



## **Culture Strategy 2007-2012**

Oxford City Council

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**Appendix A: Culture Strategy Implementation Plan (see separate document)**

## 1. Introduction and summary

1.1 This Culture Strategy for Oxford sets the context and direction for culture within the city, both as delivered directly by Oxford City Council, and by the council in partnership with local cultural and creative organisations in the private and third sectors, and regional partners such as Oxfordshire County Council and the South East Economic Development Agency (SEEDA). The Strategy:

- sets out a shared vision for cultural, creative and leisure opportunities across the city, exploring what kind of cultural life we aspire to, and why investment in our culture is important;
- suggests ways in which cultural provision, support to the culture sector and access to cultural opportunities might be improved in Oxford, and;
- establishes a genuinely partnership-based approach to sustaining, developing and improving the cultural life of the city and the region as a whole.

1.2 The Culture Strategy recognises the importance of the corporate objectives of Oxford City Council, directing all cultural efforts led by the council to support the delivery of those objectives first and foremost. To achieve this aim, the Strategy highlights three key priorities for the future development of culture in Oxford.

- 1. Promote involvement by all in a diverse range of cultural opportunities.**
- 2. Harness the potential of the creative and leisure industries as central to a vibrant City with a high quality of life.**
- 3. Support the development of a successful and sustainable cultural sector in Oxford.**

1.3 Through this Culture Strategy, the council will work in partnership with all key local, regional and national stakeholders to ensure the value of culture is recognised as both an end in itself and also as a means by which to support the achievement of wider social, economic and environmental goals.

## 2. The scope and potential of culture

2.1 Culture has the power to change lives and to raise aspirations. It has the power to enrich our enjoyment of life and to be a source of passionate interest and individual skill. It also has an intrinsic value to communities, bringing people together in shared experience, strengthening community bonds and making a major contribution to the quality of life - in recent years there has been growing recognition that a vibrant cultural life and active participation in culture and creativity is a necessary ingredient of sustainable communities. Participation in cultural activities, whether through leisure, recreation, community events or learning, is fundamental to how people experience and perceive the places and the communities in which they live or which they visit. Cultural activity contributes to a distinctive local identity, engenders pride and a sense of belonging, and supports individual well-being and enjoyment. Additionally, a thriving cultural sector can deliver substantial economic benefits to the community as a whole - knowledge-based and creative industries are amongst the fastest growing sectors of the economy nationally, and culture-based tourism and the associated night-time economy can add substantially to local economic prosperity.

2.2 'Culture', as defined by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, has a much wider meaning than often understood and includes:

- Performing and Visual Arts;
- Landscape, Architecture and Buildings;
- Museums, Archives and Local Identity and Sense of Place;
- Fashion, Design Media, Film, Writing and Publishing;
- Sports and Recreation, Food, Parks and Open Spaces;
- Cultural Diversity and Countryside Recreation;
- Tourism, Traditions and History, Libraries;
- Children's Play and Playgrounds.

2.3 Oxford's cultural organisations and citizens consider their experience of culture to be even broader than this list would indicate. Oxford has a long and illustrious cultural history, and literature, science and technological advancement, life long learning and architectural heritage contribute much to the cultural offer of the city.

### **3. Culture in Oxford**

3.1 Oxford is a city of international special cultural interest. Its built environment, academic heritage and status as an international publishing centre lend it that distinction, as does the enduring influence of the artists, writers, performers and thinkers who are associated with the city in the world's imagination. The city attracted the designation "European Centre of Culture" in 2002, associated with the UK hosting of "European Capital of Culture" in 2008. At the same time the city was identified by Arts Council England as one of three Centres of Cultural Leadership in the South East. Oxford is a cultural hub for the population of Oxfordshire and neighbouring areas, a primary location for national and regional cultural and sporting facilities and is significant as a regional centre for creative industries and for artists' higher education and training.

3.2 The city is home to many world-class cultural organisations and a myriad of festivals, and is especially rich in music and literature. Oxford hosts nationally and internationally acclaimed cultural organisations from the Ashmolean Museum to Modern Art Oxford and the Playhouse. Oxford has also been the artistic proving ground for many of today's most respected artistic producers. For example, Complicite is one of the world's most acclaimed theatre companies – nurtured as they started out by the city's Pegasus Theatre. The city is home to the largest concentration of published writers in the UK outside of London. East Oxford, in particular the Cowley Road area, has a lively street culture reflected most fully in the annual Cowley Road Carnival, one of the largest events in the city's calendar. This cultural asset base, combined with the presence of two thriving Universities and the diverse, cosmopolitan nature of Oxford's resident and visiting community give it an inherent cultural vibrancy and an ever increasing potential for excellence.

### **4. Strategy context and the role of the city council**

4.1 In developing a Culture Strategy for Oxford it is vital to have regard for national, regional and local aims and aspirations for cultural development. This involves bringing together those priorities outlined by organisations such as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport at a national level, the South East Development

Agency at a regional level, and the priorities of Oxford City Council, the two universities, Oxfordshire County Council and other key partners through Oxford Inspires, to ensure that national, regional and local priorities are fully integrated.

