Overarching Leisure Strategy

1.   Introduction

Our ambition is to ensure that the cultural, leisure and sporting opportunities of Oxford enhance the lives of all people in the city.

To achieve this ambition, the Council has adopted a series of aims, which reflect the varied ways in which leisure activities contribute to quality of life. These aims are:
1. **To ensure equity of access and diversity of provision.**
2. **To encourage participation in healthier lifestyles.**
3. **To advance lifelong learning.**
4. **To protect and enhance the natural and built environment.**
5. **To enhance the vibrancy of the Oxford brand, both locally and internationally.**
6. **To nurture community well-being and enable the expression of community spirit**.

This document, the Overarching Leisure Strategy, outlines how the Council's work in relation to culture, sport and leisure ensures the delivery of our strategic aims, and how these contribute to the delivery of Cultural Strategy and Community Strategy aims.

2.   Strategic context
How leisure fits into the bigger picture

In 2004, partner organisations in Oxford agreed a Community Strategy for the city, which agreed five themes:
1. Vibrant and inclusive economy
2. Safer communities
3. A better living environment
4. Opportunities for life
5. Active and healthy lifestyles

While cultural, leisure and recreational activities contribute to all of these themes, the vision statement for the active and healthy communities theme makes specific reference to cultural activities. It recognises that "good physical and mental health, and a sense of well-being require a healthy lifestyle and access to social, cultural and leisure activities".

The Cultural Strategy was agreed in 2002 and has two central objectives:
1. Ensuring that Oxford remains culturally rich for decades to come
2. Breaking down barriers that restrict access for residents and visitors
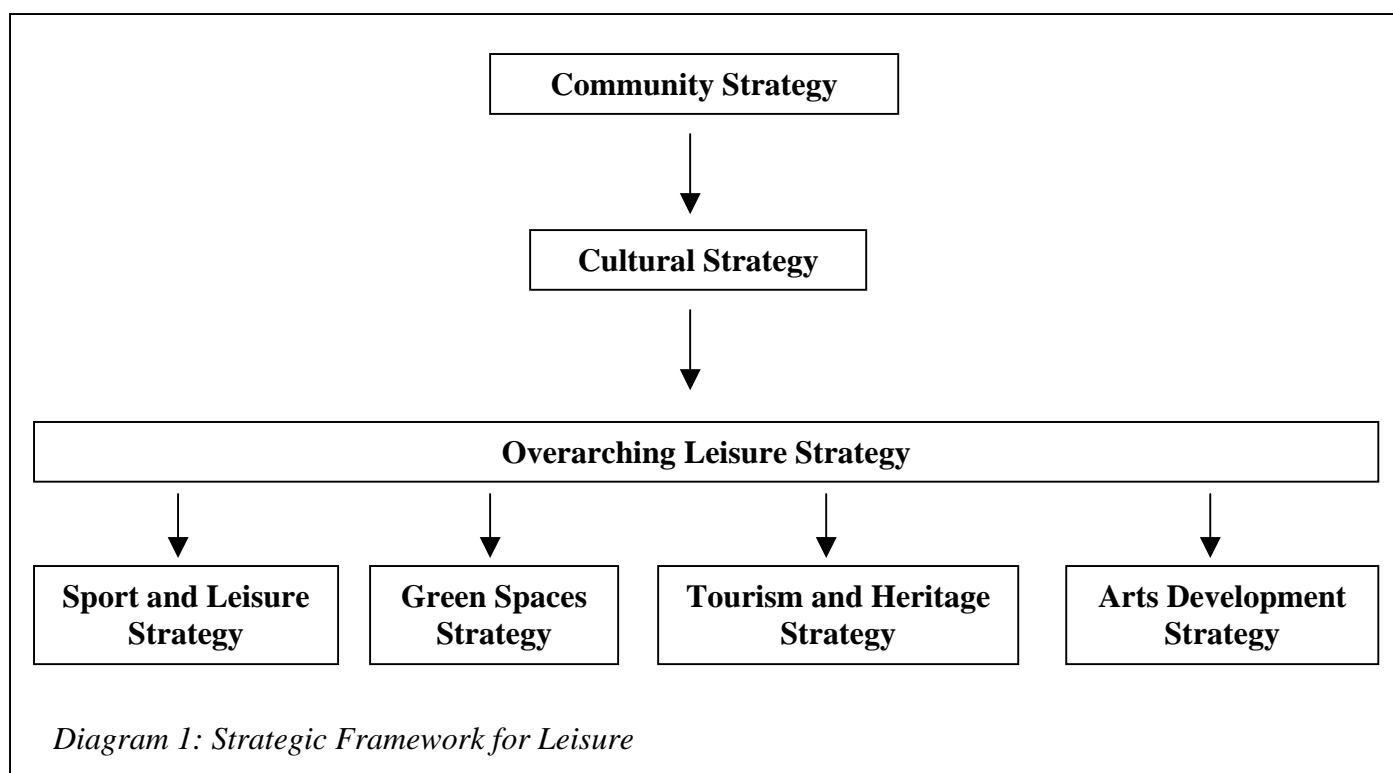
This document, the Overarching Leisure Strategy, serves several purposes:
- It outlines how the Council's strategic aims for culture, sport and leisure contribute to the achievement of the Cultural Strategy and the Community Strategy.
- It outlines current performance, customer feedback, recent market analysis and our self-assessment of the quality of our cultural services.
- It highlights those aspects of leisure provision and promotion that the Council has prioritised, explains our reasons why, and outlines what we intend to do to improve them.
- It reflects on the Council's role and position within the wider leisure market and indicates how this will be developed in the future.

