

Report to Oxford Strategic Partnership

Oxford City Centre Evening and Night Time Economy

1. Introduction

There is a growing national recognition of the importance of the evening and night time economies to our city centres. Recent work by the ATCM and BCSC has shown that the evening economy accounts for around 27% of city centre economies. Nevertheless, there seems to be an overwhelming national attitude that city centres in the evening are a source of distress that need greater control and management, rather than being opportunities for economic growth.

2. Policy Context

Oxford City Centre currently fulfils many functions, including being a major retail centre, ranked 6th in the South East and the focus for a wide range of leisure and cultural uses. It does not suffer from the drinking culture homogeneity to the same degree as other city centres, but nonetheless still has potential to develop its evening and night time offers and performance.

The policy context for this is favourable. Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 4 gives encouragement to local authorities to plan coherently for diversity and choice after-hours, where appropriate. The City has in place an existing and evolving policy framework which creates the conditions and support for the evening economy, ranging from its status as a 'regional hub' in the South East Plan to a range of policies contained within the Oxford Local Plan.

Within this context, there is an increasing case for the evolution of a more specific and coherent policy statement and action plan for the medium term development and management of the evening and night time economies in the city centre so that it plays an increasing role in the city's economic development and minimises the need for expensive management and supervision.

It is therefore recommended that the Partnership agrees the following:

- ◆ Recognise the importance of the evening and night time economies to the economy of the city and the city region
- ◆ Supports the development of an Oxford City Centre Evening Economy Strategy and Action Plan
- ◆ Notes that this will initially be progressed in the context of a 3 year City Centre Action Plan
- ◆ Supports the creation of a Strategic Management Group to lead the development of the strategy and its subsequent implementation and maintains a strategic overview of the management and promotion of the city centre in the evening.
- ◆ Supports the achievement and retention of Purple Flag status for Oxford city centre

3. Purple Flag

Purple Flag is a new national accreditation scheme for entertainment and hospitality areas at night in cities. It is promoted as the indicator of where to go for a good night out and is intended to help to combat image problems which afflict city centres in the evening. The promoters of Purple Flag aim to make it as well recognised as Green Flag and Blue Flag.

It has already been agreed that Oxford should endeavour to achieve Purple Flag status for three reasons:

- ◆ As a promotional tool, it could lead to greater levels of investment, business and employment
- ◆ Oxford cannot afford not to have it, if other city centres have it
- ◆ The application process itself is a useful discipline to ensure that we are doing all we can to have an attractive and well managed evening and night time economy in the city

The application process is fairly straightforward with two principal components:

- ◆ A statement providing a profile of the area
- ◆ A self-assessment chart based on our overnight appraisal of the area. This is in 5 parts:
 - The policy envelope (evidence of a clear strategy)
 - Wellbeing (clean and safe)
 - Movement (secure pattern of arrival, circulation and departure)
 - Place (stimulating destination and a vital place)
 - A broad appeal (vibrant choice and rich mix of entertainment and activity)

The application is assessed by the Blue Flag board, supported by trained, independent assessors appointed by ATCM. They are professionals with specialist knowledge of a particular element of the night time economy. The assessment process is in 4 stages:

- ◆ Scrutiny of the application
- ◆ Overnight visit by the assessors
- ◆ Follow-up fact check
- ◆ Application and findings jointly considered by the PF Accreditation Panel

Purple Flag status is awarded for 2 years.

A working group has been established to prepare and submit Oxford City Centre's application.

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