Growth and inclusion in Oxford: past experiences and current challenges

Mark Fransham

International Inequalities Institute

The divided city

One of the two Cutteslowe walls built in 1934. Picture courtesy of Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive

Population growth in Oxford 1801 - 2021

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Total population

Value labels shown on chart:
15,000
3,000
10,000
5,000 per decade

Y-axis: 0; 20,000; 40,000; 60,000; 80,000; 100,000; 120,000; 140,000; 160,000; 180,000

X-axis: 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011, 2021
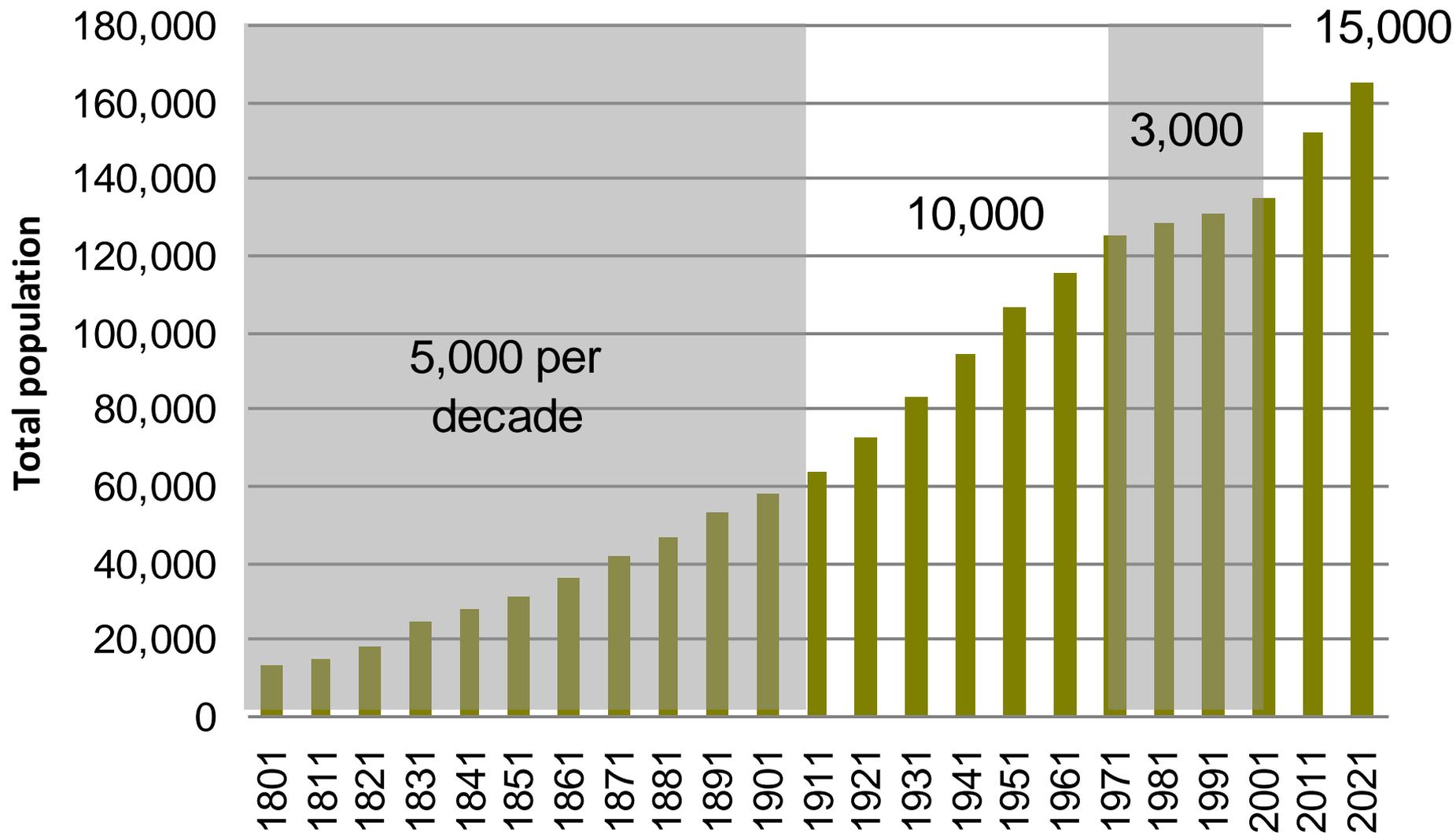
Oxford residents in employment by industry, 1841-2011

