



Local rapper Leonidas Barrett

## Local rapper nurtures new talent

future talent also in and around Oxfordshire.

The Blueprint Project was launched before lockdown and was already going well when, like other community projects, it came to a grinding and abrupt halt. Leonidas added that despite this, it has still had a very positive influence on those people taking part.

"We did what we could during lockdown but reopened in July and it has been really refreshing to see the young men who were in the group before lockdown and quite shy, come back with a really positive mental attitude. It is amazing how well they are benefitting from it. They are proud of what they are achieving."

The fact that Leonidas already has a well-established profile as a successful performer has inspired the people on the course.

He added "They are familiar with my stuff which is great but they are not star struck. When my new single was played on BBC Radio 1xtra they couldn't believe it, but it makes them realise that if you really want to do something and you work hard at it then you can achieve it. They are very young but very mature in their attitude and we will be re-starting the group again after half-term so we hope to have more people joining."

Leonidas has ambitious plans to create a course that has a qualification attached to it, and encourage the existing members to become mentors.

"Giving the current young people who are on the course some responsibility and the chance to contribute to the project will give them ownership and that's really important. Already one of them has produced an album and another is producing a video. They are making really good stuff. Another two are now singing together – it really is great for them to have this chance."

Leonidas added "The feedback we have had in general and the conversations with Oxford City Council are really positive and I think that lots of people will now stand behind us and what we are doing. I am involved in this project because I want to be, and I am sure we will get more support."

The Blueprint Project meets every Tuesday for sessions at the ArkT Centre in Cowley. Leonidas' new single Nightmares in Nike Airs premiered on BBC 1xtra and will be released on October 31. He is also working with his Blueprint Project colleagues Kingsley and Sam from DeSide/DAW Media putting together a project under his new label No Sympathy for Winners.

**BLACKBIRD LEYS** rapper Leonidas Barrett has had a pretty good month. His single Nightmares in Nike Airs was premiered on BBC Radio 1xtra, and the innovative community project he is helping to run is going from strength to strength.

Established to support local teenagers and young men, the Blueprint Project has been supported by Oxford City Council and the ArkT Centre and gives young people the chance to learn about music production and videography.

Leonidas, 28 said "We are running a course for young adults from challenged backgrounds

who perhaps wouldn't usually have the opportunity to do something like this and learn about music from professionals. The Blueprint Project is a great opportunity for them to channel their energy into something they really enjoy and work alongside professionals from the industry."

The sessions that Leonidas helps to run give young people the chance to experience singing, spoken word performing and music and video production. He is working alongside other musicians, performers and producers. The ages of those taking part range from ten to 15.

"We have managed to draft in

some very talented people to work with us and it's great to have that extra support as well as additional knowledge and experience that is being shared in the group. The young men taking part are loving it and learning so much about how to mix videos and what it's like to work with a vocal coach. It's a great opportunity to bounce ideas off everyone."

Leonidas is working with Sam from DAW Media who is also shooting music videos and short films in and around Oxfordshire, and Kingsley of the In-spire Sounds recording studio who is currently engineering and producing some of the



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Leys News is produced by a team of volunteers who attend free Community Journalism Training courses.

If you would like to volunteer as part of our team and help to produce your local, independent newspaper please email the editor (*details below*) for more information and an informal chat about how you can help.

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**EDITOR'S  
LETTER**
**The future  
of Leys News**

**Hello everyone**

**We are all facing some challenging times, and Leys News is no exception.**

**In the last issue of the paper we printed a survey that we invited you to complete and send back to us.**

**In response to that survey, and due to the very challenging conditions that we are all facing at the moment, it will come as no surprise to you to learn that the December issue of Leys News, published by Leys News Limited, will be the last.**

**This decision has not been an easy one to make, but the ongoing lack of funding and dwindling support from the community have unfortunately left us with no option but to cease production of the paper and wind up Leys News Limited – the company that has produced the paper for 25 years.**

**We do, of course, hope that there will continue to be a community newspaper for The Leys, and that a new group will come forward to take on this challenge in 2021 with fresh ideas – we will keep you posted.**

**In our final issue – out in early December – we will have a look back over the last 25 years of Leys News and focus on some of the amazing things that have happened in this community thanks to your community newspaper.**

**Best wishes**

*Sarah Edwards*

**Issue 165  
maybe  
the last!**
**It will be  
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**If you would like to submit an article or letter, or contribute in another way, please email [editor@leysnews.co.uk](mailto:editor@leysnews.co.uk)**

# Funding for community foods services up for grabs

**COMMUNITY** food services in Oxford will be able to bid for up to £5000 of funding to help them support people in hardship, the City Council has announced.

The £60,000 grant fund is being launched to boost food support, as more people are expected to need support as a result of the economic impact of coronavirus.

The City Council has provided emergency food support since the start of lockdown, targeted at the most vulnerable and those who could not leave their homes due to self-isolating. Now that restrictions have been lifted, the Council ended those services on 11 September.

Community food services can apply for the grant and find out more information online at [www.oxford.gov.uk/EAGrant](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/EAGrant)

The Council began working with Oxford Hub on the Oxford Together partnership to set up this support as soon as lockdown came in, using its own funding. All residents receiving Council food parcels have been given information about alternative support, and our staff are making phone contact to ensure that this is a smooth and supported transition. If we are unable to reach residents on the phone, our teams will make a welfare check in person. A one-off small grant

is available to support individuals or households with the transition process. The Council has written to recipients of parcels to inform them of the details.

Over the time the food support has been operating, it has delivered over 10,000 food parcels to households across the city. This has been undertaken in partnership with SOFEA, (a local food charity that runs community larders), The Oxford Hub and many other volunteers and community groups.

The Council worked with a nutritionist from Brookes University to ensure food parcels are nutritionally balanced, and food parcels have been tailored to household dietary needs, including halal supplies and food allergy specific boxes. The food parcels have met additional needs like baby essentials, and council and ODS staff have ensured delivery to the door of up to 800 food parcels every week through the course of the crisis.

There is an ongoing issue with hardship that has increased as jobs have been affected by the pandemic, and food services provide vital support to households that are struggling. The grant fund can help organisations in a variety of ways, from covering a weekly food subscription, purchasing a new

fridge/freezer, to improving their distribution systems:

The fund is open to organisations such as community groups and support services who are helping people with food and essential supplies, as a result of Covid. Each organisation can bid for up to £5,000 and applications assessed once a week. The government funding of just under £132,000, will be open until all has been allocated.

The City Council will put in place a dedicated officer to continue to support the transition and local food delivery system and liaison between partners

Councillor Marie Tidball, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, said "I'm really proud of everything our locality response hubs have achieved during lockdown. The food support was a huge project and an essential part of making sure no one was facing food poverty during lockdown.

