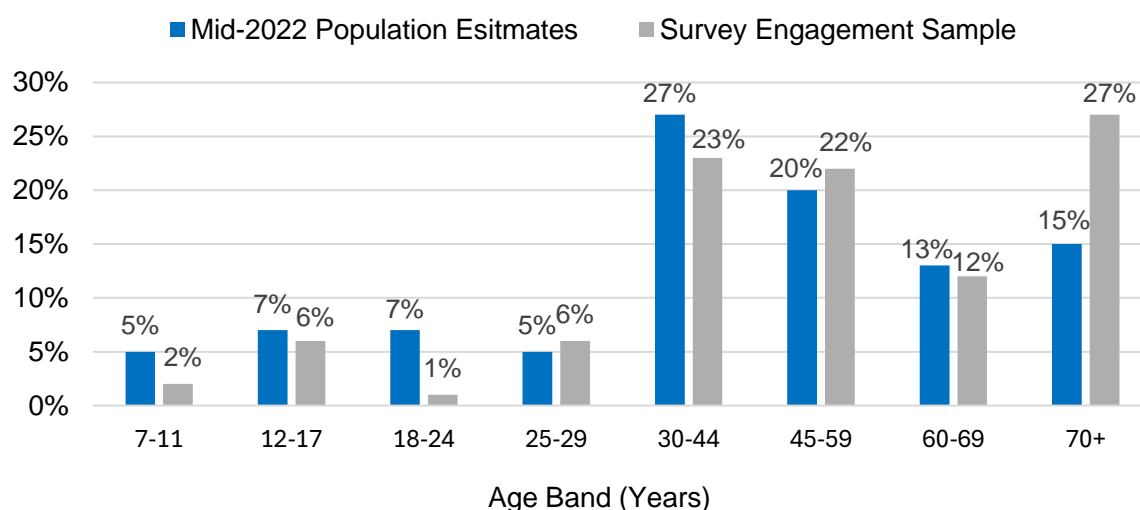
5.1 Research methodology and sample

Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) carried out community engagement between February to April 2025. The engagement reached 128 people in total, which included:

- 31 one-to-one interviews with residents,
- 24 one-to-one interviews with representatives from local groups and organisations,
- 5 focus groups attended by 39 people in total (28 adults and 11 children and young people),
- An online survey completed by a total of 34 respondents.

The age profile of respondents who engaged was broadly similar to the age profile of Bicester West residents according to the Mid-2022 population estimates. For example, 6% of respondents were aged 12-17, and 7% of the Bicester West population were aged 12-17. The engagement received an above total population response rate for the age bandings of people aged 25-29 years, 45-59 years and 70+ years.

Figure 5 Proportion of respondents of the Bicester West engagement by broad age vs split age of total population of the Bicester West Community Insight area



Research sample = 126 total respondents (excludes two participants who did not provide their age). ONS mid-2022 population estimates; ONS mid-year population estimate for Bicester West MSOA from Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).

According to the Census 2021², the main ethnic group in the Bicester West Community Insight area was 'white', and this group was well represented in the engagement.

- The proportion of the resident population in the Bicester West Community Insight Profile area from a 'white' ethnic background was 89.2%
- 96% of survey respondents were from a white ethnic background

Ethnic minority groups were less well represented in the engagement. The comparisons between the proportion of engagement survey respondents and the resident population were:

- Asian – 3% of survey respondents versus 4.7% resident population
- Mixed or multiple – 0% of survey respondents versus 3.2% resident population

² ONS Census 2021 table TS021 from www.nomisweb.co.uk

5.2 Living in Bicester West

Bicester West as a place to live

Around half of online survey respondents were satisfied with Bicester West as a place to live, with 44% of respondents somewhat or fairly satisfied and 15% dissatisfied (41% neutral).

The proportion of dissatisfied residents was similar to 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 live³.