Chart showing "Residents working in each industry (not total of both)" on the y-axis (0 to 60,000) and years from 1841 to 2011 on the x-axis. Two areas labeled "Services" (teal) and "Manufacturing" (olive).
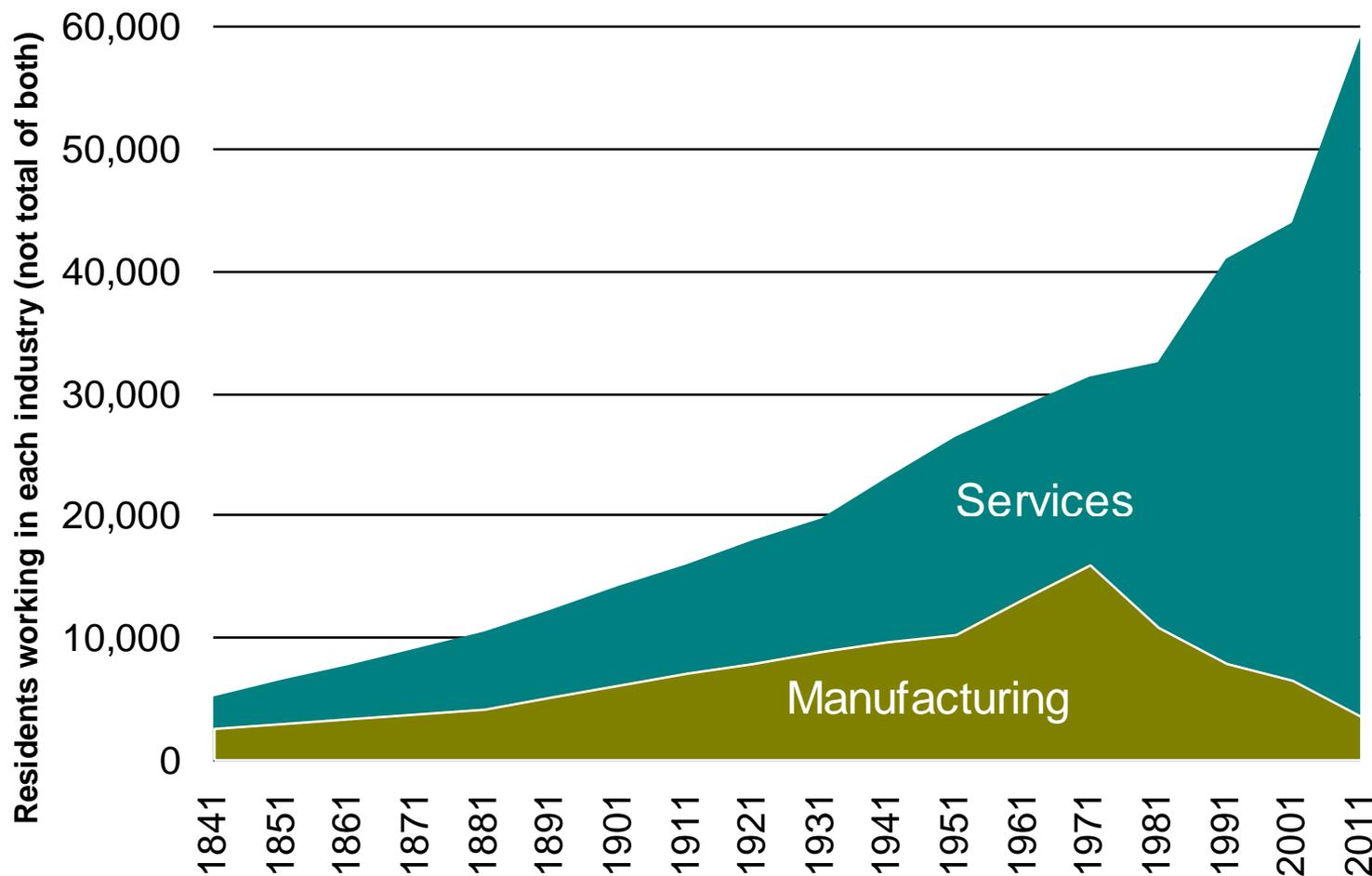
Oxford residents in work by type of occupation, 1841-2001

Source: www.visionofbritain.org.uk
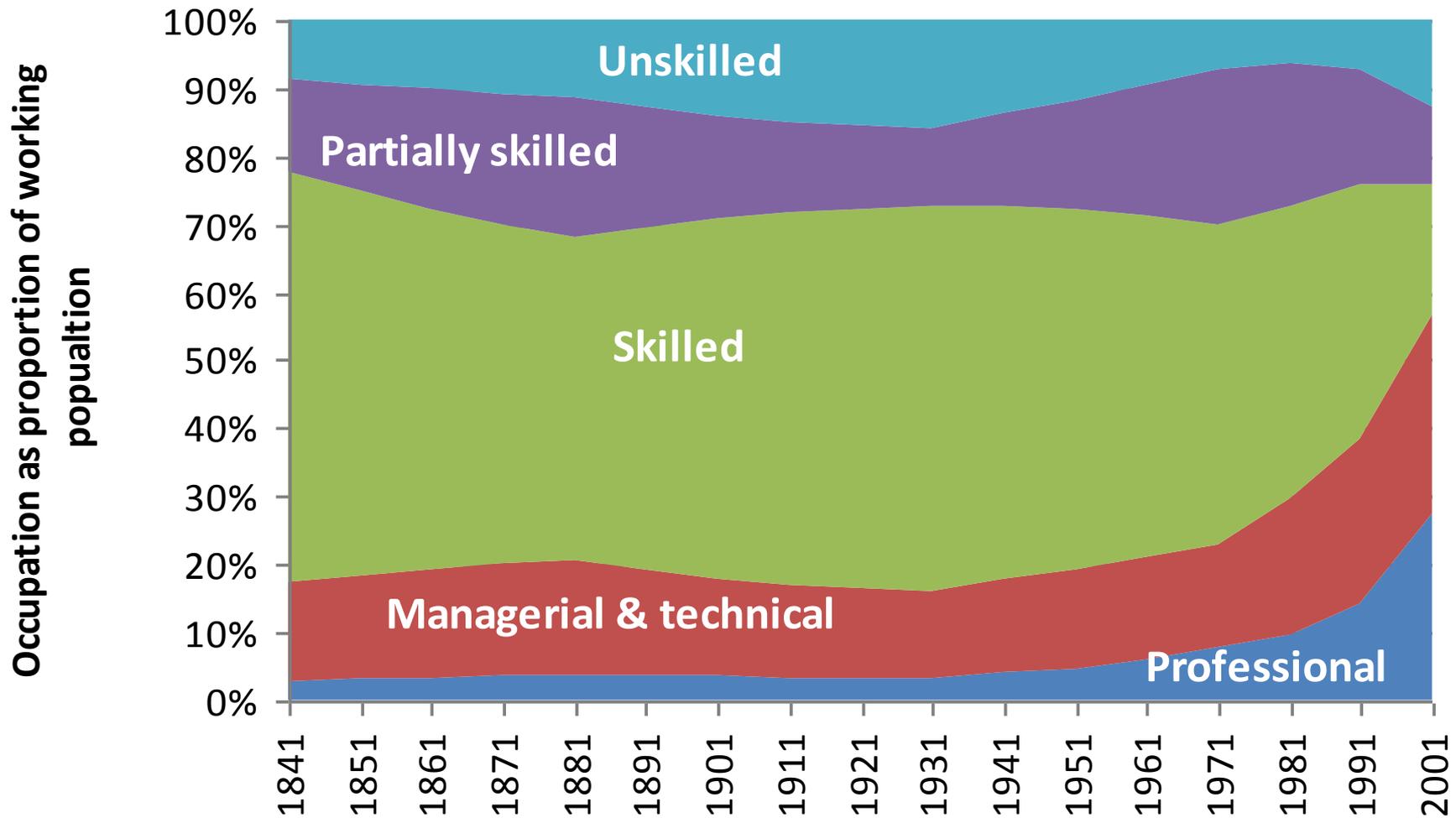
Other big dividing lines

