

Summary of Oxford Consultation: Talkback survey

The Aims of the Consultation:

- To establish the types of services favored by the public, as well as those that are not considered essential.
- To generate discussion on the future direction of the council, the types of services that should be prioritised and those that should not.

Social Research Associates findings:

The Talkback survey was sent to 960 panel members in November. 429 panel members completed and returned their surveys giving a response rate of 45%.

Reduce inequality through social inclusion

- There was a lot of support for improving leisure centres and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- There was also support for promoting community centres

More housing for Oxford, better housing for all

- Promote responsible management of Homes in Multiple Occupation
- The provision of affordable housing, the improvement of Council housing and housing for homeless families also received support.
- Grants to improve private housing and the Rose Hill development gained the least support of the services under this priority.

Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life

- Recycling and refuse collection were considered the most important services under this priority with 81% rating them as very important.
- A further 71% rated street cleaning as important.
- Services such as tourism, security at allotments and managing street trading all received low levels of support.

Reduce crime and antisocial behaviour

- There was support for increased partnership working with Thames Valley police.
- Street wardens and CCTV did not get much support from panel members.

Tackle climate change and promote environmental resources management

- Preventative work on flooding was considered very important by 67% of respondents.
- Tackling pollution received the support of 63% of the panel.
- While planning policies to protect the environment received the support of 60% of the panel.

Be an effective and responsive organisation, providing value for money services

- Planning for emergencies and the collection of Council Tax were considered important while Area Committees and One Stop Shops received low ratings.

Oxford City Council Talkback

Survey 4 Report



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Oxford City Council Talkback

Survey 4 Report

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Oxford City Council Talkback Survey 4 Report

Executive Summary

Overview

The talkback citizens' panel comprises a group of residents in the Oxford City Council area who have agreed to take part in Council consultation. This survey was the fourth that the panel completed in 2007 and asked for opinions and feedback in five distinct areas

- Culture in Oxford
- The Cultural Strategy
- Houses of Multiple Occupancy Licensing
- Housing and Homelessness
- 'What is Important to You?'

The final section included questions related to the Council's six corporate priorities.

Process

Surveys were sent to the 960 members of the panel on 5th November and a deadline of the 7th December for replies. 429 respondents completed the survey, a response rate of 45%, comprising a good spread of local people.

Key Conclusions

Culture in Oxford

The main aspects of culture in Oxford that were particularly commended by the panel were the museums and art galleries, the parks, and the mix of people in the city. The panel felt that culture improved the quality of life for those in the city and boosted the tourist economy. The responses on whether culture can improve the opportunities open to Oxford residents were slightly less positive but there was still a majority in agreement.

The main improvements supported by the panel were the promotion of parks and public spaces for cultural events, more 'world class' cultural events and the extension of cultural facilities to those areas that lack them. This final point was a recurring theme through the culture questions, as many panel members felt their particular area was not well served.

The most used facilities were libraries, historic buildings, cinemas, museums and art galleries. Most money was spent on opera and classical music, sporting events and plays.

The chief barriers to attending cultural events were cost and lack of time, whilst 11% of respondents felt there were not enough cultural events close to where they live.

The Cultural Strategy

The key message to come from the section on the Cultural Strategy is that whilst respondents were keen to support the expansion of culture in Oxford, there was concern to ensure that this was not focused on one particular area of the city, or a particular elite group of people. In particular it was felt that the cultural strategy should take particular account of the needs of the disabled and younger people

In defining culture and setting out a vision for culture in Oxford, respondents also questioned whether the history of the city as an academic seat of learning was being fully utilised.

Additional licensing for houses of multiple occupation (HMOs)

Panel members have experienced considerable problems with privately rented homes, with 40% reporting difficulties. The most common reasons given were dumped refuse and poor condition of properties and gardens. Members from the East of the city appeared to be disproportionately affected by this.

There was virtually universal agreement that landlords should manage their properties and failure to do so caused problems for the surrounding area. Over 70% of respondents supported the additional licensing scheme, although many were skeptical about the potential for the scheme to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Housing and Homelessness

The questions on Council homeless services and allocation of housing were answered by a small number of respondents who had knowledge or experience of them, but many of those felt dissatisfied. Equally many felt that the Council's performance on providing affordable housing and maintaining Council properties was below their expectations.

The most important issue for the respondents to the survey was the high house prices in the area, with high rents second and a lack of affordable family housing third.