The top things that survey respondents (base⁴=24) liked about living in the area were:

- Local shops and services (70%)
- Green and open spaces (50%)
- Playparks (38%)
- Community feeling (33%)

Focus groups and interviews highlighted the friendliness of the community, the availability of community events and proximity to the town.

- *"It's a close community very friendly. Where I live everyone knows each other really well"*
- *"Good location. Very friendly. People keep an eye out for you and are there if you need them"*
- *"I recently moved here. I like it, I can walk everywhere, and people are friendly and helpful. Everything is quite close"*

Getting around

The location of Bicester West was positively noted by respondents, particularly in relation to the location and good transport links.

- 73% of survey respondents found it easy to get around Bicester West
- Interviewees noted the Ability Bus as a valuable asset for those struggling with mobility and disability

"The transport links are very good, which makes it very easy for me to get around. All the amenities that I need are within close proximity or I can easily get to via public transport" Quote from personal story

When asked which mode of transport on a daily basis "you and your family use most often", survey respondents (base⁴=27) selected:

- Walking (88%)
- Car (59%)
- Wheelchair/mobility aid (10%)
- Bicycle (9%)
- Train (9%)

³ Note that the profile of the sample of the Bicester West engagement survey is different to the weighted sample used in the Oxfordshire residents survey and the question wording was slightly different. Bicester West respondents were more likely to be neutral about their area as a place to live (41% of survey respondents compared with 13% across Oxfordshire).

⁴ The terminology 'base' used within this summary report represents the number of people who responded to the particular survey question. Please note that not all respondents answered all survey questions.

Social and community infrastructure

The community engagement identified that there are a range of local groups, courses, community sessions, social and support groups and community venues available for residents to access nearby in Bicester.

- However, in interviews and focus groups respondents noted that there were relatively few groups and activities available directly within the Bicester West Community Insight profile area
- Only 8% of survey respondents (base⁴=25) reported that their needs were met inside Bicester West, and 60% reported that most or all of their needs were met outside of the area

“There are clubs in Bicester you can join, for example the gardening club, bridge, running club, walking football”

5.3 Keeping healthy

When asked ‘what supports health and wellbeing in Bicester West’, survey respondents (base⁴=23) reported various factors which were also reflected in interviews and focus groups:

- **Green spaces**, parks and playparks (74%)

“I walk a lot. We have a dog and young children and go to the parks and the playground across the road”

- Community **spirit/relationships** (57%)

“I socialise and come to this group [Open Doors]. I go cycling. The ex-servicemen's group is good”

- Community **groups/organisations/charities** (43%)

“There are Facebook groups for everything - there's lots to do. The church has a cafe and a new mum's group and Bible reading group. We have a community help & information point [CHIP] which is part of Citizens Advice”

For children and young people, various activities were mentioned in focus groups and interviews that support them to keep healthy in Bicester West. This included taking part in sports and activities, being outside, spending time with friends and animal-based therapies.

5.4 Challenges to keeping healthy

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

Cost of living

It was clear from the community engagement that cost of living is a prominent challenge to resident's health and wellbeing, with the affordability of healthy food also a concern. This is

reflected in corresponding data, which shows that rates of children in poverty were above the Oxfordshire average. The rate of children eligible for free school meals was also higher than the Cherwell and Oxfordshire averages.

- 43% of survey respondents (base⁴=23) reported that income made it difficult to look after themselves/their household
- Some interviewees mentioned taking on extra work shifts at nights and weekends as they needed the money
- In focus groups, local organisations noted that many people in the area struggle with debt, often caused by the increased cost of living

“Cost of living is a major problem for me. Water bills are going up and Thames Water make me furious. Why should we pay for their failures?”

“I’m not really sure. I work nights and weekends as I need the money and look after the children the rest of the time. I don’t get out much”

“It can be a struggle to feed everyone. I use the Food Bank at the Beacon – it’s really helpful”

Access to healthcare services

There was extensive comment about the difficulty in getting a GP appointment or finding an NHS dentist, with some respondents confused or intimidated by the process and sometimes being put off. Corresponding data highlights that there is no GP practice located directly within the Bicester West MSOA, and for most of the area it is an estimated 20 minute or more waking time to the nearest GP practice.