Life expectancy

Education outcomes & opportunities

Social deprivation

Child poverty

Polarisation in Oxford and Oldham: tracking divergence in neighbourhoods

1994 study of Oxford and Oldham, part of a wider study investigating the rise in income inequality during the 1980s
Covering 1981 - 1994, studied polarisation between neighbourhoods in terms of social deprivation, housing assets, unemployment and housing affordability
Found evidence of increasing polarisation by area

Covering 1971-2011, my updated study investigated trends in:

- social deprivation
- unemployment
- housing assets
- housing affordability

Very different trends in social deprivation and unemployment vs housing

Deprivation polarisation, Oxford and Oldham 1981–2011
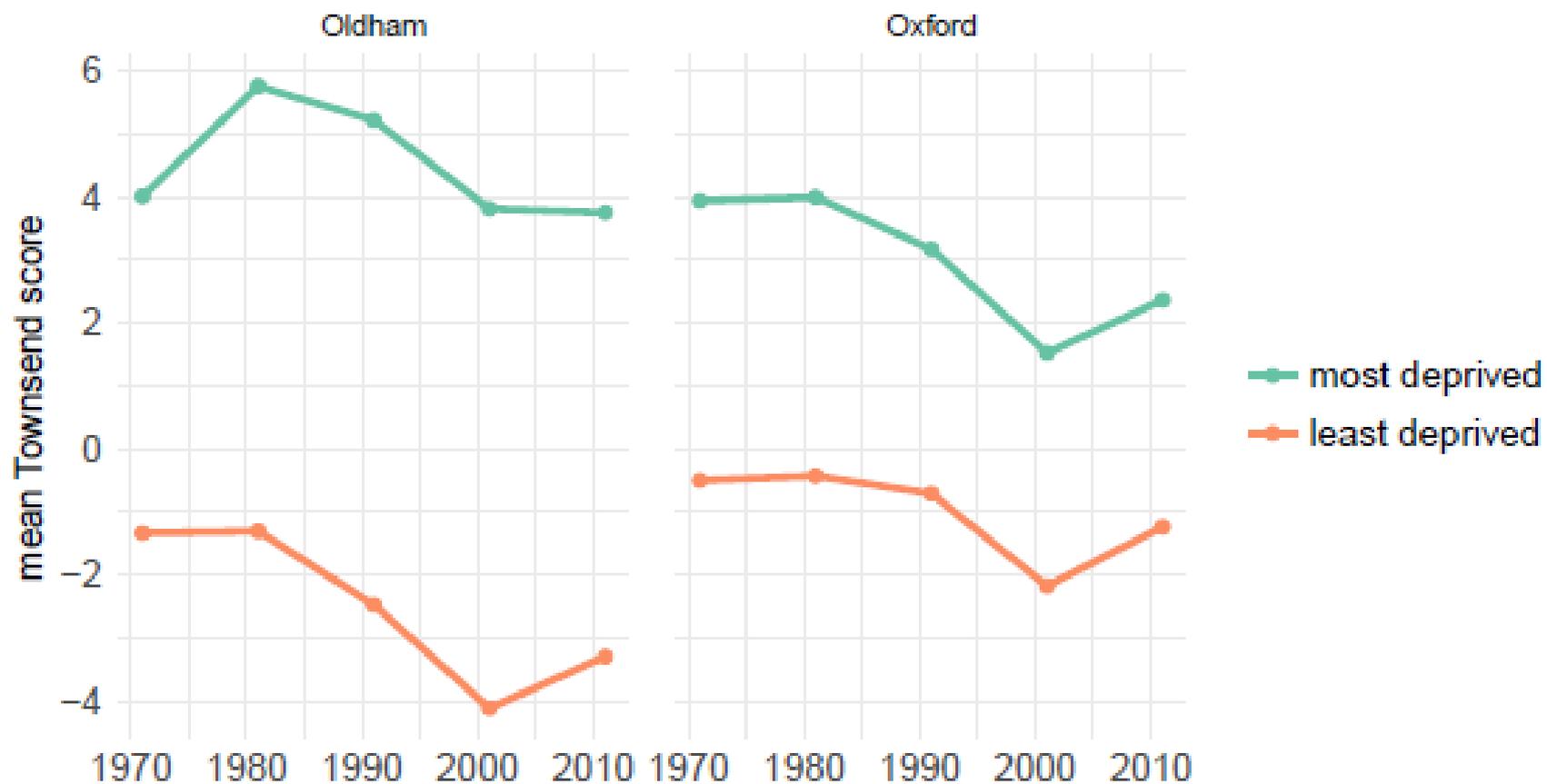
Unemployment polarisation, Oxford and Oldham 1971–2011
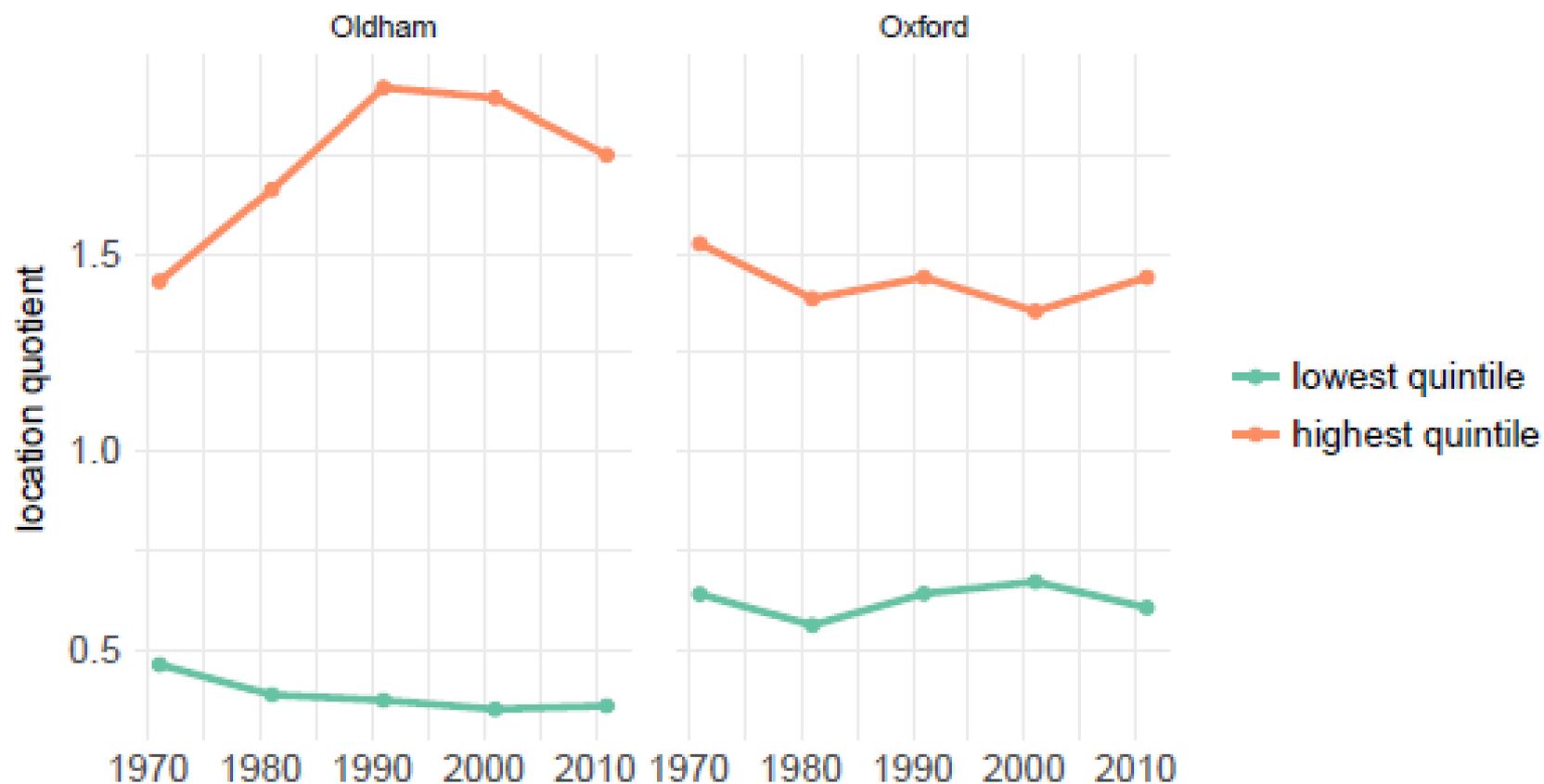
Housing asset polarisation in Oldham and Oxford 1991–2011
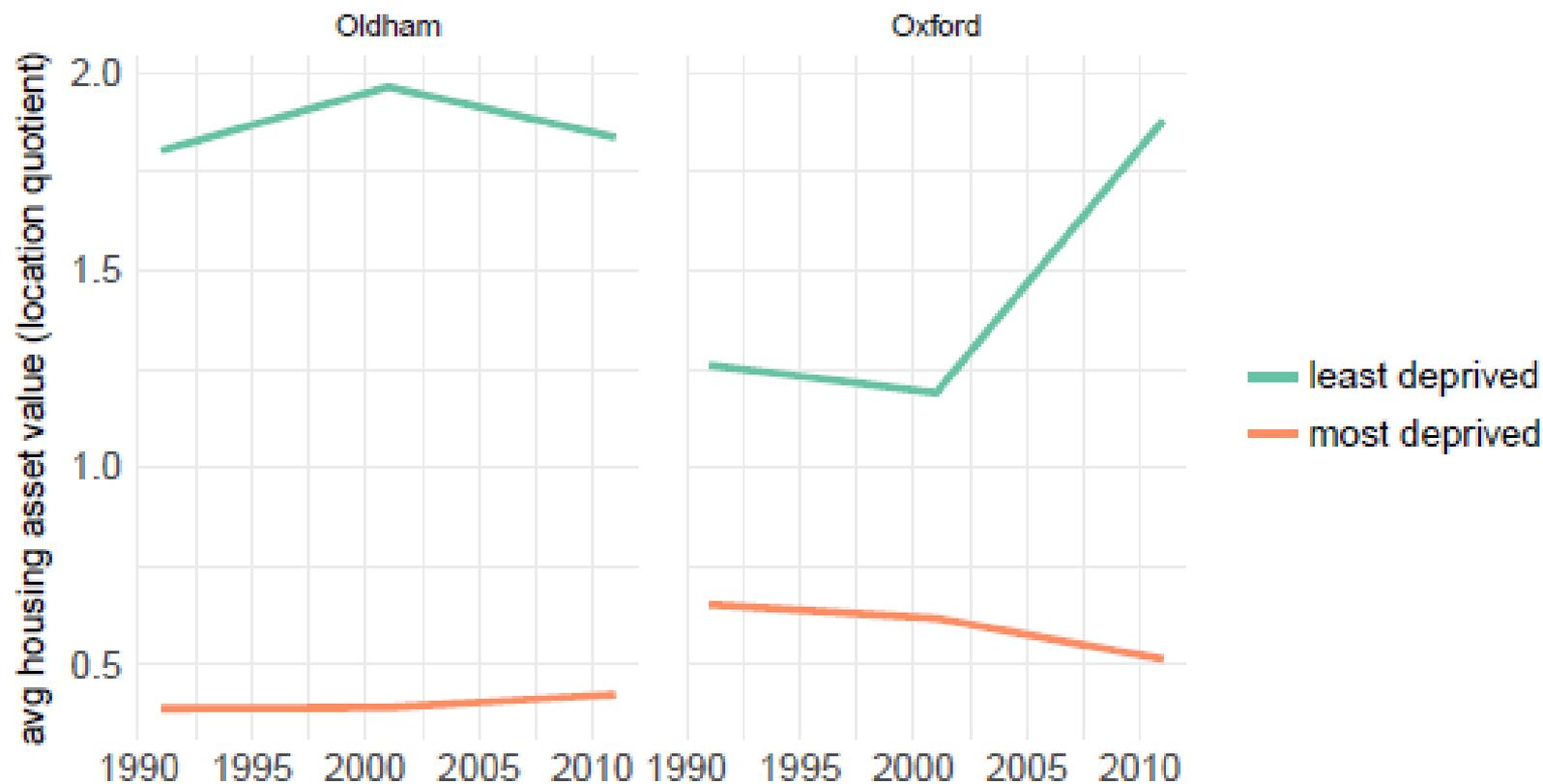
Lower quartile housing affordability ratio, 1997–2017
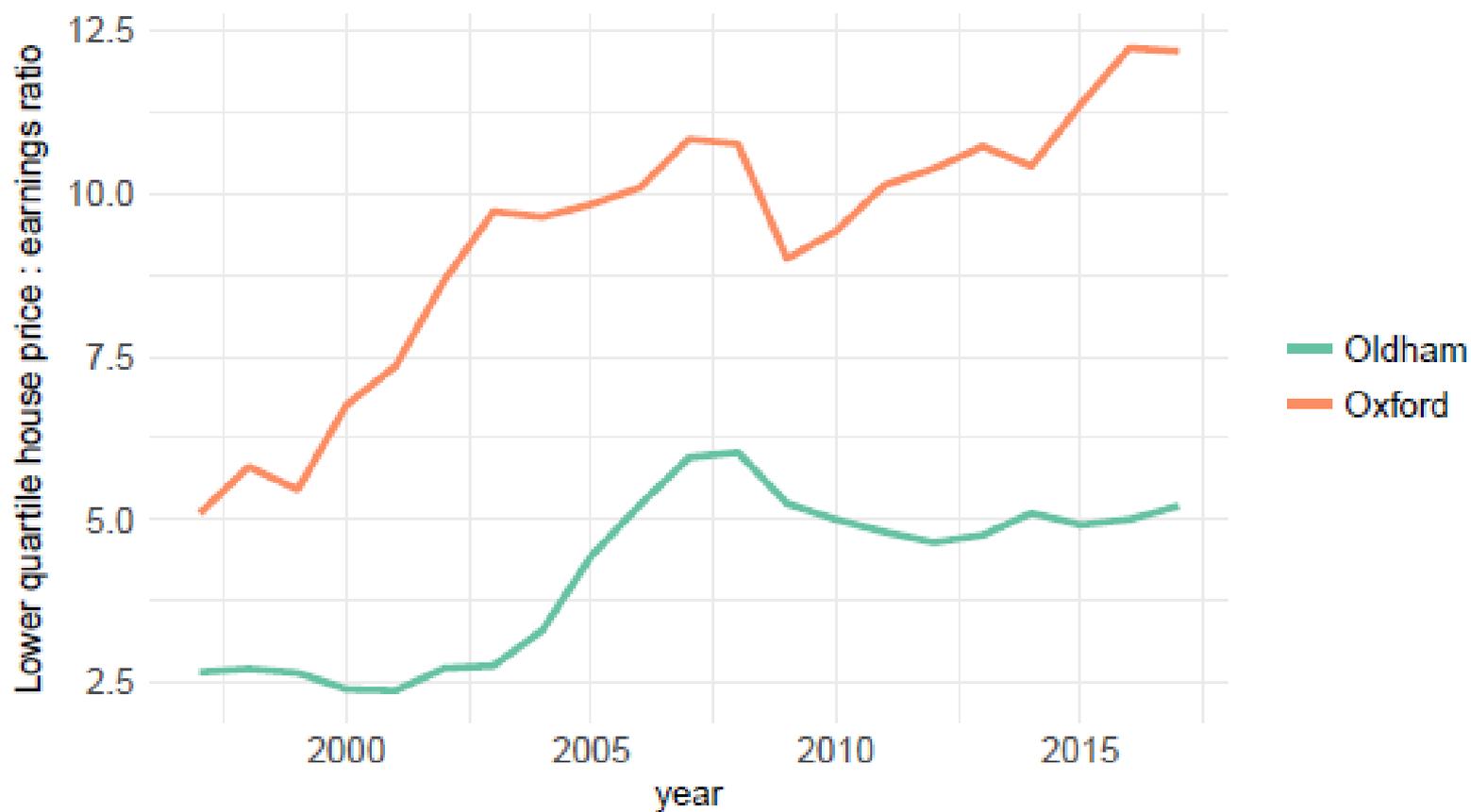
# Social polarisation at the local level: a four-town comparative study

