Future of OPFA and the delivery of its information and advice service

It has become clear to the OPFA Trustees in the last few years that the provision of the Charity's information and advice service is becoming increasingly financially unviable.

We are reliant on one local authority grant, the continuance of which is threatened by the proposed restructuring of local government covering the county. Opportunities for paid contract work (such as project management) as a source of income are currently non-existent due to the lack of capital grant aid for relevant local facility improvement projects. This situation is not likely to change in the near future. Membership numbers are declining, with a consequent impact on income from fees.

The Trustees are also aware of the fact that demand for OPFA's information and advice service has been declining for a number of reasons:

- financial pressures on parish and town councils and other community organisations managing local assets
- the lack of capital grant aid for relevant projects
- increased number of alternative sources of information and advice from other agencies and online

The Trustees are conscious that our numbers are small and it is clear that we have difficulty in making a good case for new Trustees to join an organisation in decline. Recent recruitment efforts have been unsuccessful. We are concerned to ensure that our healthy financial reserves continue to be managed well and used more cost-effectively for the Charity's purposes. There are costs involved in maintaining a separate membership charity, even a small one – costs in terms of money and also volunteer management time.

The Trustees have reviewed options for the way forward from here:

- Winding-up
- Merging with another organisation
- Realistic plan for revival

We have decided that the option of winding up should be pursued. According to the OPFA Constitution this would involve any property remaining after the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities being given or transferred to another charitable institution or institutions having objects similar to some or all of the objects of the Association, as the Association may, with the approval of the Charity Commissioners, determine.

The Trustees are now actively pursuing the option of transferring OPFA's remaining assets to Community First Oxfordshire (CFO), a partner charity, which under the original name of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council established the OPFA in the 1930s and took a management role for the new charity in various forms for many years.

CFO provides information and advice services for various rural community organisations including community halls and shops and community transport schemes, similar to the OPFA's service for outdoor playing space managers. Many of the same local organisations are involved in local management of the various community assets CFO seeks to support e.g. Parish and Town Councils. CFO seems to be the most appropriate guardian of the OPFA's objects and remaining funds and their Trustees have expressed a willingness to take over the OPFA's services and integrate them with their own.

OPFA Members may be aware that the OPFA already has an arrangement with CFO, whereby, for convenience, OPFA uses their postal address and phone number. This will provide some continuity following the transfer.

Other options for an asset transfer have been considered. Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association) was not felt to be sufficiently active in Oxfordshire and no longer offers practical or technical advice to local playing space managers. The Oxfordshire Play Association has a rather different and specific focus on promoting and delivering play activities and does not have the reach into a wide range of local communities in the way that CFO does. Active Oxfordshire, another local charity promoting opportunities to take part in physical activity, currently focusses on work in urban areas and primarily areas of deprivation, although they recognise that there is also rural inequality. The nature of their work does not offer the synergy that a transfer to CFO would and they themselves have suggested that CFO would be a very appropriate host for our service.

In addition to remaining funds the OPFA would hand over to CFO the following:

- Our series of technical information sheets
- Information about sources of technical advice e.g. Grounds Management Association, RoSPA Play Safety
- Access to Andrew Parsons, as an experienced self-employed consultant who can provide more in depth advice on technical issues. Andrew is currently the OPFA's Community Development Officer and supports the OPFA Trustees' proposals.

This report is intended to inform OPFA Members of proposals for the transfer of OPFA services to Community First Oxfordshire, which will be subject to advice obtained from the Charity Commission and to the Commission's agreement that CFO is an appropriate receiving charity. The report will be received at the forthcoming OPFA AGM on Wednesday, 21 October 2026 at 7.00 p.m. in Yarnton Village Hall, where any comments can be made and any questions can be dealt with.

When the OPFA Trustees are satisfied that all the necessary preparation for a successful and beneficial transfer has been made, they will call a Special General Meeting for OPFA Members, where Members will be asked to vote on a Resolution to dissolve the OPFA and transfer its remaining assets to CFO. It is likely that this Special General Meeting will take place in the New Year.

The OPFA Trustees will be aiming to provide existing paid up Members with the OPFA service as usual up to 31 March 2027. Members will be given full information as to how to access the service from CFO from then on.

Bob Johnston, Chair of Trustees
Liz Bickley, Vice-Chair of Trustees

October 2026
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