

The CAG Oxfordshire Strategy

2023-2025

1. Where we have come from

In 2001, Resource Futures, working closely with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) secured funding from TOE (Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment) to develop this approach across Oxfordshire, building upon work initially developed in the Bristol area. This became the Community Action Group (CAG) network, a collective of community groups that has expanded to organise events and projects to take action on issues such as food, transport, the natural environment, energy, and sustainable planning and infrastructure, alongside waste.

Over the years our network has been at the forefront of community-led climate change action. Community Action Groups were some of the first to trial community-owned renewable energy generation in the area, whilst others, such as Cultivate and Broken Spoke Bike Co-op, have developed innovative projects to make our local economy and food systems more sustainable.

Since 2004, OCC has supported our organisation and played a key role in championing the work of the volunteer-led groups making an impact in their local villages, parishes, towns, and cities.

In 2023, having grown to over 100 groups, including social enterprises, co-ops and charities, The CAG Network is the biggest community based network of its kind (that we know of). Our members are autonomous but also connected to, and collaborative, with, each other. As we enter our second strategic plan as an organisation, we recommit ourselves to our members and the wider community in which CAG operates.

2. Vision

This shared vision aims to reflect the future we are all working towards in the CAG Network.

An Oxfordshire with resilient and empowered communities, working together so that people and planet can thrive within ecological limits.

3. Mission

The mission outlines how the staff team will work to achieve the overall vision.

To support and facilitate the development of a strong, well-connected network that is enacting community-led social change.

4. What we believe

There are many systemic challenges in addressing the climate crisis, but communities are well placed to take immediate action that will result in positive locally-relevant change. CAG Oxfordshire encourages and promotes this local, community-led approach. We believe that by highlighting the good in our community, we will motivate and inspire others to get involved, increasing resilience and creating greater collective impact as we go.

We also understand that the CAG network does not yet fully represent Oxfordshire's diverse communities. We need to work harder to seek out the voices of groups and individuals, especially those negatively affected by climate change, and collaborate on social, economic and racial justice issues, to build an inclusive network. This may not always look like traditional climate action work, but we believe that society cannot achieve climate justice without tackling these barriers. Only then can we meet our mission 'where people and planet thrive'.

5. Things we value

This set of 'things we value' as CAG Oxfordshire and the wider network will guide our work as a staff team, and ensure that we act in alignment with the wider values and priorities of the network.

- *Respecting the natural environment*
- *Building relationships and supporting each other*
- *Demonstrating practical change*
- *Being community-led*
- *Being proactively inclusive and valuing diversity*
- *Prioritising equality and social justice*
- *Experimenting, learning and working imaginatively*
- *Looking after our own wellbeing, and that of others*
- *Being part of wider movements for change*

5. How we work

5.1 Our governance

Cooperation and participation are at the centre of what we do, so we are constituted as a Community Benefit Society. CAGs are "members" of the Community Benefit Society allowing for ownership and control of the new organisation by CAG network member groups, through voting at AGMs and other participatory feedback processes. Our board is made up of a majority of elected representatives of CAGs, as well as a staff representative and other supporters co-opted where needed.

5.2 Our approach

A true network is one in which people communicate and collaborate with each other, connected by more than a shared link to a central project. We want to define the network by members' relationship to each other rather than to The CAG Project as a central 'hub', with members bringing new ideas, direction and leadership to the network. We see our role as providing:

- **A 'backbone'** - maintaining core administration and support functions

- **'Glue' in the network** - repositioning CAG Oxfordshire alongside the network and working to facilitate connections, communication and mutual support within the network between groups directly.

6. Goals & Objectives

These will help us prioritise and focus our work to achieve our mission.

1. Facilitate a network of exchange whereby member groups deliver climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience activities through individual and collective efforts.

- *Objective 1:* Run events, skill-sharing activities, knowledge exchanges and network socials to facilitate regional links, peer-to-peer support, learning, and mutual aid.
- *Objective 2:* Facilitate direct relationships between CAGs, as well as between CAGs and local and national partners, including local authorities, to enable access to a range of support and opportunities for more joined up strategic work.
- *Objective 3:* Develop topic-focused meet-ups (Collaborate groups) and networking activities for those individuals and groups, as well as other organisations outside the network working on similar themes to facilitate joint-working.
- *Objective 4:* Identify experts, preferably from the Network and in support of CAG's community wealth building aims, to provide advice and support to CAGs and raise awareness of different community approaches to climate action.
- *Objective 5:* Develop communications approaches that better support communication between network members.

2. Support network members to achieve their own missions.

- *Objective 1:* Employ an intentional community organising approach when working with CAGs, focused on building personal relationships and networks, prioritising opportunities for face-to-face meetings and understanding local needs.
- *Objective 2:* Provide CAGs with tools, resources, training and learning opportunities to support core organisational and practical skills needed to run and sustain their groups and projects well.
- *Objective 3:* Provide a range of support relevant to where groups are in their journey -- whether that be starting out, merging, sustaining, growing, or winding down -- with the aim that no one feels 'alone' in their role or mission.

3. Demonstrate local pathways for environmental and social justice agendas to come together recognising that environmental justice cannot be achieved without social justice.

- *Objective 1:* Invite, include, and centre seldom heard voices in the CAG network and in climate action conversations, which we have access to.
- *Objective 2:* Support and signpost to spaces that allow environmental and social justice groups to organise together around local, high priority issues.
- *Objective 3:* Prioritise community wealth building as one approach to social justice building via the Owned by Oxford initiative.
- *Objective 4:* Incorporate learnings from other environmental and social justice movements within the CAG network, providing connections to CAGs feeling a part of wider movement for change.

4. Communicate that a more sustainable and just future is possible, focusing on activities of Community Action Groups and the network, to motivate and inspire additional action.

- *Objective 1:* Share best practice and case studies of community action at the regional and national level as well as within the network and local partners, to highlight local creative responses and solutions.
- *Objective 2:* Provide clear signposting and communications for new people wanting to get involved with community action.
- *Objective 3:* Raising the profile of the CAG Network and being part of wider conversations about social change.
- *Objective 4:* Organise an annual awareness raising ‘campaign’ designed to elevate the local knowledge and expertise of community groups to influence local, regional, or national policy decisions igniting a conversation around ‘positive possibilities.’

5. Diversify our organisational revenue streams to facilitate more resources directly into the network.

- *Objective 1:* Identify trusts and foundations whose grantmaking values align with CAG and develop relationships with grant officers.
- *Objective 2:* Opportunistically apply for service contracts where CAG can deliver value through procurement processes.
- *Objective 2:* Work in relationship with network members to jointly fundraise for initiatives that add value beyond any one organisation or group.
- *Objective 3:* Through fundraising activities, deepen existing partnerships, or create new partnerships, with groups representing communities most impacted by climate change, elevating the position of groups seen as more risky to institutional funders.