Our recent working paper based upon original qualitative and quantitative work in Margate, Oldham, Oxford and Tunbridge Wells: http://www.lse.ac.uk/International-Inequalities/Working-Papers

Polarisation from above and below, and 'squeezed middles'

Experiences of inclusion / exclusion

"The differences between Oxford and Tunbridge Wells which have experienced polarisation from above (with social deprivation concentrated in the peripheral neighbourhoods), versus Oldham and Margate where inequality is driven from below (and deprivation in the town centres) has created different structures of visibility and 'feels' about the towns"

Decile plot of household income distribution, tax year ending 2016
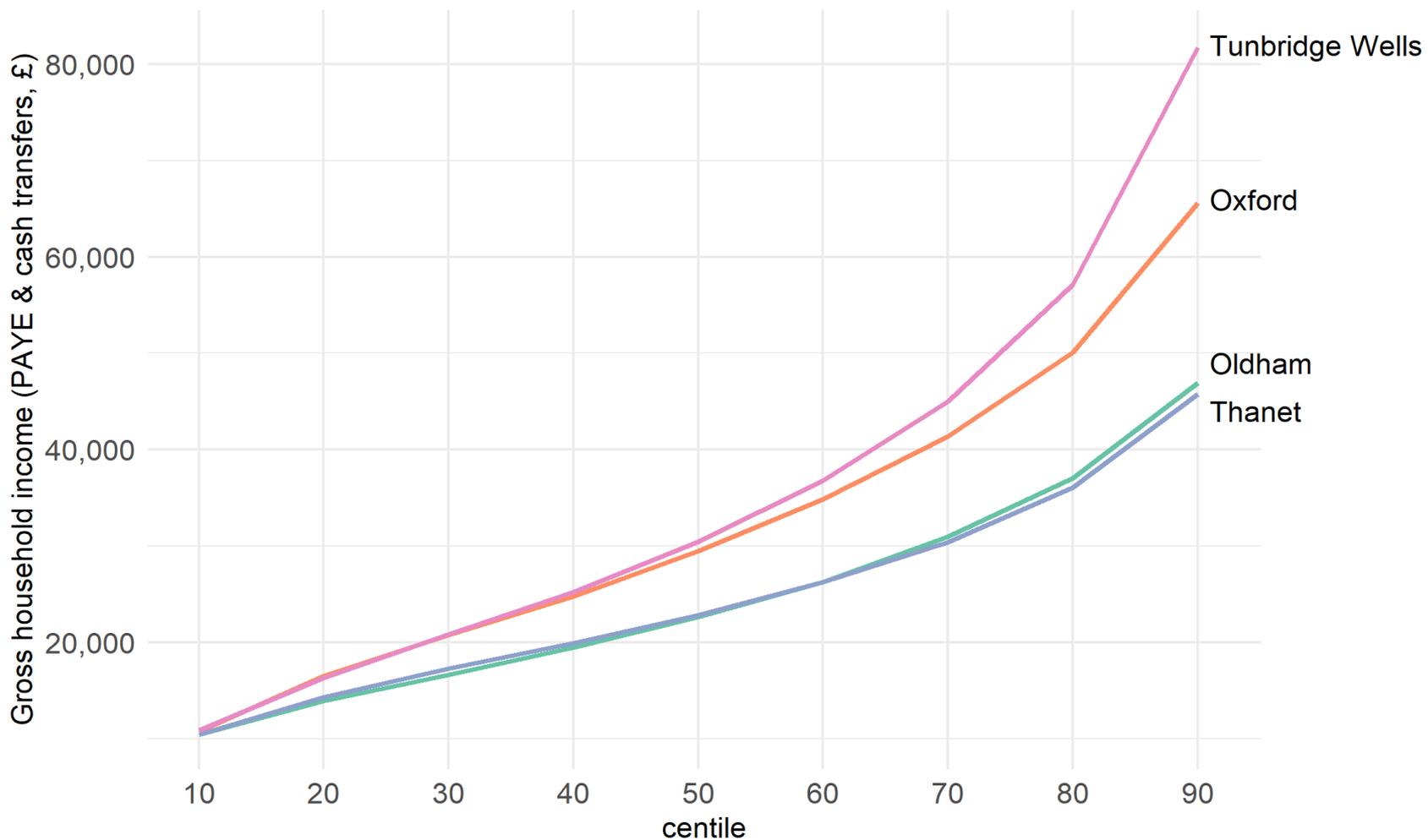
Source: Admin-based income statistics, England and Wales: tax year ending 2016, Office for National Statistics