"We have worked closely with partners and secured funding from government to ensure a smooth transition as we stop providing this service and ensure long-term resilience in the food system in Oxford. We know there are great organisations who are already helping people and our teams will continue to work closely with these organisations."

## Local policing team tackles anti-social behaviour

**THE** Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Policing Team is working to keep local open spaces safe following feedback from the local community.

Sgt Alex Penn said "Acting on feedback from the community we identified a number of concerns regarding criminality and anti-social behaviour in both Gillians Park and Fry's Hill Park. In response we have been working in partnership with the council's Green Space Development team in order to try and make your open spaces, safe spaces."

So far, the team has improved the lighting, cut back a lot of overgrown hedgerows to improve visibility, completed several weapon and drug sweeps using licenced search officers, incorporating Spindleberry Nature Reserve and

all adjoining bridges, and increased active police patrols night and day.

Sgt Penn added "In addition we would also like to thank Pegasus Primary School for the warm reception during our latest safety presentation and to all the residents who participated in our recent knife amnesty. We want everyone to continue enjoying these parks hassle free and welcome all feedback regarding criminality and anti-social behaviour in the area."

**Contact the team directly at [blackbirdleysnhpt2@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk](mailto:blackbirdleysnhpt2@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk) or alternatively call on 101 or 999 in an emergency.**



Bounty at the Waste-to-taste Cafe

# Waste-to-Taste!

**A BUMPER** crop of vegetables harvested from a giant edible chaos garden on the Blenheim Estate, was transformed into delicious meals to feed vulnerable people thanks to an innovative Oxford community pop-up café.

Much of the produce grown by Richard Tustian at Blenheim, which includes parsnips, beetroots, leeks, cauliflowers, turnips, potatoes, carrots, pak choi, peas and pumpkins, has been donated to Oxford-based Waste2Taste to be used in their café at the Ark T Centre in Cowley which has become a lifeline for many people during the pandemic.

Richard, whose day job entails looking after the Blenheim Estate's herd of British White cattle, had originally planned to create a small chaos vegetable patch in his own back garden.

However instead he decided to randomly sow hundreds of vegetable seeds on an unused, half-acre plot of land within the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"The whole process was an experiment to see what was achievable with an area of unused ground and very little labour whilst embracing a natural process. Standard vegetable gardens tend to take a huge amount of time to maintain and are quite often very regimental with all produce planted in lines," Richard said.

"Although these standard practices can produce huge amounts of produce from relatively small plots, they can also cause some issues with insect and disease pressures as it is easy for the problem to spread up the lines of regimental plants.

"Within the chaos garden I have seen less disease and pest problems and I put this down to the random spacing

between the plants and quite probably the camouflage of certain plants by weeds.

"What is quite obvious from the chaos garden is that it would not produce as much produce as a standard veg plot, but it shows that you can grow nutritious food with relatively minimal labour," he added.

"We then had to decide what to do with the crop. I wanted it to go to somewhere that would really benefit so we decided to take it to a pop-up café at the Ark T Centre in Cowley, Oxford. The café is run by two amazing women called Marie and Sandra, who have created a catering service called Waste2Taste using surplus food to make delicious meals."

## CHAOS!

The chaos vegetable garden project is one of a series of new initiatives being undertaken by the Blenheim Estate as part of its ground-breaking land strategy, which aims to utilise the Estate's land for the benefit of local communities.

Café co-founder Marie Lehri said "Richard from the Estate Team at Blenheim contacted us when he heard about our free meals scheme and we are absolutely thrilled that he has decided to donate this fantastic produce to Waste2Taste. Many of the families and individuals we are providing free meals to, are sadly experiencing food poverty or ill health. For these people healthy, nutritious and delicious meals are crucially important. With this wonderful produce we are able to provide them with exactly that."

Marie added that since April 7, Waste2Taste alone have supplied almost

3000 free meals. "We deliver weekly food parcels to people we have identified through our Cooking for Health and Wellbeing workshops. Feedback from people who have been in receipt of the free meals has been very powerful – people have described the impact as a lifeline. We have now launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise £20,000 to enable us to keep going. It is going really well but we need a big push to get us where we need to be."

Waste2Taste tackles food poverty and food waste, providing delicious, nutritious free meals to those most in need, and works with community partners to address food poverty and food waste in Oxford.

Marie added "Oxford has high levels of homelessness, child poverty and food inequality. Using income from our acclaimed ethical, sustainable catering operation, Waste2Taste works in partnership to deliver training, outreach and delicious home-cooked meals to those most in need."

In just three years, Waste2Taste has grown from the seed of an idea into a successful, grass-roots social enterprise. Before the pandemic they were struggling to keep up with the demand for their event catering service, and were looking to expand the team.

"Our Waste2Taste Community Café at the wonderful Ark-T had become a safe space where everyone felt welcome and vulnerable community members dropped in regularly. Waste2Taste's Health & Wellbeing workshops for homeless and vulnerably-housed adults were so popular we had a waiting list and a brilliant cohort

of trainees on supported placements in the Café and elsewhere. All of this, and still we fulfilled our commitment to donate 25% of our profits to a local homelessness charity The Gatehouse."

The impact of Covid-19 and then lockdown was dramatic for the project. Within days all event catering bookings were cancelled, and the café closed. Workshops were put on hold. Volunteers could no longer access their placements. Waste2Taste lost 100% of its income.

But instead of giving up, Marie and Sandra remodelled the social enterprise. "We didn't allow Waste2Taste to go under or for activity to be put on hold. Instead, we remodelled. Teaming up with local partners Ark-T Centre, Flo's The place in the Park and Oxford Hub we formed the #OX4FreeFoodCrew providing people who are shielding, the elderly, those who are experiencing food poverty or otherwise vulnerable with nutritious and delicious cooked food with the help of Oxford Food Bank, Sofa Didcot and Bucksom Farm."

One recipient, Tin, said "I widely appreciate all of your produce, fantastic good news for me! I look forward to it. All the tastes have been great. I am not vegetarian but I wonderfully appreciate your food, is a very good resource to be able to go to and I hope you get stronger and bigger and carry on for a very long time. Thank you very much."

Lockdown may have been eased, but there is still a massive and growing need for food assistance. Waste2Taste is exploring new ways to increase its reach alongside rethinking their business approach in response to these changed times.

Marie said "We have just launched a Pay It Forward scheme in our café, so people can buy a drink or a meal for someone else to have when they need it, and a newly evolving partnership with schools is helping us to reach the increasing number of families experiencing food poverty. However, we need to raise funds to support the enterprise through the next few months, to be able to continue to deliver our food equality programmes, training and volunteering whilst enabling us to redesign our model. We believe we can change lives."

Waste2Taste needs to fund 200 free meals a week, secure staff, skills and resources needed to deliver the project and deliver Health and Wellbeing workshops.

