

Oxford Strategic Partnership

The Quality of Public Realm for Residents and Visitors

Thursday 26th March 2009
Said Executive Education Centre, Kennington, Oxford OX1 5NY

NOTES FROM THE SEMINAR

A list of attendees is attached as an appendix

Background

The partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy includes '*working in partnership to improve the public realm in all areas of the city*' as a key objective. An Action Planning Group chaired by Sarah Maxfield of Oxford Inspires will produce a draft action plan by end May 2009. This seminar will support the action planning process.

Purpose

To seek a shared understanding of the key issues relating to public realm and why they are important. To identify priorities and provide a steer regarding the areas where the partnership can add most value.

The seminar was introduced by Sarah Maxfield, Chief Executive of Oxford Inspires and Public Realm Champion for OSP.

To provide context, five short presentations were delivered as follows. Copies of slides used are available on request.

- Regeneration Framework - *Mel Barrett, Executive Director, Oxford City Council*
- West End Area Action Plan – *Mark Jaggard, Development Manager, Oxford City Council*
- Transform Oxford – *Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council*
- Tourism Study – *Michael Crofton-Briggs, Head of City Development, Oxford City Council*
- Cultural strategy – *Laura Worsfold, Arts Officer, Oxford City Council*
- Street Scene Manual – *Rachel Williams, Principal Planner, Oxford City Council*

The meeting then addressed three questions:

1. What do we mean by improving the public realm?
2. What is going well, what needs attention and what is most important?
3. How can OSP add value to the most important issues?

1 What do we mean by improving the public realm? (based on the card exercise)

The public realm should:

- Be inclusive, accessible to all, belonging to everyone and celebrating diversity. It should be a source of pride to local residents inspiring ownership, respect and creativity. It should be open and democratised rather than hidden behind walls. It should bring residents into the City from outlying areas.
- Be a welcoming, exciting and flexible place that promotes world-class events and festivals that are intergenerational.
- Include spaces to stay rather than rush through. It should have a continental, café style feel, which encourages community life to take place in public.
- Be clean and well maintained.
- Feel safe.
- Include open attractive green space and public squares with strong edges – buildings and spaces working together.
- Work day and night.
- Be well signposted at the main entry points such as Park and Ride and the station and throughout the City.
- Be unique and bespoke.
- Consist of high quality, durable materials combining conservation with modernity. Public art, street furniture, lighting, shop banners and paving should be aesthetically pleasing, distinctive and reflecting the local character. There should be more planting in the streets.
- Prioritise the pedestrian and cycling experience. Heavy London buses should be routed away from the heritage centre and there should be less domination of the centre by buses (though the bus service is excellent). A free eco friendly bus could operate within the heritage centre.
- Be welcoming and friendly to visitors, showcasing the City and providing a focal point
- Sound and smell attractive as well as look good
- Bring the University and City together in a more joined up approach
- Allow for climate change and promote healthy lifestyles
- Offer safe, attractive spaces for young people especially on outlying estates

2 What is going well, what needs attention and what is most important?

This is a full unedited list of comments written up under the various headings with the number prioritising the issue in the ‘Needs Attention’ column presented in the right hand column.

2.1 City Centre

	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Design and Amenities	Bonn Square	Street cleaning	8
	Fantastic open green spaces	<i>Transform Oxford</i> is not visionary or radical enough – it’s still tinkering around the edges and not dealing with fundamentals	7
	Open air theatre - <i>Creation</i>	Cycle racks often get in the way of pedestrians – important to have lots of them well maintained but location needs attention	4
	Fantastic museums, galleries and gardens	Better sites for cultural publicity	1
	Wonderful diverse place, different characters of space	Access to the hidden gems	1
	Oxford Castle	Venues for performing and visual arts	1
	Pleasant inviting feel	Unified street surfaces for walking	
	Relaxing to walk around	...and pedestrians get in the way of cyclists!	
	World class heritage built environment in churches, colleges and university	Arts and culture scene not matched by facilities (eg no really good concert hall) – <i>Sheldonian quite adequate</i>	
Fantastic music but what about a concert hall?			
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Management	Oxford Castle	Covered market	6
		Tourism needs to promote wider cultural offer – not just what University offers	5
		Better ways of finding way about for visitors and others	5
	College linked spaces eg Christ Church Meadow	Clearing overnight rubbish	4
		Celebrate green spaces and how to find them	4
		Bigger landlords (City, Colleges) must be more interested in variety of tenants/businesses (rents etc)	4
		Understand history of place before changing – conservation/historic context	3
	City/County events – a working partnership	Learn from other historic cities	3
		More seating areas – opportunities to linger	2
		Ask the younger generation what they want in their future city	2
	Coordination at City and County Council level of public realm opportunities to publicise events (banners, posters, Cross St etc)	Public utilities spoil the public realm	1
		Ensure all potential weapons are removed before closing time (ie 5am and 8pm)	1
		Young people friendly management (involvement)	
Marketing			