lspart2.doc

This Overarching Leisure Strategy paints a very broad picture across a wide range of activities and identifies broad aims rather than detailed actions. It is supported by a series of more detailed "thematic" strategies which develop these broad aims into specific tasks and targets. These focus on:

1. Sport and Leisure;
2. Green Spaces;
3. Tourism and Heritage; and
4. Arts Development.

The relationship between the Community Strategy, Cultural Strategy and suite of leisure strategies, is shown diagrammatically below.

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Community Strategy     │
                    └────────────┬────────────┘
                                 │
                                 ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │     Cultural Strategy    │
                    └────────────┬────────────┘
                                 │
                                 ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Overarching Leisure Strategy                      │
└───┬──────────────┬──────────────────┬───────────────────┬─────┘
    │              │                  │                   │
    ▼              ▼                  ▼                   ▼
┌─────────┐  ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐  ┌─────────────┐
│ Sport   │  │ Green    │   │ Tourism and      │  │ Arts        │
│ and     │  │ Spaces   │   │ Heritage         │  │ Development │
│ Leisure │  │ Strategy │   │ Strategy         │  │ Strategy    │
│ Strategy│  │          │   │                  │  │             │
└─────────┘  └──────────┘   └──────────────────┘  └─────────────┘
```

Diagram 1: Strategic Framework for Leisure

3. Maximising our potential

There are numerous things that we want to achieve, but there are several different ways in which we can help to make them happen. The way in which we run events and deliver services is a function of three elements:

1. ***The degree of involvement that we wish to have.*** We need to know whether we want to get involved at all, want to deliver it ourselves, or want to fund others to deliver it. We also need to know why we have chosen that option.
2. ***The niche, or role, that we want the Council to take.*** We need to decide whether we have a preference for large or small-scale events, or particular areas of the market, and be clear as to our reasons why.
3. ***The approach that we want to adopt.*** We need to be clear about whether and why we want to expand our activities, improve our services, seek efficiency gains or act as a commercial organisation.

Some of the options for each of these elements are shown overleaf.

lspart2.doc

Approach: options	**Niche: options**	**Degree of involvement: options**
Service expansion	Events – rock concert or community event	Direct provider
Service improvement		Funder (provision through others)
Efficiency gains	Parks – large theme park or Small local wildlife refuge	Advocate
Partnership	Leisure facilities – commercial gym or public swimming pool	Enabler (e.g. grants)
Business like		Facilitator
Business readiness	Tourism – commercial tours or tourist information	Supporter
Purely commercial		Regulator
Exit the service		Not involved

Culture, sport and leisure covers a very broad range of activities, and how we work to achieve our aims varies both between activities and within activities in response to organisational aims and local needs. Some things we deliver directly, such as sports development and summer play-schemes while others we support, such as community-run activities. We can be both an enabler and a provider at the same time, and we can adopt more than one approach: we know that we want to improve the quality of some aspects of our leisure facilities, but we also want to increase the efficiency with which we operate.

In determining our broad approach in the Culture, sport and leisure areas, the following principles have been considered:
- Ensure that the provision of services to the end user is delivered by the organisation best placed to do that efficiently and effectively.
- Act commercially as this can provide a driver for improved efficiency and quality, except where this would result in cost being a barrier to participation.
- Provide directly those activities that are not readily delivered by other providers to fill gaps in provision.
- Work in partnership to increase public access to sites and facilities provided by others to prevent duplication of provision.
- Ensure that local people and community/interest groups are empowered and enabled to run events and activities for themselves.
- Ensure that the suite of culture, sport and leisure activities on offer across the city caters for a variety of tastes and covers the spectrum from large to small scale events
- Facilitate local responses to local issues and empower communities to enable them to happen
- Facilitate community investment by the private sector
- Maximise opportunities to bring other drivers to bear on leisure aims and objectives, such as the Local Area Agreement