Marie added "By helping our project you are helping us to sustain our social enterprise overall core objectives, which in turn benefits and changes the lives of the communities with whom we work in Oxford. This is a time for us to get together with kindness and respect and to help others to the best of our abilities, we are all in this together."

**To support the crowdfunding campaign go to [www.waste2taste.co.uk](http://www.waste2taste.co.uk)**

# Call for bathing water status on the Thames

**OXFORD** City Councillors have voted unanimously for bathing water status on the Thames through Oxford, and called on Thames Water to immediately provide real time alerts of sewage spills in the river.

Data from the Rivers Trust revealed that last year, just four sewage treatment works in Oxford spilled raw sewage into the river over 170 times, for the equivalent of 82 days.

Water companies can only legally release raw sewage in exceptionally heavy rainfall events, indicating that Thames Water has been breaking the law repeatedly.

Over 4,000 people have now signed a petition in support of bathing water status and ending sewage pollution.

Bathing water status would mean weekly monitoring of river pollution in the summer months, allowing river users to avoid pollution and stay safe. However, it will now take a year to apply for the designation, so the earliest it would be in place is summer 2022.

Campaigners and the council are also calling on Thames Water to provide real-time alerts of sewage pollution.

Claire Robertson, founder of the #endsewagepollution Thames group spoke at the meeting. She said "It's a national and local scandal that raw sewage is regularly ending up in our rivers. In Oxford, we



Protesting river pollution on the Thames

love the river – it gives us so many mental, physical and social benefits, especially during lockdown. Why hasn't Thames Water already promised to upgrade their sewage works? Why can't they be honest and give us real time alerts of when sewage

is spilling? They have that data, they need to make it publicly available."

Oxford follows Ilkley in Yorkshire and the River Avon in Somerset in applying for bathing water status. The designation has been granted for over 600 beaches and

lakes but as yet, no rivers. The campaign is gathering a head of steam as data from the Guardian newspaper revealed the extent of raw sewage pollution. In 2019, raw sewage was spilled by water companies across England on over 200,000 occasions.

# Food and Kindness raises funds for hospice



**CHEFS** and cooks from across Oxfordshire, have contributed some of their favourite recipes to a new cookbook to support the Sobell House hospice.

Food and Kindness, available from Monday, is a very special kind of cookbook and has been published to raise awareness and funds for the hospice, it's also about recognising some of the local businesses in the food and

drink industry that have supported Sobell House over the years, and have been badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The book brings together over 30 stories and recipes from a wide range of local chefs, restaurateurs, food writers and celebrities, many of whom hold Sobell House close to their heart. Alongside a recipe for hummus from Stephen Fry you will find one for orange and carrot cake from Barefoot Bakery, and beetroot and mint burgers from The Butchers Arms in Headington. A recipe for the perfect vegetable soup handed down to Mel Giedroyc by her mum is included and there is a tasty vegan lunch courtesy of Sue Perkins. The star of BBC 3 mockumentary This Country, Paul Chahidi, who is an ambassador for Sobell House proudly showcases his Mediterranean pork, lemon and parmesan meatball dish. Alongside these famous supporters, plenty of Oxfordshire eateries have also got involved with the book, giving readers

the chance to make some of their best-loved dishes at home and discover the stories behind each unique venture. Among these are waterside destination The Cherwell Boathouse with breaded halloumi and sweetcorn fritters; city-centre brasserie No. 1 Ship Street with French onion soup; and South Indian restaurant Bhoomi Kitchen with Kerala fried chicken.

Other favourites include Arbequina, Aziz, Oli's Thai, La Cucina, The Mole Inn and The White Hart at Fyfield who share the secret of their elderflower crème brulee with goosberry compote. Oxford Fine Dining's recipe is for chicken breast with pea puree and wild garlic hollandaise.

Food and Kindness is all about bringing the local community together to celebrate the inspiring work and ethos of Sobell House. Since 1976, the hospice, which is jointly funded by the NHS and Sobell House Hospice Charity, has been providing specialist end-of-life and palliative care to local

people with life-limiting illnesses as well as supporting their families. The staff believe that every adult should be able to die with dignity and without pain.

"If it wasn't for Sobell House I'm not sure how I could have ever coped. They are the most lovely, selfless people who make the lives of others a priority, working long, hard hours but always maintaining a high standard of care and love. I will always be forever grateful to everyone at Sobell and hope this great place will continue to care for many years to come."

Yazmine's experience of the care of her mother Gina.

The idea of the book came in March just before lockdown when Sobell House's Head of Fundraising, Lorraine Pink, realised that Covid-19 was going to have a serious impact on the Charity's income. She said "We needed to look at alternative ways to engage with our supporters as we could no longer hold our annual fundraising events. A cook book featuring local businesses who

have been so kind to Sobell House over the years seemed the perfect choice."

Tim Wraith, who has worked with Sobell House for many years and a great 'foodie' was the ideal person to lead this project. He said "I have loved leading the project to publish Food and Kindness. I am a big foodie person and own lots of recipe books so was delighted to get involved. At Sobell House, we receive incredible kindness from the local hospitality businesses and this is an opportunity for us to support them at this tough time. The whole cost of the book has been sponsored by local businesses which means all the money raised goes to supporting Sobell House."

**Food and Kindness is a 144 page paperback and retails at £15. It will be available to purchase from Amazon, bookshops including Waterstones and online from <https://mezepublishing.co.uk/>**



Sir Muir Gray has teamed up again with Age UK Oxfordshire and Active Oxfordshire

# Donate and support older people to be active and connected during this pandemic

**SIR MUIR** Gray, Age UK Oxfordshire and Active Oxfordshire have once again teamed up to support the Share Your Warmth campaign. Last winter, this campaign helped to get older people more physically active and reduce isolation and loneliness. Now more than ever, help is much needed.

The campaign wants to get older people active, feeling supported and connected online, and is asking people who receive a winter fuel allowance but are able to spare it, to donate it to this year's Share your Warmth campaign.

The last campaign ended in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, so these donations couldn't have been more timely. The money raised made a real and immediate difference to older people in Oxfordshire.

It enabled the production of five specialist exercise films that were designed to maintain strength and balance whilst at home, and proved popular during this time. Becoming physically deconditioned can have a huge impact on people's daily lives, such as not being able to walk as far or as fast or not being able to hold a full kettle of water.

Sir Muir Gray said "The bad news is that the impact of reduced activity and increased isolation makes the need for the campaign even greater. The good news is that people can become stronger, more supple and move with more stamina and skills whatever their age and no matter how many long term conditions they may have."

The campaign sent out 1,000 home exercise packs to people without internet

access and also made 3,290 phone calls to check on people's wellbeing and to motivate people to be as active as possible.

Those who benefitted said "Really appreciative of these messages and the videos. Makes me get on with it!"

"I do one or two sessions every day since lock down, and have really benefited. Your varied sessions on YouTube have kept me sane (and balanced!)"