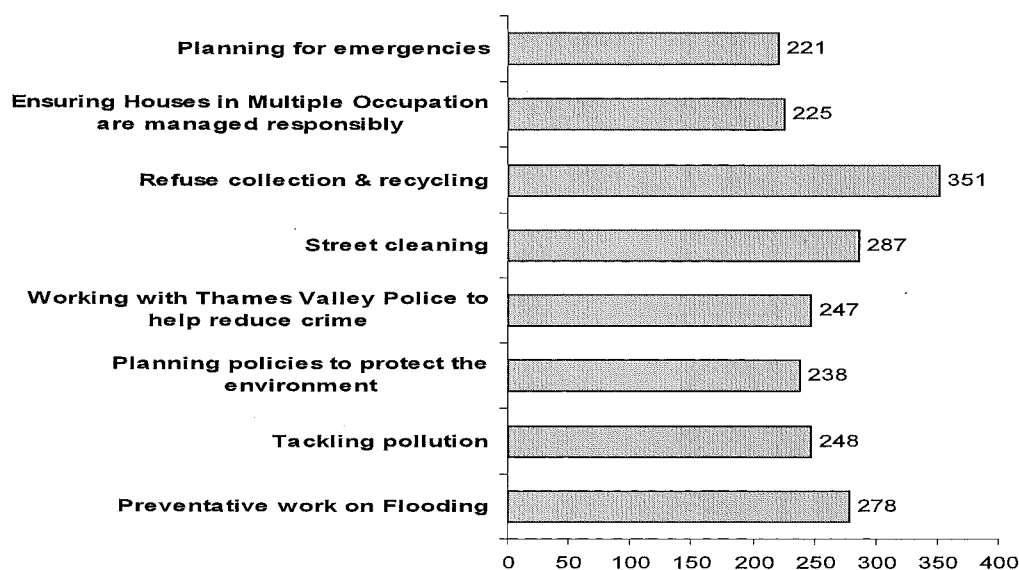
The panel favoured building houses over flats and also expressed a slight preference for building in the surrounding towns rather than in the City.

What's important to you?

The overall results overall shown that refuse and recycling was considered the most important priority with street cleaning a close second. The third highest priority was adequate flood protection - clearly related to the recent floods in Oxford. The panel also supported increasing the presence and effectiveness of policing.

Another high priority was support for additional licensing for HMO's, but comments from this section and the housing section of this survey reveal that affordable housing is a key concern for many people.

The top ranking answers to 'What is important to you?'



Talkback Survey 4 – December 2007

The Talkback panel

The talkback panel was initially recruited in September 2006 and supplemented in September 2007. The panel is broadly representative of the demographics of the Oxford City Council area. A breakdown of the panel demographics is included as Appendix 1.

Methodology

The survey was sent out to a total of 960 people. Of these, 787 were sent by post, and the remaining 173 received email links to online surveys as they had previously requested. The deadline for response was 7th December 2007 to allow sufficient time for the panel to respond and the Report to be prepared. A copy of the survey booklet is shown at Appendix 2.

The Survey

The Talkback survey 4 contained 5 sections

- Culture in Oxford
- The Cultural Strategy
- Houses of Multiple Occupancy Licensing
- Housing and Homelessness
- 'What is Important to You?'

This last section related to the Council's Corporate Priorities and is part of a wider budget setting consultation.

429 responses were received (54 web, 375 postal) from panel members representing a 45% response rate and a good spread of local people apart from some under representation of young people and men (see Appendix A). The response rate from postal surveys is slightly higher (48%) than those responding by email links (31%).

Data

Percentage answers are listed by valid percentages unless otherwise stated. Valid percentages are defined as the percentage of those respondents who actually answered that question, not the percentage of the total responses including those who did not answer. Where reference is made to the area of responses, this corresponds to the area committees run by Oxford City Council. The wards in each area are listed below.

North: Summertown; Wolvercote, St Margarets, North

North East: Marston, Headington, Headington Hill & Northway, Barton and Sandhills, Quarry and Risinghurst, Churchill

East: St Clements, St Mary's, Iffley Fields

South East Rose Hill and Iffley, Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, Northfield Brook

Central Jericho and Osney, Carfax, Hollywell, Hinksey Park

Cowley Cowley Marsh, Lye Valley, Cowley

Section 1: Culture in Oxford

The first part of the survey asked the panel about culture in Oxford. This included questions on what they liked about culture in Oxford at present, the events they attended, what they would like to see in the future and any barriers to attending cultural events.

Q1 What do you like most about culture in Oxford?

	1st Priority	%	2nd Priority	%	3rd Priority	%
The mixture of people who live here	134	32	49	14	55	17
Museums, theatres & art galleries	137	33	101	29	56	17
Parks & open spaces	110	26	132	37	80	24
Nightlife (bars & restaurants)	7	2	20	6	21	6
The creative industries (film/design/web technology)	1	0.2	6	2	20	6
The range of shops	9	2	24	7	48	14
The range of sports & leisure facilities	7	2	8	2	39	12
Other	15	4	13	4	15	5
Total	420		353		334	

The top three answers receiving the first priority were closely grouped and given high priority by all age groups

- 'The mixture of people who live here',
- 'museums, theatres and art galleries' and
- 'parks and open spaces'

However, within these categories there were some differences between the top priorities for different age groups.