		Street furniture that is distinctive to Oxford’s character	
		Better management of tourism experience	
		Don’t listen to loud voices against change (eg older people criticising pedestrianisation)	
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Use	Fantastic range of cultural activities but little opportunity to publicise in public realm	Space for people to move (eg St Aldate’s clogged with bus queues) – nowhere to walk	11
		Better understanding of needs of colleges/University and how can work together to improve tourist/public realm experience – Does it have to ‘feel’ closed?	9
	Oxford Castle	Worrying numbers of shops are closing in the City Centre – commercial heart is being lost – need imaginative use of empty spaces eg shop units	5
		What nonsense to allow health and safety to stop events: May Morning a disaster – shocking bridge is closed – loss of tradition	3
	Cultural events	Whatever happened to town hall development plan – action please	3
		Pedestrianisation of Broad St – more tables and seating – urban square	2
	More opportunities for major events in public spaces	Have businesses engage in opening toilets for public/visitors	2
		Need to represent the diversity of Oxford’s history	2
	Nice to see theatre and other public performances taking place in unusual spaces (especially University crossover) – more please	Enabling events in public spaces	1
		Kebab van and KFC in Gloucester Green – the smell!	1
	Events in Bonn Square such as Science Festival and Folk Festival	Health promoting – walking and cycling	
		Shop front design	
	Oxford traditions such as May Morning	Understanding whether anyone is allowed into the colleges and gardens - ever and when	
	St Giles Fair – communities all come together	Balance of uses by time – eg Broad St is an essential car park for quick visits to the covered market but should be a public square for markets and events at frequent intervals	
		Welcome young people – do not demonise	

2.2 City Villages/Other Retail Centres

	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Design and Amenities	Supermarkets	Increased cultural activities	8
	Distinctive and unique	More consistent (regular) cleaning of business areas (Cowley/Oxford Rd)	2
	Places to sit and relax – spaces (in some – others need attention)	Utilise empty retail space for both art and publicising events	2
		Wasteful spending on street schemes	
	Street schemes have improved appearance	Independent retail viability	
		Parking and transport	
Good cafes, cinemas, restaurants in areas like Jericho	More soft landscaping (Summertown)		
	Maintenance and care of railings in public areas (railway station, Botley Road, Waterways)		
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Management	Joined up thinking between key local organisations	Streets for People	3
		Sensible licensing policies appropriate to largely residential and sometimes historic areas (eg Bartlemas)	
		Establishment of clear, visible, local information points/notice boards	
		Cleaning regimes intermittent	
		Better transport links between villages	
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Use	Growing quality retail and leisure offer in some areas	Address decline in some of the retail centres	1
		Loss of Post Offices	
	Mixed uses – locally accessible facilities	Promote more to visitors eg specialist shopping/eating	
		Cowley Rd Carnival – important community event – needs more support	
	Summertown Festival and Artweeks	Street parties	
		More area festivals	

2.3 Estates

	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Design and Amenities	Barton improvements	New developments to encourage sense of community and create projects to join people together (public art)	6
	History group in Barton – pride of place	Very poor amenities on estates (eg Rose Hill) – no benches, no cafes, few shops, no pub, few places where people can meet outdoors – need investment	4
	Blackbird Leys and Botley buses work well	Creating movement out of the estates into the city	2
		Balancing the need for seating and gather/resting places against the worry of vandalism and anti-social behaviour	1
	The Glow Tree in Blackbird Leys	Wood Farm school site needs integrated approach	1
	New housing schemes in Barton, Rose Hill and BBL	More public art with local involvement	1
	Children’s Centre in Rose Hill is excellent and is used by people from all around the city	More investment in cultural activities	
	New playground developments		
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Management	Very good PCSO/ Warden/ Police presence on Rose Hill - all actively engaged in community meetings	Cross culture engaging local people and seeing their place matters and they matter, improves their feeling about themselves	11
		More balanced communities on estates – housing policy	4
		Perception of safety in parks	1
	Great community groups and organisations to work with	Behaviour of a very small minority destroys potential for better use of public realm	1
		Better contact between local areas	1
		Too much management in BBL containing people and encouraging them to stay in	1
		More integration of housing, street scene, parks and public order structures	
	Working Well	Needs attention	Priority
Use	Good access to indoor and outdoor leisure facilities	More joined up work between Council social and education service and voluntary/cultural sector to produce events etc	10
		Needs greater use for city/countywide events (adds value)	1
	Good sense of pride (like being part of Rose Hill community)	Better protection for very young children’s play spaces	1
		Good sense of community	
Active community groups (BBL choir, Barton Bash, newsletters)	Sense of being ‘done to’ ie projects parachuting in and out – ‘tick box’		