During the pandemic, older people are understandably being far more cautious about socialising, which in turn is taking its toll on mental health. Many regular social activities have not resumed, meaning that feelings of loneliness are even more pronounced. For older people, this realisation can be quite hard hitting, with many people saying they are feeling a sense of loss of hope.

For younger people, adapting to a new life online may be easier than for someone who is unfamiliar with technology, increasing the feeling of being cut off. The campaign aims to change that and make a difference to as many people as possible.

Malcolm donated his winter fuel allowance during the last campaign. He said "I saw an article about Sir Muir Gray's appeal on behalf of Age UK Oxfordshire and Active Oxfordshire. I also watched his video on YouTube and decided it was just

what I had had in mind for my unwanted winter fuel supplement. I retired from a London university some 15 years ago and am fortunate to have a good pension. This allows me to have holidays abroad and trips to museums and theatres in Oxford [pre-COVID]. After a lifetime of cycling and walking holidays, I know the benefits of an active life. Not only is it beneficial for our physical health but one's mental health. If donating my winter fuel supplement can be of help assisting their aim to get those less well off than myself to be more active and also improve their contact with others, we all know how loneliness can be such a devastating thing for the elderly and unfortunately it is all too common. I would encourage anyone whose personal circumstances are similar to mine, to donate their winter fuel supplement to this worthy cause."

#### By donating your £200 you would:

- Support 20 housebound people to do chair-based exercises at home with a home exercise pack,
- Support 40 older people to attend an online tailored group exercise class, keeping them active, mobile and socially connected,
- Enable 100 housebound older people in Oxfordshire to receive a friendly phone call.

Sir Muir Gray, Age UK Oxfordshire and Active Oxfordshire are working together to help older people be as active and as connected as possible to benefit both physical and mental health.

Age UK Oxfordshire's Deputy CEO Nigel Gowing said "This is a terrific initiative that will make a real difference to older people in Oxfordshire. The ever-changing rules can make it difficult to maintain activity levels at any age, but physical exercise is proven to be highly beneficial to both physical and mental wellbeing. So, we need to do everything we can to support older people to remain fit, healthy and connected, and we are immensely grateful to everyone who is able to support this campaign."

Paul Brivio, Chief Executive of Active Oxfordshire, said "Staying physically active and connected is more important than ever during these challenging times. We're delighted to play our part in re-launching Share your Warmth to help older people across the county stay active and protect their physical and mental well-being. Your support really will change lives – thank you."

Visit the Just Giving page to donate via <https://justgiving.com/campaign/warmth>



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# Arts in Oxfordshire gets share of 'lifeline grants' to ensure a sustainable future

**THIRTEEN** Oxfordshire arts organisation have received almost £2 million as a share of grants from the Government's £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund to help face the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and to ensure they have a sustainable future.

Among those to receive the lifeline grants are The Oxford Playhouse Trust which received £458,000 and Arts at the Old Fire Station which has been awarded £96,420.

They are among 1,385 cultural and creative organisations across the country receiving urgently needed support. £257 million of investment has been announced today as part of the very first round of the Culture Recovery Fund grants programme being administered by Arts Council England. Further rounds of funding in the cultural and heritage sector are due to be announced over the coming weeks.

Oxford Playhouse has been awarded £458,026. The grant will help Oxford Playhouse Trust, the charity that runs the venue, to survive the impact of

the coronavirus pandemic and work towards fully reopening the theatre in 2021. The funding will help the theatre to survive in the short term, engaging with its audiences and the communities it serves.

Jeremy Spafford, Director, Arts at the Old Fire Station said "We are over the moon to receive this funding. The Old Fire Station is a unique centre for creativity, with our theatre, gallery, shop and studios running a lively and vibrant programme of all different kinds of artistic work, which is woven in amongst all of the amazing work Crisis do to support people experiencing homelessness in the building we share together. Our organisation's work has become a way for people from all walks of life in this community to find solace, joy, and connection during good times and bad. It is needed now more than ever, and the Old Fire Station can play a significant role in Oxford's recovery from this crisis. Our city is known for its beautiful architecture and world class university, but the wealth gap here is significant –



The Old Fire Station, a key Oxford arts centre

12 neighbourhoods in Oxford are amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.

Oxford needs the Old Fire Station because it is about openness, inclusion, looking forward and different thinking – it acts as a bridge between sectors, organisations and people. We are here to produce and present work across art forms, help

people to be creative, support artists, include people who are facing tough times because of disadvantage, and work with communities across Oxford. And, in everything we do, we need to consider how it helps us to face the climate emergency, unlearn discrimination, be human friendly, experiment, listen and build financial resilience.

We're reflecting deeply and thinking on our feet, seeing what work needs to be done, and securing our place in Oxford. This funding is an incredible lifeline to secure our recovery. Our hope now is that the community and our friends will stick by us to make sure we have a long future making Oxford a better place for everyone."

## Oxford Playhouse Autumn 2020 Meanwhile Season

**OXFORD** Playhouse has launched an exciting new Autumn 2020 Meanwhile Season, a programme of work that embraces live socially-distanced shows, live streaming, digital commissions, great talks, and family theatre, along with a full participation programme for everyone to get involved and stay connected while the theatre is closed due to Covid-19 restrictions.

OP aims to engage and entertain loyal and new audiences this autumn with a programme that includes digital world premieres, a great line-up of comedy, immersive listening events, and real-time Zoom experiments.

Louise Chantal and Vanessa Lefrançois, Joint CEOs at Oxford Playhouse said "Interesting times call for creative approaches – to theatre as much as to life! 2020 has brought many challenges for us all, not least how to stay creative. This 'meanwhile' programme spans live and online performances and we've tried to look at new ways of presenting theatre to ensure creative ideas and talent are kept

active during the current crisis. Everyone at the Playhouse is delighted to be welcoming audiences back to the theatre, albeit in a much reduced and rather different way, and we're thrilled to have commissioned and now be premiering new work, embracing innovative ways of working which will no doubt be 'the new normal' from now on."

Oxford Playhouse has commissioned six world premieres during lockdown which will be showcased this autumn, inviting audiences to experience theatre in a new way. These include:

**Under the Mask**, co-produced with Tamasha, a live binaural listening event based on the real-life experience of a newly qualified doctor on the front line of the Covid pandemic, with audiences seated directly on the OP stage;

**Small Hours** – co-commissioned with IF Oxford and directed by Yasmin Sidwha of Mandala Theatre, with scientific advice from the University of Oxford Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute, this piece is performed by four young actors across the globe and probes the mysteries of sleep;

**Do You Love Me Yet?** – a funny, touching, live experiment into human intimacy, in which the audience watch two actors meet for the first time on Zoom, created by Jocelyn Cox and Samuel E Taylor, commissioned by Oxford Playhouse with the support from TORCH (University of

Oxford) and Ferment, Bristol Old Vic; **Great Big Story Mix Up** – created by OP family-friendly theatre company favourites Roustabout (One Small Step), an improvised fairy tale led by audience suggestions which sees wild and wonderful ideas brought to life; **Take Up Space** – by Evolve artist and movement director Jenni Jackson, invites a group of 30 women on a journey to discover how we use our bodies and what it means to 'Take Up Space'; **Oxford Winter Light Festival** mobile installation by local artist Nor – co-commissioned with Arts at The Old Fire Station and Tandem Arts Collective, this open-air event asks communities what would you put in an empty parking space?