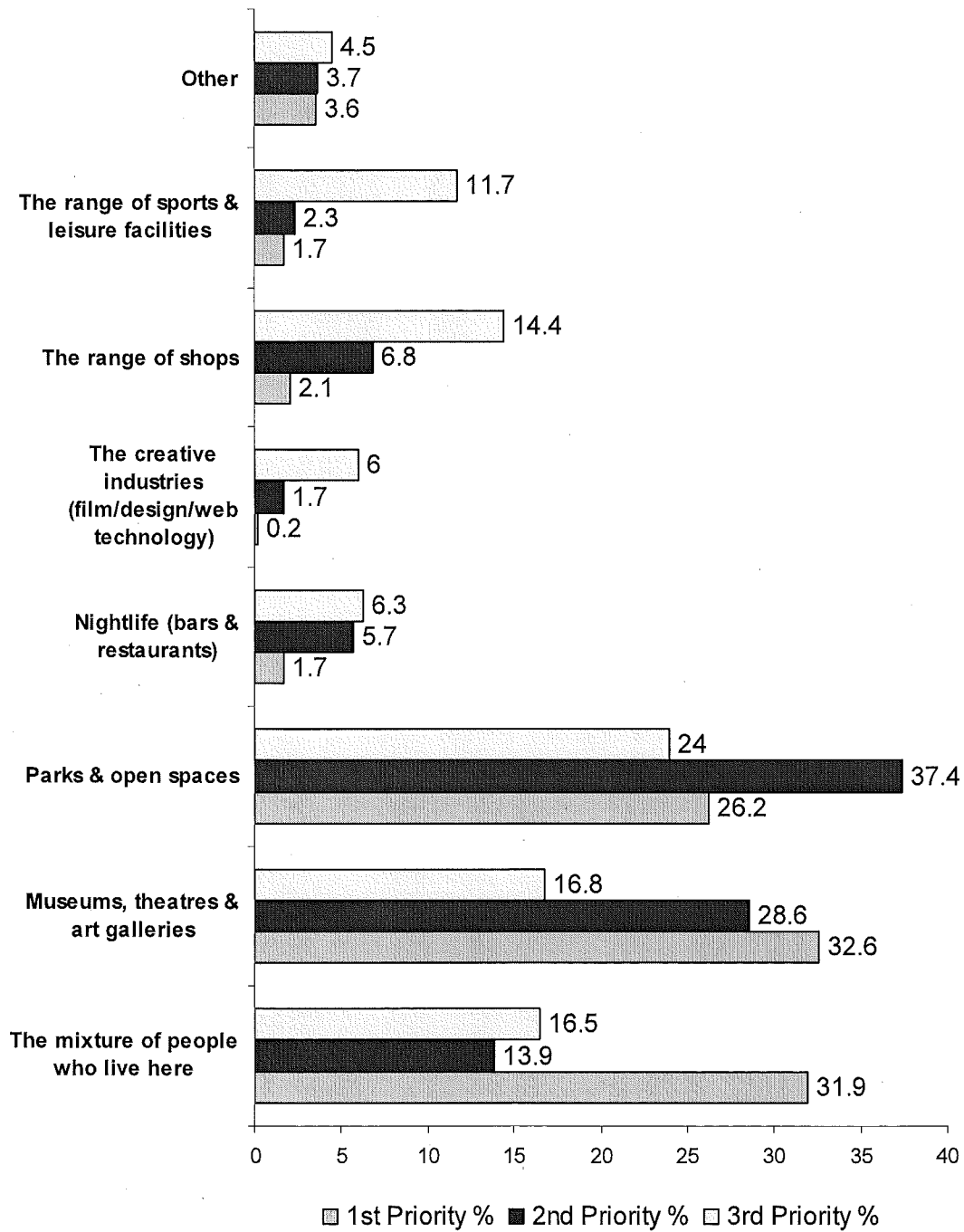
- 40% of respondents over the age of 55 ranked museums, theatres and art galleries as the their top priority, which was the top ranking choice for this age group
- 36% those under 45 named the mixture of people living in Oxford as their favourite aspect of the cities' culture.

There were also differences in the top priorities of respondents from different areas of the city.

- Those from the North of the city were far more likely to favour museums, theatres and art galleries, as were those from the South-East.: 48% of people from the North ranked museums, theatres and art galleries as number one, whereas only 19% of people from Cowley who put this category first.
- 42% of respondents from the Eastern area ranked the mixture of people in Oxford as their top priority.