Margate   Oldham   Oxford   Tunbridge Wells
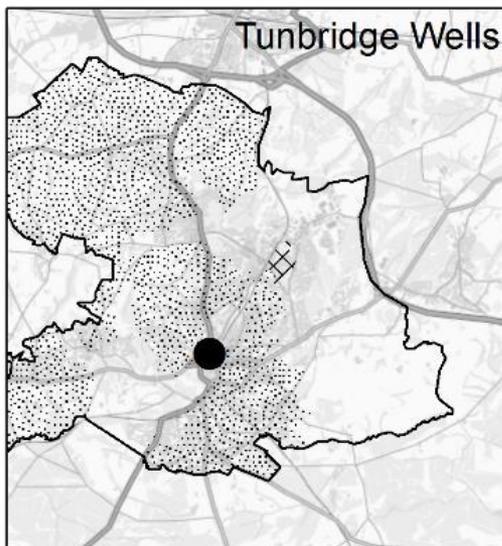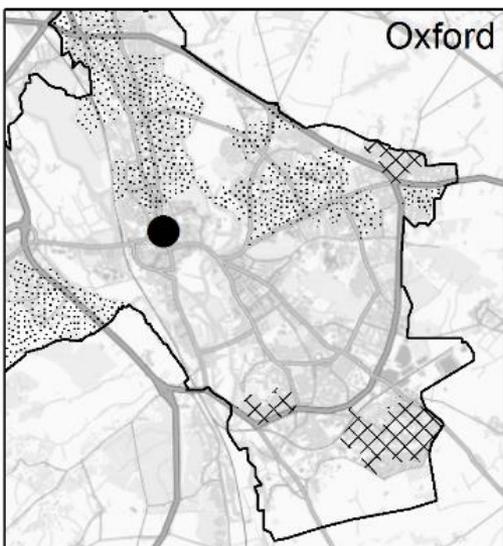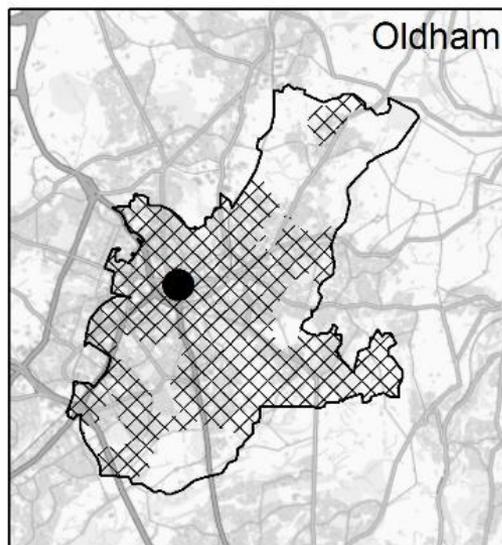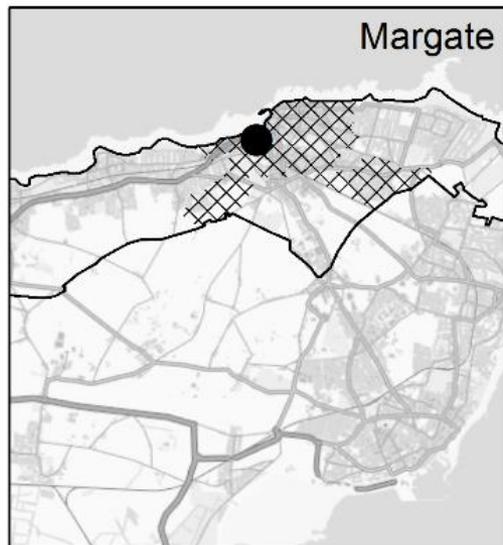
Area deprivation

IMD 2015 national quintiles

Most deprived 20%

(middle 60%)

Least deprived 20%

Town centres

Extent of urban area

Scale: 1:140,000

Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2019

Occupational class of working age residents by sex

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics
Points show England average

