

The Quality of Public Realm for Residents and Visitors

Short Briefing Paper on Understanding and integrating the colleges and the University into the public realm

1. Overview

The brand “Oxford” is underpinned historically and contemporarily with the reputation for educational excellence and cultural significance of the University of Oxford and the Colleges. This history, together with the “dreaming spires” drives:

- Large numbers of day and overnight visitors
- Strong tourism sector and large number of jobs within the sector
- Favoured film/TV location

2. Initiatives currently under way in the City

- There seems to be a perception that the colleges are not accessible to the people of Oxford, however the University of Oxford website supplies details of opening times, with many colleges making no charge
http://www.ox.ac.uk/visitors_friends/visiting_the_university/visiting_the_colleges/index.html
- The University is undertaking a “Public and Community Engagement Review” and will produce a Strategy or public statement in autumn 2009.
- The Oxford Preservation Trust, in partnership with The University and others runs the “Oxford Open Doors” weekend in September which attracted over 24000 visits in 2008.
<http://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/odom.php>.
- The University Museums and Collections have extensive engagement with the community through exhibition and education programmes. (e.g. the Pitt Rivers Museum/Museum of Natural History won the award of UK Family Friendly Museum of the Year in 2005). There is free access. The Ashmolean will reopen in November.
- The Museums and Collections and other parts of the University work with Oxford cultural organisations to create activities in the public realm/attracting new audiences (e.g. The Magic Hour at the Botanic Garden) and to commission public art e.g. Mark Wallinger’s “Y” at Magdalen College.
- Other University property including the University Parks, ChristChurch Meadow and Wytham Woods provide an accessible amenity for the public.

3. Who are the key players?

- The University including the Museums and Collections and the Colleges
- OPT
- Local Authorities (tourism, economic development, transport)
- Tourism sector
- Cultural organisations/Oxford Inspires
- Residents and visitors
- Others - Car Drivers, Local Businesses, Users of services – e.g. Bus passengers

4. What are the gaps and where might the OSP add value

- Promoting and publicising the opening times of colleges (and other accessible parts of the University) and what there is to see (e.g. Artworks – Mark Wallinger’s “Y” in Magdalen College, Christchurch Gallery)
- Access to facilities (e.g. sporting facilities)?