Oxford Playhouse is opening up the theatre for a number of special socially-distanced shows, with a reduced capacity, featuring favourite comedians and speakers. Where possible, these events will also be live-streamed to audiences at home.

In addition to OP's homegrown digital commissions, there will also be a full digital programme, OP Online, in which Oxford Playhouse has hand-picked the best of digital touring productions for audiences to enjoy from the comfort of their living rooms. Fun, interactive and thought-provoking, these shows will be live streamed from venues around the UK.

The Autumn programme also includes

three unique live streamed OP in Conversation events, with writers and authors giving readings of their work and answering questions about their extraordinary lives.

Artists remain at the heart of everything the Playhouse does and the theatre will continue to support them during these challenging times. This Autumn, OP will be working with The Plot, a self-organising, diverse group of later-career playwrights, to help them develop their own voices and practice. The Plot is the latest addition to OP's extensive artist development programme, which includes Evolve, Playhouse Playmaker and Advice Sessions for local artists.

Oxford Playhouse is following the safety and hygiene measures set out by the government in its guidance for performing arts. For audiences' safety and assurance, OP has put a number of Covid-secure measures in place, including staggered arrival times, reduced capacity and socially distanced seats, air circulation, enhanced cleaning and Test and Trace on arrival. Oxford Playhouse has been awarded the seal of approval from both Visit England's: We're Good to Go and UK Theatre's: See It Safely.

**Full details of all the Covid-secure measures at Oxford Playhouse can be found at [www.oxfordplayhouse.com/your-visit/covid-secure-measures](http://www.oxfordplayhouse.com/your-visit/covid-secure-measures)**



**Rubie Marie**

**INFLUENCER** Rubie Marie has joined Oxford Against Cutting, as an Ambassador and Facilitator to help services understand the signs to look out for and help young women at risk of forced marriage and honour-based abuse.

This comes after ITV's crime drama 'Honour' aired on national television at the end of September based on a true story.

Rubie, now 37 said "I endured the horrific taboo experiences of honour-based abuse myself in 1998/9 when I was 15 years old and I was taken abroad just after my sister ran away from home. She was 18 years old and very much in love with her boyfriend. Brave as she was, she confronted my father to get married. This was not approved, and she endured honour-based abuse to the point she had no choice but to leave the city. All eyes turned on me. I had a secret boyfriend who my family

found out about and they thought I would leave although that was not my plan."

She added "The uncles and my father had endless meetings after restaurant hours at my home, always talking over each other. Social services were always at my home as my mother was subjected to domestic violence. Summer holidays were approaching, and the community was looking down on us as a family. We would be spat on as we walked past them in the streets. They said we were a disappointment to society and that the honour for our family and extended family, even to family friends, had been damaged. It was the ripple effect of the 'honour' system."

Rubie was tricked into going to Bangladesh but had no idea what was planned. She said "We must get away from the family for a while," my father kept on

# Survivor of honour-based abuse and forced marriage supports Oxford Against Cutting

repeating. I thought this was a great idea as I never been abroad as we were a poor family, so why not? I was 15 years old and I never thought of marriage or it even being considered as I was so young. Time went by, one, two, three, four months in Bangladesh. When I asked about school, my father simply said that we'd spent our money and couldn't afford to go back. Eventually my father disclosed the true plan as I sat eating dinner: I was going to be married. I couldn't comprehend being married and to someone I didn't love. My nightmare began."

Forced to marry a man twice her age, Rubie was given the birth control pill by one of her younger uncles before the wedding so she wouldn't get pregnant. She said "But then one day, after the wedding, the husband's sister went through my belongings, found them and disposed of them. I was raped every day as he wanted me to be pregnant as a guaranteed visa for him. Weeks went by and I soon became pregnant. At the cost of my unborn daughter's health we became sick from a virus the husband passed on to me called CMV (cytomegalovirus).

The doctors advised me to get back to the UK otherwise I and my unborn child could die, it was life threatening. I needed to come back home. The 'husband' wanted me to stay in Bangladesh until I gave birth and then to come to the UK as a family, but his concern for the risk of losing his visa if we died was greater and so he needed to let me return.

"When my daughter was born "handicapped" as the doctors said, I didn't understand what it meant, I kept asking the hospital "What does it mean?" I was so angry with everyone, as they all blamed me for my daughter being born with severe special needs. The husband's extended family only came to see my baby twice. She was seen as "tarnished" as she had a disability and it seemed his family wanted to dispose of her. If we were to stay in Bangladesh, I think my child would have been thrown in the streets like rubbish – used and most likely sexually abused."

Rubie tried to move away but was found by her family who imprisoned her and would not let her leave the house or have any contact with anyone. She added "My mobile phone sim was scratched and I was looked at in disgust. I was treated as someone who had dishonoured the family name and committed adultery. I was seen as a whore, prostitute, good for nothing."

A few days later, Rubie fled and a friend called the police but she ended up in a violent five-year marriage. "I had left Wales with my baby and no one in the Midlands followed up to check on my welfare. My family should've taught me to look out for perpetrators yet I just fell into another one's arms. When I finally escaped this relationship, I had a son to raise, at the same time as coping with five years of stalking. I felt this drowned me. After countless court attendances he was never put in jail. Feeling

dysfunctional for over a decade, disowned by my family, I had no one. I always sought out a man who would protect me, not realising it should be me to protect myself and my children. I was 27 when I first started to get to know myself again."

Rubie said "This torment of young people, being forced into marriage, experiencing honour-based abuse, child abuse, human trafficking and being raped to becoming pregnant, needs to stop. These criminal acts are being driven by the hands of our very own communities – victims' own families and extended families. The people that we thought we could depend on and trust unconditionally, are tearing lives apart. We need to have input from community leaders and work with them to bring an end to the suffering. We are blessed to live in a diverse society and we need to understand different cultural practices, the harmful, as well as the non-harmful. I frequently hear questions asked like "Isn't it just their 'culture' or 'religion'?" but in fact "honour-based abuse" is simply 'abuse' and is very much disguised with many layers."

She added "These abusers are ruining many of our British girls' lives, leaving many suffering with mental health issues from the traumas they've experienced. Some even take their own lives or are killed by their family. Many will run away from their own families for safety. Many cases have had professionals involved who have missed key signs that could have saved the victim. We need aftercare services put in place to help support young people who have experienced honour-based traumas. Let's give our young girls the lives they deserve to live, with education and dignity."