More detail on the different methods that the Council will adopt in ensuring delivery of cultural services can be found in the appropriate supporting strategy.

lspart2.doc

4 Developing the Strategy

4.1 What we will focus on

In determining our areas of focus, we have taken several influences into account in order to balance addressing local needs with meeting people's expectations, driving service improvements and meeting national objectives. These include satisfaction levels, customer feedback, recent studies and research, internal performance measures and benchmarking information, and national priorities.

4.1.1 Satisfaction

Overall, satisfaction with the suite of cultural activities and facilities available in the city is high, with satisfaction levels in the upper quartile for museums and galleries, theatres and concert halls, and parks and open spaces. However, not all of the facilities and activities enjoyed by residents and visitors are provided by the Council, and levels of satisfaction are significantly lower for sport and leisure facilities than other cultural provision. Our own satisfaction surveys and customer feedback indicates some key areas where our services are perceived to be of a good quality, and others where improvements could clearly be made:

Areas of high satisfaction:
- Access to and quality of parks and green spaces
- Cultural facilities, e.g. museums and galleries
- Tourist Services, including the Information Centre
- Swimming provision
- Leisure facilities where investment has been undertaken

Areas in need of improvement:
- Provision of toilets and other facilities at parks and green spaces
- Addressing anti-social behaviour issues to improve perceived safety
- Continued investment in leisure facilities
- Quality / standards of facilities
- Maintenance of facilities
- Provision of more varied programmes of activities

4.1.2 Research

In response to ongoing consultation, we have commissioned and undertaken various bits of research into our own services, our position in the market and the degree to which our provision meets the needs and aspirations of visitors and residents. For example:

The **Green Spaces Study**, undertaken by Scott Wilson in 2005, highlighted the need to:
- review our provision of parks, play areas and recreation grounds
- establish maintenance and refurbishment programmes
- ensure that we manage our wildlife sites effectively
- ensure that our provision is sufficient for future as well as current populations
- provide better facilities at some of our parks and open spaces.

The **Indoor Leisure Facility Review** and **Operation Review**, undertaken by the consultancy firm Strategic Leisure, indicated that we should:
- Review our provision of leisure facilities
- Review our staffing structures
- Improve our marketing and promotion in relation to leisure facilities
- Review our general operating procedures

lspart2.doc

4.1.3 Performance measures

While we have enjoyed success in recent years in national competitions, including winning the Britain in Bloom regional finals and the Best Kept Park (Florence Park) in 2005, this is only one aspect of our performance.

A recent assessment by the Audit Commission on our use of resources compared to other local authorities revealed that for cultural services as a whole we are one of the highest spending authorities. Within this broad heading our use of resources varies. Our spend on leisure is high in comparison to other authorities, but the number of visits to our facilities is low when compared to similar facilities. However, Audit Commission data also show that for tourism we are one of the lowest spending authorities, despite being one of the most visited destinations in the UK.

One of the issues that we face is a lack of robust information on our own performance, which limits our ability to compare our performance with that of other councils. We need to identify what best practice looks like and determine how we assess value for money. Until we have done this and assessed our own performance against those two benchmarks we will be poorly placed to evaluate whether we are justified in being one of the most expensive leisure services.

A Best Value Review is due to be completed in 2006, which will analyse in more detail how we can be more efficient and effective in achieving our aims, particularly in relation to the more formal end of the leisure spectrum (covering indoor facilities and sports development, but not parks or arts and dance). This overarching strategy and its supporting strategies primarily identify those actions that we can take immediately to improve our services (those that do not require fundamental changes to the way in which we operate), while the Best Value Review will highlight potential longer-term changes to the manner in which we operate that would make us more effective in achieving our aims. In identifying significant means of achieving efficiencies, the Best Value Review will also identify ways in which we can reallocate our resources to achieve greater impact for the same investment, and allow us to undertake some of the activities identified in these strategies that are not currently resourced.