		approach	
	Events that people from City Centre and City villages want to travel to (eg Modern Art Oxford on Rose Hill)		

2.4 Anything Else

	Priority
Better involvement between city and old university	4
Improved connectivity between villages/estates ie orbital bus routes	4
Celebrate our fantastic public transport system – make it accessible for visitors – move bus station to one central position – not Gloucester Green	3
Just as we are talking about open spaces for people to have in town, certain minority communities need places in the estates where they can meet and have time to do activities to promote heritage	1
More civic pride – littering, fly-tipping, late night behaviour show lack of it	1
The real Oxford people who stay often live on ‘estates’. They have history with the City. Much more needs to be done to connect them with their city – pride of place, civic pride – increased aspirations (Is this true or our assumption?!)	1
City not integrated	
Better coordination of public transport – empty buses frequent more roads than occupied ones	
Public service (eg dustcarts) blocking roads during peak periods	
Question whether Oxford needs to be attached to London by a 24 hour bus?	
Offer more possibilities for students/artists/workers to keep them in Oxford	
Need joined up ACTION not just vision/thinking – how do we achieve these issues and who will do it – needs to be realistic and have practical outcomes	

NB It was noted that the prioritisation exercise was flawed because those at the meeting are not representative of the wider community. This exercise only represents the views of those present.

3 How can OSP add value to the most important issues?

The following issues were discussed in more depth:

- Enhancing pride and sense of place on estates
- Street cleaning
- Understanding colleges and helping them feel less closed
- Cultural activities in City villages and estates
- Space to move and find way about in the centre
- Transform Oxford

3.1 Enhancing pride and sense of place on estates

Issues:

- Feeling of belonging
- Distinctiveness
- Need to use a variety of measures to break the cycle of deprivation
- Economy, environment and people
- Facilities for cultural education, community uses for different cultural and ethnic groups
- Not top-down change but empowering communities themselves
- Need an African-Caribbean Centre in the City centre
- Recognise there are multiple communities in each estate

- Can we make more of facilities we have already (such as Kassam) – link to local communities?
- Residential areas need ‘spill-out’ spaces that feel safe and ‘playable’ space
- Segregated spaces for different users should be avoided – integration builds community
- Users of spaces/events should be involved in planning them

OSP actions:

- Coordinate projects and funding to maximise benefits
- Don’t spread funding too thinly – focus on key priorities
- Ensure significant public involvement – meaningful input to plans
- Work on building community relationships – bring existing communities into city centre and build links between different communities (geographic, cultural, religious, ethnic, age etc)

3.2 Street cleaning

OSP actions:

- Promote better signage
- Promote extension of opening hours of public toilets in City Centre to reduce urine on the streets (review is underway ref London Borough Richmond scheme). Encourage businesses to allow use of toilets
- Promote Pub Watch – especially the condition of people leaving pubs – to reduce vomit on the streets. Lobby City Centre manager.
- Improve scheduling and removal of delivery packaging. Create central recycling points? Support City Centre manager in best practice and enforcement to prevent packaging being on streets from 6pm to late morning.
- Policy of welcoming visitors but recovering the cost of those visitors from those visitors. Eg increase coach parking fees and tax language schools.