Number of LSOAs by national deprivation quintile
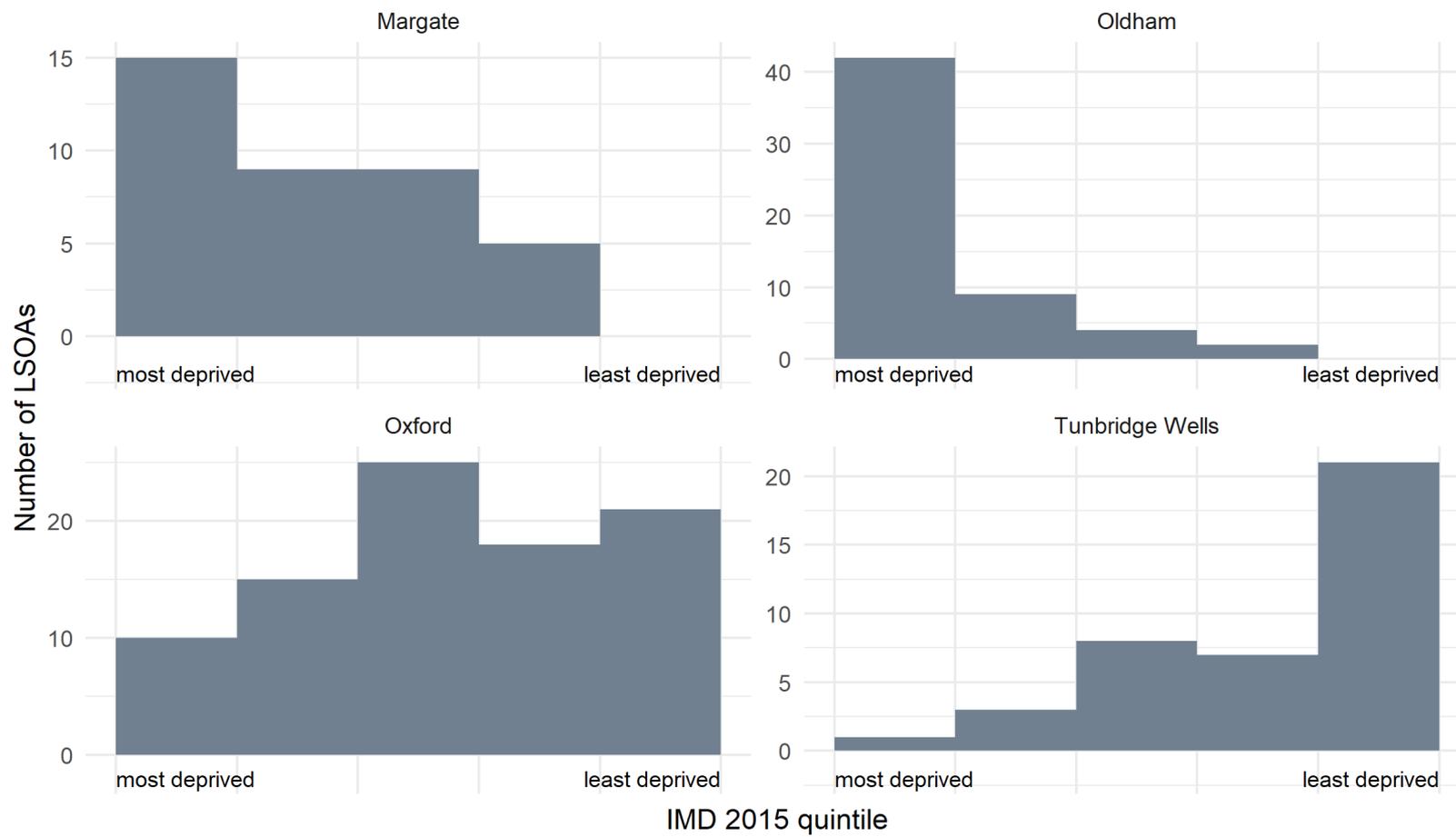
Source: English Indices of Deprivation 2015
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Divisions and difference

"In both Oxford and Tunbridge Wells, working class residents tended to narrate such antagonism towards the town's wealthier or well to do people, including the landed elites who had long formed part of the towns' business and political establishments, the comfortable middle classes and the commuters from London"

"'*It's always been an us and them*', is how Joe who had grown up on the Blackbird Leys estate explained to Author A. '*Growing up, you wouldn't go beyond the bridge [demarcating the boundary of the estate] because it was clear that this was a different world*'."

The 'squeezed middle'

"A white female professional in her mid-thirties who worked in a managerial role in a middle-sized charity and who had lived in Oxford for nearly fifteen years talked about the challenges she faced. She was renting a shared house, together with a housemate in the health care sector, and did not have the money to move out, let alone dream of being able to buy a property to live in. This could make her feel resentful: '*Sometimes it's hard*' she said, *'I work so hard and then I see my neighbours who live in a council house and don't have to pay their own bills or council tax and they have a gardener come from the council – and I have to do everything on my own and pay for it myself*'"

What are the challenges to inclusive growth in Oxford?

Oxford and the region has particular challenges to overcome:

- A historical legacy of one city divided in two

- Unemployment is relatively low, but labour market inequalities with poverty and social deprivation

- Massive educational divides in a city that is a worldwide brand for learning

- More low income households exposed to market rents for housing, and a 'squeezed middle'

- The relationships between the city and the county

But it also has enormous opportunities – if it can't be done in Oxford and Oxfordshire, then where?

Divisions can be removed…

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Schoolchildren walk through the newly broken down wall in 1959.
Picture courtesy of Jean Stubbs (one of the teachers in the picture)