**Forced marriage and anti-FGM training can be booked by contacting [info@oxfordagainstcutting.org](mailto:info@oxfordagainstcutting.org)**

**For more info go to [www.oxfordagainstcutting.org](http://www.oxfordagainstcutting.org)**

**Twitter: @OAgainstCutting  
Facebook: OxfordAgainstCutting  
Instagram: @oxfordagainstcutting**



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# Support for anyone self-isolating

**AS THE** government makes the guidance on self-isolating a legal requirement, Oxford City Council is reminding residents that support is there for them if they need it.

As Leys News went to press, anyone testing positive for coronavirus is required by law to self-isolate for 14 days, to protect others from catching the virus. Practical help is available to support people through this two-week period, from collecting shopping and prescriptions to claiming financial support for the most needy.

Volunteers are ready to help with shopping and prescriptions so you don't need to leave home.

There are voluntary organisations across the city that offer food parcels for those in hardship to supplement their weekly groceries, many of them listed on the Good Food Oxford map. For those on the lowest incomes the government is providing a £500 grant, beginning this month.

Through lockdown the City Council established a network of local response staff who helped residents with the emergency needs from isolating and financial hardship that resulted. The knowledge and relationships these teams have built up are now there to support people who are struggling due to self-isolation.

As well as the Council's services a number of community organisations have developed support for their local community. Oxford Hub has partnered with the council on the Oxford Together programme which provides local volunteers who can help pick up shopping and prescriptions; food banks and community larders are now reopening to help those in hardship, and arrangements can be made for those self-isolating.

These services and other support for hardship can be accessed by calling the City Council on 01865 249 811 or visiting [www.oxford.gov.uk/communityassistance](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/communityassistance)

In October the government's financial support for low income households that cannot work from home comes into effect. Details on eligibility and how to claim will be published shortly.

Previously it has been a guideline to self-isolate for 14 days, to protect the rest of the community. As case numbers rise it has now become a legal requirement, with fines of £1000 issued by the police for those who breach the rules. Employers who pressure staff not to self-isolate will also be liable for the fines, which can increase to £10,000 for repeated or the most serious breaches.

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Safer, Healthier Oxford, said "It's vital that people self-isolate if they test positive or have symptoms, that is the most effective way to stop the spread. There is support to make this easier, from the government's financial support to Oxford volunteers for shopping and practical help.

"Although friends and family are often the best sources of support, there are times when they aren't able to give the help that's needed. Our customer services team and our locality hubs can help you access support, whether that's directly from the Council or finding other services that can help. Please get in touch if you need support."

## Citizens Advice

# JOB REDUNDANCY: check your rights

**ONE** of the most serious outcomes of the current pandemic problem is that thousands of people in the UK are losing their jobs. If you are one of these people, and are made redundant or offered voluntary redundancy, it is important that you thoroughly understand your rights and options.

The first thing to do if you are at risk of redundancy is to look at your contract of employment, which will spell out your basic rights. Make sure that your company abides by these conditions. Also, consider other sources of help such as your union if you belong to one. Bear in mind that if you have been in the job for less than two years you do not have as much job protection, but if for more than two years, your employer has to follow certain procedures, such as find you another job in the company if possible.

You can't be made redundant in an unfair way or for discriminatory reasons. The reason must be a genuine one, so the job you do or the skills you have are no longer needed, or the employer can't afford you, or the business is failing. With technology advancing, sometimes fewer people are needed to do a given job.

You might be entitled to receive redundancy pay, which increases with length of service and has two elements – statutory and contractual. Statutory pay (not paid to those who have less than two years' service) is the minimum

that the law says you are entitled to, and is based on your age, weekly pay and the number of years you have worked in the job. Contractual redundancy pay is the additional amount to which your contract may entitle you. If you have been furloughed, the law says that your redundancy pay must be worked out according to your usual wages, not the 80% furlough figure.

Bear in mind that if your employer offers you a suitable alternative job and you refuse to take it without good reasons, they can refuse to give you redundancy pay. You can check that your redundancy pay is fair by using the calculator at <https://www.gov.uk/calculate-your-redundancy-pay>.

You are also entitled to a paid notice period or pay in lieu of notice, and the employer should give you paid time off for attending job interviews.

**All the implications of redundancy are helpfully described on the Citizens Advice website at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/leaving-a-job>. The website also gives advice about claiming benefits or dealing with your debts if you need this. You can talk to an adviser on the Adviceline, 0300 330 9042. Visit [www.ca.org.uk](http://www.ca.org.uk) to find your local Citizens Advice office.**

## Volunteer advisers needed

**WE CAN** all face problems that are too stressful or complicated to sort out alone.

Last year our 150 volunteers advised over 11,000 people. We helped three quarters resolve their debt, benefits, employment and housing problems.

We now need more advisers to help us during and after the Covid-19 crisis.

Our main offices are in Abingdon, Didcot, Henley and Thame. Since March, 90 volunteers and staff have been advising the public from home on our Adviceline service. Recently we partially re-opened our offices, in part to train new advisers.

What will you get out of it? You will join a friendly team, meet new people, develop your skills and make a real difference to people's lives.

You'll need to have good listening and interpersonal skills, a willingness to learn and be confident with computers. Full training will be provided.

**If you have eight hours a week to spare for the next two years or more and are looking for a satisfying and stimulating volunteer role in your local community, please contact us at: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/oxfordshire-south-vale/volunteer/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/oxfordshire-south-vale/volunteer/)**

# IF Oxford

**Spacesuits, stuntmen, dining table demos and behind the scenes at the labs creating a Covid-19 vaccine, how the science and ideas festival is going online**



**IF OXFORD** is back with a month-long festival of 100 events celebrating science and ideas for adults, children and teenagers on a dynamic new online platform.

Until Saturday 31 October the Festival brings together real time cutting-edge research from world-leading academics with wide-ranging events to excite the imagination, from

dance, film, debate, demos from dining tables, and suggestions for hands-on activities to try at home.

Festival-goers can uncover big ideas and ask even bigger questions about science, humanity, the world at large and beyond.

The online Explorazone Digital event will give viewers the chance to enjoy dozens of free hands-on demonstrations and activity ideas for all ages in a virtual exhibition hall and auditorium.

Here visitors can discover the smallest particles in the Universe and travel to the edge of space, tour the Oxford labs creating the COVID-19 vaccine at Headington's Jenner Institute or avert a catastrophic flood while filling up a virtual 'swag bag' with goodies and try-at-home experiments.

Enjoy a new contemporary dance performance created using motion-capture software during lock-down in response to the COVID-19 crisis, a collaboration between nationally-acclaimed choreographer Alexander Whitley, Oxford's Parasol Dance Group and the Oxford University Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics.