4.2 Intended approach

Based on the above considerations, we intend to adopt the following broad approach to the development of culture, sport and leisure services:

1. We will use the principles outlined in section 3 to determine our preferred level of involvement, preferred niche and preferred approach for each area of our activities.
2. We will focus on service improvement
3. We will focus on achieving efficiency gains while maintaining effectiveness

While this and the associated strategies provide the framework within which the Best Value Review will operate, the Review itself will help to drive service improvement and achieve efficiency gains. It will also help to shape the direction of our culture, sport and leisure activities over the coming years.

5. Turning Strategy into Action
What we intend to do

With limited resources and some ambitious objectives, we need to prioritise our resources on the most important aspects. In evaluating our priorities, we have considered all of the areas highlighted above as well as how specific activities can contribute to wider corporate commitments and priorities.

However, we are aware that not all open spaces or sports facilities provide the same level and quality of provision, and that not all areas of the city enjoy the same level of access to a full range of facilities and activities. We also know that different issues are of importance and concern in different geographic areas and among different communities. For that reason, we do not attempt to cover all aspects of cultural services within this overarching strategy. Instead, this document is supported by a series of thematic strategies, each of which provides further information in relation to particular aspects of our cultural services.

While there are overlaps and links between the subjects of the supporting strategies, they come under four headings:
1. Sport and Leisure, which includes reference to leisure facilities and sport and health promotion, and which links with the Council's Community Centres Strategy;
2. Green Spaces, which includes consideration of allotments, the countryside, play areas and recreation grounds;
3. Tourism and Heritage, which also includes events; and
4. Arts Development, including reference to performing arts, music and visual arts.

The table in Section 7 provides an overview of the issues that the Council has prioritised and, in the last column, to which areas of our cultural services these issues primarily apply. This column details which of the supporting strategies contains further information about what the Council intends to do to address these issues.

6. An evolving strategy
Monitoring and review

This Overarching Leisure Strategy provides a broad overview of the priorities within our range of cultural services over the next 5 years, based on current circumstances. The four supporting strategies provide more detail about the actions that we intend to take to address these priorities over the same time scale. The delivery of these actions will be reviewed every six months.

6.1 Monitoring

Each of these strategies will need to be monitored regularly to ensure not only that we are completing the actions that we have identified but also that those actions are having their desired impacts and that levels of satisfaction and our performance show continuing improvement.

To enable effective monitoring and ensure that we achieve our aims, we will need to:
1. Identify key performance indicators
2. Establish robust and consistent mechanisms for capturing performance data
3. Identify comparators, to enable us to compare our performance with other providers both within and outside local government
4. Establish targets to help us drive improvements

lspart2.doc

These indicators will need to cover several aspects of our culture, sport and leisure provision, including:

- Usage figures, covering overall use, number of new users and the number and range of new uses, for example provision for minority sports
- Financial information, such as expenditure on leisure provision, income received from charges, external investment secured.
- External recognition, either for Oxford as a brand and venue in regional and national arenas, or for the quality of the services we offer
- Satisfaction results, both through standard assessments and through the monitoring of complaints
- Internal management practices, relating to the frequency, quality and efficiency of maintenance and refurbishment programmes
- Community benefits, from the number of new interest or community groups established to the number of educational and recreational courses provided.
- Wider benefits, relating to the economic benefit arising from increasing the number of instructors trained, or the community safety benefit of reduced crime and antisocial behaviour.