- Poor access to healthcare when needed was a barrier to looking after oneself/their household for 44% of survey respondents (base⁴=23)
- 46% of survey respondents found it difficult to access the health centre/GP, whilst 36% found it difficult to access a dental practice
- In interviews and focus groups, concern was also noted regarding the loss of the minor injuries’ unit at the Bicester Community Hospital

“The surgery is good, but I haven’t seen my own doctor for 4 years and it’s very difficult to get through to the surgery. What makes me really angry, is that you can’t assume that everyone has a computer or phone to make appointments”

“I haven’t really used the doctor in years but recently I had to because of an injury. I had a really poor experience and there were delays in getting treatment. Then I didn’t get the proper care and ended up in hospital” Quote from personal story

Public realm and the environment

Common concerns raised in the community engagement around the public realm included the poor state of repair and upkeep of pavements, roads and green spaces.

- 44% of survey respondents felt improved pavements and walking routes would be helpful to get around Bicester West
- In focus groups, young people criticised the state of repair and maintenance of parks and green spaces, which could be made more attractive and welcoming places

- Respondents also noted that a reduction of streetlighting across the area sometimes led to feelings of vulnerability or a lack of safety, with 32% of survey respondents feeling unsafe at night-time

"The streets, roads and parks could be improved. Green spaces are not well-used. It is dangerous cycling in certain places"

"More people would be out playing if there were more green spaces. I would like to use the green spaces for family time, picnics, walks, football, and rugby"

Challenges for specific groups

Within the community engagement, specific groups of residents also expressed particular challenges to their health and wellbeing in Bicester West.

- **Children and young people** (aged 7-16 years) highlighted not feeling engaged in decision making or being asked their opinion. The need for early intervention mental health and neurodiversity support was also expressed by young people.

"I've been self-harming and had depression for years. Only got CAMHS help after I'd got really bad. They only do something if it gets serious"

- **Older adults** noted mental health challenges, including a strong feeling of exacerbating and hidden isolation. Difficulties relating to digital exclusion were also discussed, including navigating the complex online surgery and banking systems.

"I don't do many community things. I come to Open Doors and also have my son to speak to. But I don't want to bother him too much"

5.5 What more could be done to support health and wellbeing

When asked about what could be provided to support residents' health and wellbeing within the Bicester West area, respondents proposed intergenerational groups, community development support and low cost all year-round activities.

- 83% of survey respondents (base⁴=23) agreed that free or reduced cost access to events and activities would improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Bicester West
- Proposals by interviewees and focus group attendees included:
 - *"People out there on the ground talking to people would make a difference"*
 - *"We need funding so we can get the drop-in centres back. Also, the mental health place has shut down, which was provided by MIND. You see people now in the Sainsbury's cafe who used to go there and they're just sitting and not talking to each other"*
 - *"We need things to bring older and younger people together. People don't know how to talk to each other"*

6 Recommendations

A range of recommendations derived from the community insight gathering are clustered by key themes and summarised briefly below. A detailed discussion on these, including the underpinning rationale can be found in the recommendations section of the Bicester West 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

6.2 Community and integration

- Develop a holistic, Bicester-wide communication strategy
- Extend community development worker support
- An inclusivity and access awareness campaign

6.3 Supporting community-based groups and organisations

- Improve voluntary sector joint-working and networking
- Seek discussions to explore or extend community-based usage of empty stores, green spaces, and existing community venues
- Improve grant application processes and explore longer-term funding
- Explore funding opportunities to support extended community action
- Launch a Bicester Volunteer Drive

6.4 Community action: meeting identified need

- Additional support for young people and improved engagement

6.5 Community action: improving resiliency and developing skills

- Develop a programme of community-based life skills sessions
- Extend befriending initiatives

6.6 Public realm, environment and transport

- Local environment/streetscape improvement discussion