Unearth the secrets of a good spacesuit with Daniel Craig double, stuntman and extreme adventurer Andy Torbet or join actor Steven McGann, Dr

Patrick Turner in the popular BBC period drama Call the Midwife, as he joins other panellists discussing the scientific possibilities of a memory erasure in response to the film The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004).

Tempt your taste buds with an insight into the science behind your morning coffee, a foray into chocolate making, a virtual apple day or take part in a gin tasting that takes you around the world.

With poetry, politics, music and more, there's something to intrigue everyone whatever their interests. The majority of events are free to attend (donations are welcome using the Festival's Pay What You Decide).

Organisers have tried to find ways to bring great ideas and activities to people during the pandemic and not only focus on online activity. There is a special Curiosity Box crammed with relevant equipment and materials for experiments that bring Explorazone Digital into the physical world. The festival has teamed up with STFC and the Oxford Lights Festival to put on a series of LED coding workshops and there's a coding kit available to buy or you can win one of 50 packs.

**All the details are at [www.if-oxford.com](http://www.if-oxford.com)**



# USEFUL CONTACTS

## Able Centre

Cuddesdon Way.  
Free courses in Maths and English.  
T: Nicky, 01865 776334

## Agnes Smith Advice Centre

96 Blackbird Leys Road. Gives free independent and impartial debt advice and counselling.  
T: 01865 770206 or 0800 066 2218

## Blackbird Leys Bowls Club

Cuddesdon Way.  
T: David Buckwell, 01865 881735  
or Gordon Roper, 01865 361047

## Blackbird Leys Community Centre

Blackbird Leys Road, Blackbird Leys, OX4 6HW  
T: 01865 402070  
E: blackbirdleyscommcentre@oxford.gov.uk

## LOCAL CHURCHES

### Church of the Holy Family

T: Revd Heather Carter, 01865 778728  
W: www.holyfamilybbl.co.uk

### Sacred Heart Catholic Church

T: Rev. Nazarius Mgungwe, 01865 776903  
E: sacredheartchurchoxford@gmail.com  
W: www.sacredheartoxford.com

### Leys Community Church

T: Andy and Nicci Longmore, 01865 779700  
W: www.leyscommunitychurch.org.uk

### Chrisco Ministries

T: 07533 845714 and 07737 564677

### Mount Zion Ministries Oxford.

T: Rev Chris Ugwu, 07877 536406 and 07932 964056  
E: mtzionoxford@yahoo.co.uk  
W: www.mtzionox.org

### Redeem Christian Church of God

T: 07825 679044  
W: www.RCCGLighthouse.co.uk

### Kingsway International Christian Centre

T: 07951 262426  
E: admin@kiccoxford.org.uk  
W: www.kiccoxford.org.uk

## Blackbird Leys Library

Cuddesdon Way.  
T: 01865 770403

## Blackbird Leys Youth Centre

Blackbird Leys Road. Variety of activities and advice for young people.  
T: 01865 772886

## BLAP Afterschool Club

Outdoor and indoor activities for ages 8 to 13 in a structured environment.  
T: 07530 933690 and 01865 236646  
E: blap76@yahoo.co.uk

## Brownies

Holy Family Church Hall.  
T: Jennifer Pleass, 07886 757338  
E: bblbrownies@gmail.com

## The Clockhouse Community Centre

Long Ground, Greater Leys OX4 7FX  
T: 01865 395908  
E: clockhousecdi@btconnect.com

## Indoor Bowls Club

Sandy Lane West.  
T: 01865 775891  
E: oxbowls1@yahoo.co.uk

## Leys Pools and Leisure Centre

Pegasus Road, Blackbird Leys, Oxford, OX4 6JL  
T: 0344 893 3222

## The Leys WI

All ladies aged 18 or over are welcome to attend.  
T: 07973 336 041  
E: theleyswi@yahoo.co.uk

## 35th Oxford (Blackbird Leys) Scout group

Contact Duncan Bowler  
07935 408991

baloo35thoxford@gmail.com

We meet at the Scout Hall, Sandy Lane,  
Blackbird Leys OX4 6AN



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www.facebook.com/leysnews



## The Blackbird Leys Choir



We will begin meeting again in September. All are welcome to join and we will be using Zoom for meetings until face to face gatherings are safe.

We are singing a range of popular songs from all over the world that reflect the interests of our multicultural community.

Music is arranged by the choir leader Malcolm Atkins to suit the voices we have and any who join.

malcolm.atkins1@ntlworld.com  
07872 991287

## Affected by Covid-19? If you are in need of support please contact:

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

#### Agnes Smith

Specialise in helping people with money and debt, welfare benefits and housing.  
Contact: 0800 066 2218 (telephone messages picked up three times a day)

#### Oxford City Council Welfare Reform

The team help people experiencing changes to their benefits or struggling to sustain their tenancy to find work, access training and get other support they may need to improve their situation for the long term.  
Contact (01865) 249811

### FOOD SUPPORT

#### Blackbird Leys Community Larder

A food club with access to a cafe, children's area, community events and of course weekly food.  
Contact: 01865 402070

#### Blackbird Leys Community Fridge

The community fridge enables free access to food kindly donated from local supermarkets and volunteers to reduce food waste.  
Contact: 01865 402070

### LONELINESS SUPPORT

#### Leys CDI

Co-ordinates both a Youth Project and a Clockhouse (50+) Project.  
Leys CDI contact: 01865 395927  
Clockhouse contact: 01865 395908

### HOUSING SUPPORT

#### Catalyst Housing

Supporting vulnerable tenants in a number of ways during these challenging times.  
Contact: 0300 456 2099

#### A2 Dominion

Supporting vulnerable tenants in a number of ways during these challenging times.  
Contact: 0800 432 0077

#### Oxford City Council Tenancy Sustainment

Provides assistance to Council Tenants who are struggling to manage their tenancy and need help to avoid losing their home.  
Contact: 01865 249811  
TenancySustainment@oxford.gov.uk

### OTHER SUPPORT

#### Homestart

There to support families who have at least one child under five.  
Contact: 01865 779 991

#### Oxfordshire Mind

Provides free advice and support for people who are struggling with their mental health.  
Contact: 01865 247788

Or contact the South Community Hub  
southcommunityhub@oxford.gov.uk

# Ready Set Go campaign launched to help every child in Oxford cycle and swim

**READY SET GO** is a campaign run by Oxford Hub that ensures every child in Oxford can learn to swim and ride a bike. As children are now back at school after months of lockdown, Oxford Hub is calling on the Oxfordshire public to donate children's bikes and support the campaign to help more children learn to ride a bike and stay active.

The Ready Set Go campaign focused first on the Blackbird Leys area, helping children to learn how to ride a bike at the Blackbird Leys Summer School, in partnership with Active Oxfordshire and Wheels for All. This was a great success, with 14 children completing Bikeability courses and 12 children completing Ready Set Ride, a British cycling course for younger learners.