Reference is made to many of these aspects in the Action Plans of the supporting strategies, and the frequency and nature of their monitoring will vary depending on the specific actions to which they relate.

6.2 Review

The strategies will also need to be reviewed regularly as local needs and circumstances change. Numerous factors might affect our strategic approach to cultural services, including:

- The appearance or disappearance of major competitors in provision of facilities
- Legislative changes
- Change in the political control of the Council
- Significant changes in performance
- Significant changes in satisfaction levels or customer feedback

The strategies will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they continue to provide an effective response to local needs and circumstances. We will seek to engage users, non-users, residents and visitors alike, in the monitoring and review of these strategies.

## 7.	Action Plan for Culture, Sport and Leisure

Strategic aim for leisure	Culture, Sport and Leisure Objective	Links to other strategies (see appendix 1)		High level actions	Links to other strategies
		Community	Cultural		
To ensure equity of access and diversity of provision	Ensure that provision meets the needs and aspirations of diverse communities	4,5	2,5	▪ Review level, range and location of provision ▪ Establish standards for provision that reflect demographic, geographic and user-specific needs ▪ Work with partners, e.g. schools, colleges and universities to increase public access to their facilities and prevent duplication of provision ▪ Identify areas where provision differs from accepted standards ▪ Develop and deliver a balanced programme to redress imbalance in provision ▪ Strengthen links between community centres and leisure centres and their activities	GSS, SLS
	Ensure equity in the standard / quality of services and activities provided	4,5	5	▪ Establish standards for balance between level and quality of provision ▪ Assess provision against accepted standards ▪ Develop and deliver a balanced programme to redress imbalance in provision ▪ Establish management and refurbishment schedules for facilities	GSS, SLA, ADS
	Reduce the impact of cost as a barrier to participation	1,5	2,6	▪ Continue subsidised provision of leisure and cultural activities ▪ Promote the Slice Card, and review its scope / coverage ▪ Seek sponsorship to help deliver free and low costs activities	GSS, SLS, ADS
	Identify and tackle perceived barriers to participation, e.g. fear of crime	2,5	2	▪ Assess sites and facilities for fear of crime factors, e.g. lighting, signage and level of use ▪ Provide staffing at sites where appropriate, e.g. rangers in parks ▪ Manage communication that may impact on fear of crime, e.g. dedicated leaflets, media relations. ▪ Develop a sense of belonging by establishing stronger links between local people and cultural facilities ▪ Link with neighbourhood working initiatives	GSS, SLS, THS, ADS
	Address physical barriers to access	4,5	2	▪ Work with public transport providers to improve accessibility ▪ Assess accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians, especially where transport routes provide potential barriers to access, e.g. the ring road ▪ Establish a programme to ensure all sites / facilities are DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant ▪ Improve signage	GSS, SLS

*GSS: Green Spaces Strategy,	SLS: Sport and Leisure Strategy,	THS: Tourism and Heritage Strategy,	ADS: Arts Development Strategy*

	Widen audiences and participation	4,5	2,3	▪ Increase promotion of facilities and their use ▪ Review by-laws to ensure that no unnecessary restrictions affect use of facilities and sites ▪ Engage with local and regional media providers to increase potential audience ▪ Promote the use of alternative venues for events that are not traditionally associated with those venues ▪ Work with schools, community and interest groups, and non-users of facilities to establish and increase patronage ▪ Create links with Youth Matters and opportunity cards	GSS, SLS, ADS
To encourage healthier lifestyles	Promote and enable opportunities for physical activity	5	3,8	▪ Promote sites and facilities as places to enjoy physical activity ▪ Work with strategic partners, e.g. the Primary Care Trust to develop health referral schemes ▪ Link with existing activities, e.g. walking tours ▪ Target demographic groups that are traditionally "non-users", e.g. linking with the Blackbird Leys Active England Bid ▪ Target vulnerable groups, e.g. those with specific health problems	SLS, GSS
To advance lifelong learning	Provide opportunities for lifelong learning	4	1,8,9	▪ Maintain and increase links with schools to encourage use of facilities and sites for educational purposes ▪ Promote and increase sports development work, especially around hard to reach groups ▪ Establish links with community and interest groups and encourage community / volunteer involvement in the management and running of facilities and events ▪ Provide structured programmes for learning, e.g. summer play schemes ▪ Develop subject-specific initiatives, e.g. linking heritage and history, tourism and geography, sports science.	SLS, GSS, ADS, THS