- 4.2 Above all it is vital to ensure that the Culture Strategy delivers the specific needs and aspirations of the city of Oxford and its residents. These aspirations are currently best articulated in the priorities contained in the council's Corporate Plan 2007-2012, and these priorities will be used as the focus for all cultural activities undertaken or supported by Oxford City Council during the life of this Strategy.

Priorities include:

- Reducing inequality through social inclusion;
- More housing for Oxford and better housing for all;
- Improving the local environment, economy and quality of life;
- Reducing and prevent crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Tackling climate change and promote environmental resource management;
- Being an effective and responsive organisation and providing value for money services.

- 4.3 Oxford City Council has a duty to provide value for money services within the city, by means of whatever delivery mechanisms are most appropriate for particular activities. Our awareness of this duty, coupled with feedback from our stakeholders, has highlighted the need for the council to clearly articulate its role in supporting the cultural sector in Oxford. We see this role as having two main strands of activity within it: where the council is best placed or required to deliver a cultural service directly, it will provide that service in line with the value for money principles (i.e. lower cost, more efficient and/or higher performance). However, where a partner organisation (whether in the public, private or third sector) is better placed to provide a service and can demonstrate better value for money for that service, the council will look to support that partner, either financially or by other means, in line with its corporate and cultural priorities.

- 4.4 A vibrant, ambitious and successful creative and cultural community is a valuable asset to the city and an essential partner for the city council. Within this community, a vital part of the council's role is to help build the capacity of partner organisations to deliver cultural activities in furtherance of its corporate and Local Strategic Partnership priorities. Such support may include exercising our community leadership role, supporting major collaborative applications for funding, making appropriate grants, and making best use of services under direct council control to enable partner-led cultural initiatives to have the maximum impact.



## 5. A vision for culture in the city

- 5.1 Together with our stakeholders we share a cultural vision for Oxford that builds on its current strong reputation:

*“To be renowned the world over as a leader in high quality, innovative and diverse cultural activities accessible to all”*

- 5.2 In order to achieve this vision, Oxford will provide a strong lead to the city-region in using culture as a key driver for improving quality of life for all its citizens, workforce and visitors. The city will develop as a place that others look to for cultural and creative ideas and models that they can replicate, building on its existing world leader status in areas such as science, medicine, engineering and education to ensure it achieves equal recognition as a place at the leading edge in culture and the arts.
- 5.3 Oxford is an ambitious and vibrant community where a diverse population of all ages express and engage with their own creativity, as well as a place where artists and other creative people from around the world want to come to live and work. It is the role of the council and its partners to harness this potential and take the city to another level in terms of its cultural offering for visitors and residents alike and enhance the enjoyment of all.

## 6. Oxford City Council's cultural priorities

- 6.1 In articulating a shared vision for culture in Oxford (following extensive consultation with our partners in the cultural sector), Oxford City Council has identified a number of priorities for action over the next five years. These priorities are aligned with the broader corporate objectives of the council, and reflect our strategy for delivering

the city's cultural aspirations through a mixed economy of direct provision, facilitation and partnership.

6.2 Cultural priorities highlighted include the need to:

**1. Promote involvement by all in a diverse range of cultural opportunities.**

Objectives:

- Increase participation in all cultural activities and recreation;
- To nurture social inclusion, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Encourage communities to engage with one another to become more cohesive, confident and appreciative of one another;
- Ensure the people of Oxford lead fit, healthy and independent lives, specifically targeting children and young people, older people and other groups at risk of exclusion.

**2. Harness the potential of the creative and leisure industries as central to a vibrant City with a high quality of life.**

Objectives:

- Reinforce awareness of Oxford as a world renowned city of special cultural interest and promote the less well-known areas of cultural interest;
- Create a sense of place where people have a pride in what is special and unique about the city of Oxford as both an attractive place to live and a welcoming place to visit;
- Ensure greater vibrancy and quality of life in the city;
- Boost the economy by maximising the culture offer of the city.

**3. Support the development of a successful and sustainable cultural sector in Oxford.**

Objectives:

- Build capacity within the cultural sector to become independent and self-sustaining wherever possible in the long term to enable organisations to continue to thrive;
- Work with partners to provide a range of facilities and spaces for cultural productions, activities & events and small business development;
- Mainstream culture into the work of all public bodies and their partners in the City of Oxford, improving planning of activities and the allocation of resources.

**7. Implementing and monitoring the Culture Strategy**

7.1 This objectives of this Strategy will be incorporated into the annual business planning process of the council and its partner organisations and used to guide and inform the development of the council's Corporate Plan and directorate plans.

Service plans will be developed beneath this Strategy to provide further detail on the development of each service and how it will deliver within the broad objectives of this Strategy. The Strategy will inform the council's grant allocation programme as we move into a new model of grant allocation that focuses on joint commissioning of services with our partner organisations.

- 7.2 The Culture Strategy Delivery Plan (appendix A) outlines the headline improvement actions identified by Oxford City Council to deliver the Culture Strategy 2007-2012, setting out lead officers, targets and timescales.
  
- 7.4 We acknowledge the need to develop meaningful performance monitoring linked to the action plan, and will develop suitable indicators and mechanisms for monitoring them. We will link the actions and outcomes specified in the Culture Strategy Delivery Plan to our Service Plans across the organisation, and will seek to demonstrate the success of the Culture Strategy in helping to deliver real progress in delivering the council's corporate and shared objectives for the city.