The campaign also co-runs Blackbird Leys bike library, giving children access to a bike, lock and lights and provides cycling tuition for parents

so that the whole family can enjoy cycling. One of the first families to benefit from this support has enjoyed access to bikes and tuition: "As a result of this support I've been cycling to school with my children and it's made a huge difference to my mental and physical health – hats off to you guys!"

Ellie from Oxford Hub said "We've been working tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic to help more children in Oxford ride a bike and stay active, particularly while swimming pools are closed. Now that children are going back to school, we have a unique opportunity to encourage more families to cycle or walk to school and adopt a more active lifestyle. Our achievements so far wouldn't be possible without the generous bike donations from Oxford residents – but as demand continues to grow, we need your donations of children's bikes more than ever."

Josh Lenthall from Active Oxfordshire added "Cycling is essential for affordable and active travel in Oxford. Encouraging children to stay active is also more critical than ever, after levels of physical activity amongst children plummeted during lockdown. We are delighted to be able to support this project as part of our commitment to ensuring that every child in Oxfordshire can achieve 60 active minutes a day and protect their health and well-being."

Future plans for Ready Set Go include growing the Blackbird Leys Bike Library and expanding support across other neighbourhoods in Oxford.

**To find out more about the project, please visit [www.oxfordhub.org/ready-set-go](http://www.oxfordhub.org/ready-set-go). You can also donate your bike or donate lights, locks and helmets here our [Amazon Wishlist](#).**

## LEYS POOLS AND LEISURE CENTRE

# Leisure centre reopens with new rules in place

**GYM** and group exercise facilities at Leys Pools and Leisure Centre have reopened. The reopening adds to current leisure provision at Ferry Leisure Centre, giving residents in the south of the city access to local facilities as autumn approaches.

The centres are operating in line with new government guidelines and those planning to visit will be required to book and pay online, minimising contact required at the centre and allowing for the track and trace process to be implemented.

Leisure centre users will be asked to arrive ready to work out, ready to go. Users will be able to check in with the new NHS COVID-19 app or leave their details for track and trace. New cleaning regimes and hand sanitiser in the gym will keep equipment regularly cleaned to minimise risks.

Fusion Lifestyle continues to work closely with Oxford City Council to deliver the viable, phased, reopening of leisure facilities in Oxford. Councillor Linda Smith, cabinet member for parks and leisure, said "I know many local residents and clubs have been waiting for the Leys Leisure Centre to open and I'd like to thank them for their patience. The limited re-opening is another step forward on the phased re-start of our leisure services and the council will be working hard with Fusion Lifestyle to

make further progress, balancing the new costs of operating under current regulations with the demand for leisure services and the importance of making it easy and affordable for Oxford residents to get active."

Anthony Cawley, director of operations at Fusion, said "We know our leisure facilities are really important for the health and wellbeing of the local community and we are really pleased that we are able to announce the opening of some of our facilities in a safe and viable way. We look forward to bringing you news of more openings soon."

Bookings can be made up to seven days in advance by downloading the Fusion Lifestyle app or by visiting the centre website to register and use the booking facility.

**Temporary opening hours will alternate week on week between:**

### WEEK ONE

**Mon/Wed/Fri: 7am–3pm  
Tues/Thurs: 12pm–8pm  
Sat and Sun: 8am–2pm**

### WEEK TWO

**Mon/Wed/Fri: 12pm–8pm  
Tues/Thurs: 7am–3pm  
Sat and Sun: 8am–2pm**

**OXFORD** could lose out on almost 1,000 new council houses, if the Government goes ahead with proposed changes to planning rules.

There are currently 2,355 families on the waiting list for desperately-needed new council housing in Oxford. And, with unemployment on the rise, there are likely to be more people falling into housing need.

Oxford City Council, under the Local Plan 2036, has allocated land to build 2,700 new council homes over the next 16 years.

But the Government – in a consultation named Changes to the Current Planning System – is proposing changes to planning rules that would see the number of council homes built in Oxford before 2036 slashed by up to 919.

The change would mainly benefit large housing developers, meaning they no longer need to build council homes on their development sites and can instead focus on market value homes.

In Oxford, which is the least affordable city in the country to live in, this would mean building more houses that are unaffordable to the majority of Oxford residents, and reducing the proportion of

# Oxford could lose out on desperately-needed council homes

homes built for social rent, such as council housing.

Council housing in Oxford is provided at about 40% of average rent levels in an area. While the median private rent for a three-bedroom house in Oxford is £1,500 a month, the City Council recently let six new three-bedroom homes to families on its waiting list at a social rent of £600 a month.

The Government's new consultation was issued at the same time as – but is separate from – its controversial Planning White Paper.

Oxford could lose almost 1,000 council homes. The Government says its proposed changes to the planning system are to improve the effectiveness of the current planning system.

As part of the proposals, the Government is planning to redefine what a "large

development" site is, at least in the short-term, but potentially permanently.

In Oxford, a "large development" is currently defined as a site with 10 or more houses, but the Government is looking to change this to a site with either 40 or more, or 50 or more houses.

This means that planning rules for "large developments" will no longer apply in Oxford on sites of up to 39 or 49 houses.

In Oxford, the City Council's Local Plan 2036 – which was agreed by Government-appointed planning inspectors earlier this year – states that sites of 10 or more homes must include 40% council housing and 10% intermediate housing.

In a further change, the Government is also proposing to change these percentages to require "large developments"

to have 30% council housing, 12.5% First Homes, and 7.5% intermediate housing.

The combined impact of these two changes, in a worst-case scenario where a "large development" is defined as 50 or more homes, would see Oxford go from producing 2,700 council homes by 2036 to producing 1,781 – a loss of 919 council homes.

However, these numbers could be an underestimate because the Government's proposals would create a cliff edge for housing developers.

If the Government goes ahead with creating the threshold at 50 homes, it would mean developments consisting of 49 homes would not have to build any affordable housing, including council housing, but developments of 50 would have to build 25 affordable homes – 15 council

homes, six First Homes and four intermediate houses.

This is likely to see developers proposing schemes with fewer homes than they may otherwise have done – meaning fewer affordable homes and fewer homes overall. It could also see landowners splitting up their land and submitting several planning applications for developments that are under the threshold.

The combined impact of this is impossible to quantify, but it would have a profound impact on the delivery of council housing in Oxford over the next 16 years.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, said "Oxford's Local Plan 2036 is rightly based on meeting the requirement for desperately needed council housing in the city.

"At a time when unemployment is rising and more and more people are struggling to afford rents, we need more council housing, not less.

"These deeply damaging proposals need to be dropped immediately, and the Government needs instead to invest in the kind of mass council house building programme that is long overdue."