3.3 Understanding colleges and helping them feel less closed

Issues:

- Recognise the impact on colleges of events. Need to maintain dialogue and introduce protocols for event management
- Introduce a more joined up approach to the accessibility of colleges with clear ‘rules’.
- Clarify what access is and isn’t possible and promote that clearly to visitors before they arrive
- Introduce open days and trails.
- Seek colleges’ commitment to an ‘open city’

OSP actions:

- Help with planning process
- Coordinate between colleges
- Proactive promotion (clear guidelines)
- Create protocols for use of streets and University owned property and document these
- Consultation – consider the impact of students on the public realm
- Identify new non-traditional ways of opening spaces
- Note that museums work and are very participative

3.4 Cultural activities in City villages and estates

Issues/OSP actions:

- Encouraging more cultural activities to take place and making it easier for people to organise events and activities
- Joined up thinking about community facilities eg community centres (call them cultural centres?). They could become central information points for marketing events through websites, newsletters and giant blackboards AND for those wanting to organise events

(check list and who to contact etc). Generate more resources and incentives for centre managers to link with other centres and with the city centre.

- Business incentives to support cultural activities (eg reduced taxes)
- Ongoing consultation with users and providers.

3.5 Space to move and find way about in the centre

Issues

- Identify who needs information (residents, tourists, young, old etc)
- Where are the key signage points? – railway station, park and ride, coach station, Broad St
- Explore different ways to direct people – maps, leaflets, artistic commission
- Signpost green spaces such as Osney, Christ Church meadow, Angel meadow
- Join up branding and design with university, traders, council etc
- Clear space by signing people away to spaces
- Build more links to public spaces (eg bridge to Grandpont)

OSP actions:

- Make sure all partners involved in sign posting are joined up (University, Councils, West End)
- Way-finding strategy for the City
- Join up with cultural organisations to ensure venues and events are signposted (info point in Broad St?)

3.6 Transform Oxford

- The partnership can/should/must provide leadership to enable Transform Oxford to deliver
- The leadership must have power to effect change
- Decisions must be made to effect the changes necessary to deliver Transform Oxford's programme
- Leadership must agree a strategy and timetable for delivery – and ensure delivery

Facilitation and notes by Jeremy Spafford - jeremy@spafford.org.uk

Present

Name	Organisation
Adam Adekoya	Vice-Chair of BME Community Champions
Joe Barclay	Regional Liaison Director, University of Oxford and <i>OSP Board Member</i>
Mel Barrett	Executive Director, City Regeneration Oxford City Council and <i>OSP Board Member</i>
Hilary Burr	Development Team Manager, Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action
Erica Burton	Project Manager, Art in Rose Hill, Modern Art Oxford
Michael Crofton-Briggs	Head of City Development, Oxford City Council
Karen Crossan	Nightsafe Manager, Oxford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
Debbie Dance	Director, Oxford Preservation Trust and <i>OSP Board Member</i>
Bill Fox	West End Renaissance Project Manager, Oxford City Council
Brendan Hattam	General Manager, Westgate Centre
Abi Hehir	Public Art Officer, Oxford City Council
John Hoole	Board Member, Artpoint Trust
Cllr Ian Hudspeth	Cabinet Member for Transport, Oxfordshire County Council
Isobel Hughes	Head of Building Conservation, University Estates Directorate, University of Oxford
Jacqui Ibbotson	Arts and Learning Coordinator, Oxford Inspires
Mark Jaggard	Spatial and Economic Development Manager, Oxford City Council
Sebastian Johnson	City Partnerships Officer, Oxford City Council and <i>OSP Co-ordinator</i>
Tony Joyce	Chair, Oxford Civic Society
Aggie Kalungu-Banda	Outreach/Marketing Development Officer, Oxfordshire Racial Equality Council
Sarah Maxfield	Chief Executive, Oxford Inspires and <i>OSP Board Member</i>
Jeremy Mogford	Proprietor, The Old Bank
Sarah Mossop	Head of Education, Modern Art Oxford
Catherine Nightingale	Freelance Publicist, Nightingale Studios
Jennifer Nkumu	Chair of BME Community Champions
Katherine Powley	County Network Coordinator, Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Bob Price	Leader, Oxford City Council and <i>OSP Board Member</i>
Jo Ross	Director, Oxford Contemporary Music
Wilf Stephenson	Bursar, Oriel College
Martin Sutton	Managing Director, Stagecoach Bus Company
Philip Waddup	Project Director, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
Louisa Weeks	Operations Director, Oxford Bus Company
Jackie Wilderspin	Head of Partnerships and Health Inequalities, Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust and Chair of the OSP
Rachel Williams	Principal Planner, Oxford City Council
Laura Worsfold	Arts Officer, Oxford City Council