	Encourage community involvement to increase skills and capacity	4	8.6	▪ Develop stronger links with interest groups / community associations ▪ Establish "friends of" groups ▪ Engage local people in management and running of cultural activities	SLS, GSS
To protect and enhance the natural and built environment	Manage the environmental impacts of our own activities	3	4	▪ Develop and implement an environmental policy to manage a range of issues including waste management, energy and water use, transport issues, biodiversity and use of chemicals. ▪ Investigate and exploit potential to demonstrate environmental good practice, implement showcase developments or cutting edge technologies.	GSS, SLS, ADS, THS
	Manage Council owned sites	3	4	▪ Develop and implement a strategy to manage our sites, especially where UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species and habitats exist. ▪ Ensure management practices do not adversely affect biodiversity	GSS

GSS: Green Spaces Strategy.   SLS: Sport and Leisure Strategy.   THS: Tourism and Heritage Strategy.   ADS: Arts Development Strategy

				▪ Enhance or restore the biodiversity interest of open spaces ▪ Take measures to reduce the fragmentation and isolation of habitats by creating linkages between sites	
	Protect and enhance the built environment	3	4	▪ Work with heritage bodies to ensure protection of sites and enhancement of public enjoyment of them ▪ Promote responsible behaviour in heritage and tourist venues ▪ Promote sustainable tourism	THS
	Encourage responsible use of facilities and activities	3	4	▪ Promote responsible behaviour in parks and green spaces ▪ Promote and support sustainable tourism ▪ Promote environmental good practice ▪ Engage with national and regional campaigns where appropriate	GSS, THS
To enhance the vibrancy of the Oxford brand	Seek out opportunities for regional / national events	1	10	▪ Promote sites and facilities as attractions and potential venues, e.g. horticultural shows ▪ Develop links with regional media to increase coverage, and promote previous involvement with big names	GSS, ADS, THS
	Develop and promote Oxford brand	1	3,10	▪ Coherently develop and promote the brand of Oxford to residents, visitors and businesses ▪ Develop tourist and heritage promotional work ▪ Make use of opportunities for promotion and delivery of cultural events during 2007 ▪ Work with other councils and agencies to promote the Oxford Brand within the county context ▪ Respond to changing global markets, e.g. China	THS, ADS
To nurture community well-being and enable the expression of community spirit	Enhance community engagement	4	2,9	▪ Undertake regular consultation to identify needs and drive service improvements ▪ Establish "friends of" groups ▪ Support community and voluntary engagement in the management and running of events and parks ▪ Link with neighbourhood working initiatives ▪ Engage young people in the design of services for teenagers	GSS
	Celebrate Oxford	1	10	▪ Enable and allow cultural activities to take place in facilities and sites to encourage a sense of belonging ▪ Work in partnership with businesses, community and voluntary sector and others to enhance public engagement ▪ Celebrate success within Oxford publicly, and promote successes widely to build on the city's reputation ▪ Celebrate and promote Oxford's role within the wider world	THS, ADS, GSS

GSS: Green Spaces Strategy,   SLS: Sport and Leisure Strategy,   THS: Tourism and Heritage Strategy,   ADS: Arts Development Strategy

Appendix 2:   Strategic aims of the Community Strategy and the Cultural Strategy

Please use this table to identify which of the Community Strategy's aims this Overarching Leisure Strategy helps to achieve.

Numeric reference	Community Strategy Aim
1	A vibrant and inclusive economy
2	Safer communities
3	A better living environment
4	Opportunities for life
5	Active and healthy communities

Please use this table to identify which of the Cultural Strategy's aims this Overarching Leisure Strategy helps to achieve.

Numeric reference	Cultural Strategy Aim
1	To improve engagement with, and access to, formal and informal education and continuing professional development
2	To remove barriers which prevent anyone watching and participating in cultural activities
3	To improve the co-ordination and promotion of cultural activities
4	To protect and enhance the built and natural environments
5	To prioritise and fill gaps in culture facilities
6	To maintain and increase public and private resources to develop Oxford's cultural assets
7	To reduce negative environmental impact and ensure the long-term future of cultural organisations
8	To achieve more and better partnerships
9	To improve opportunities for children and young people
10	To develop civic pride through celebration of Oxford's talent