The results are shown graphically below.

What do you like most about culture in Oxford?



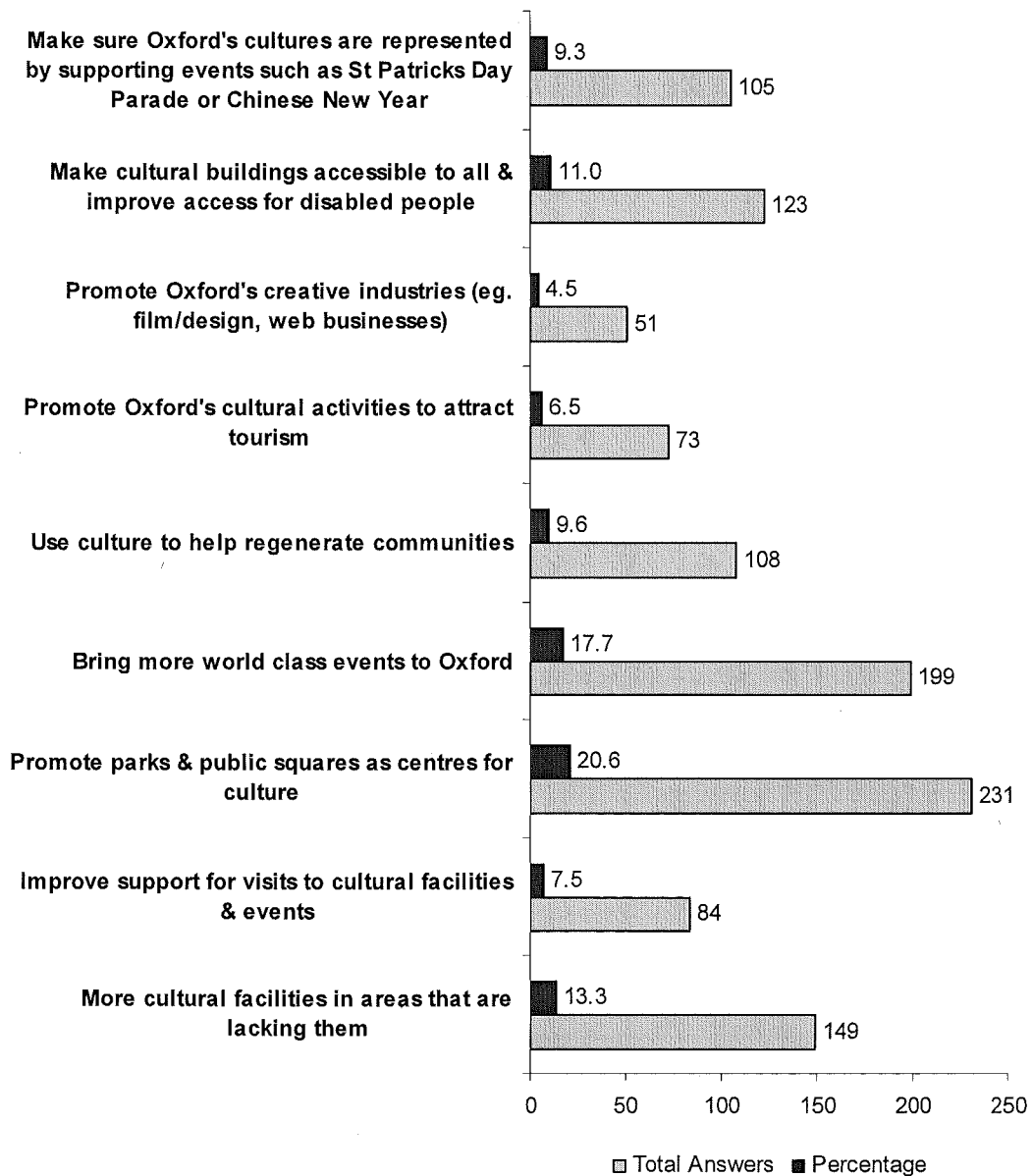
Q2 Which THREE of the following Proposals do you think could make the biggest difference to Oxford as a Cultural Capital?

The top three responses were:

- More cultural facilities in areas that are lacking them.
- The Promotion of parks and public squares for cultural purposes.
- An Increase in the number of world class events in Oxford.

There was little difference in response across different age groups.

Which three of the following could make the biggest difference to Oxford?



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Q3 How important do you think cultural activity is to Oxford's success as a city?

Question 3 asked for levels of disagreement or agreement with a number of positive statements about the effects of culture in Oxford. The majority of panel members responded in agreement to these statements and the overall results are shown in the table below and graphically on the following page.

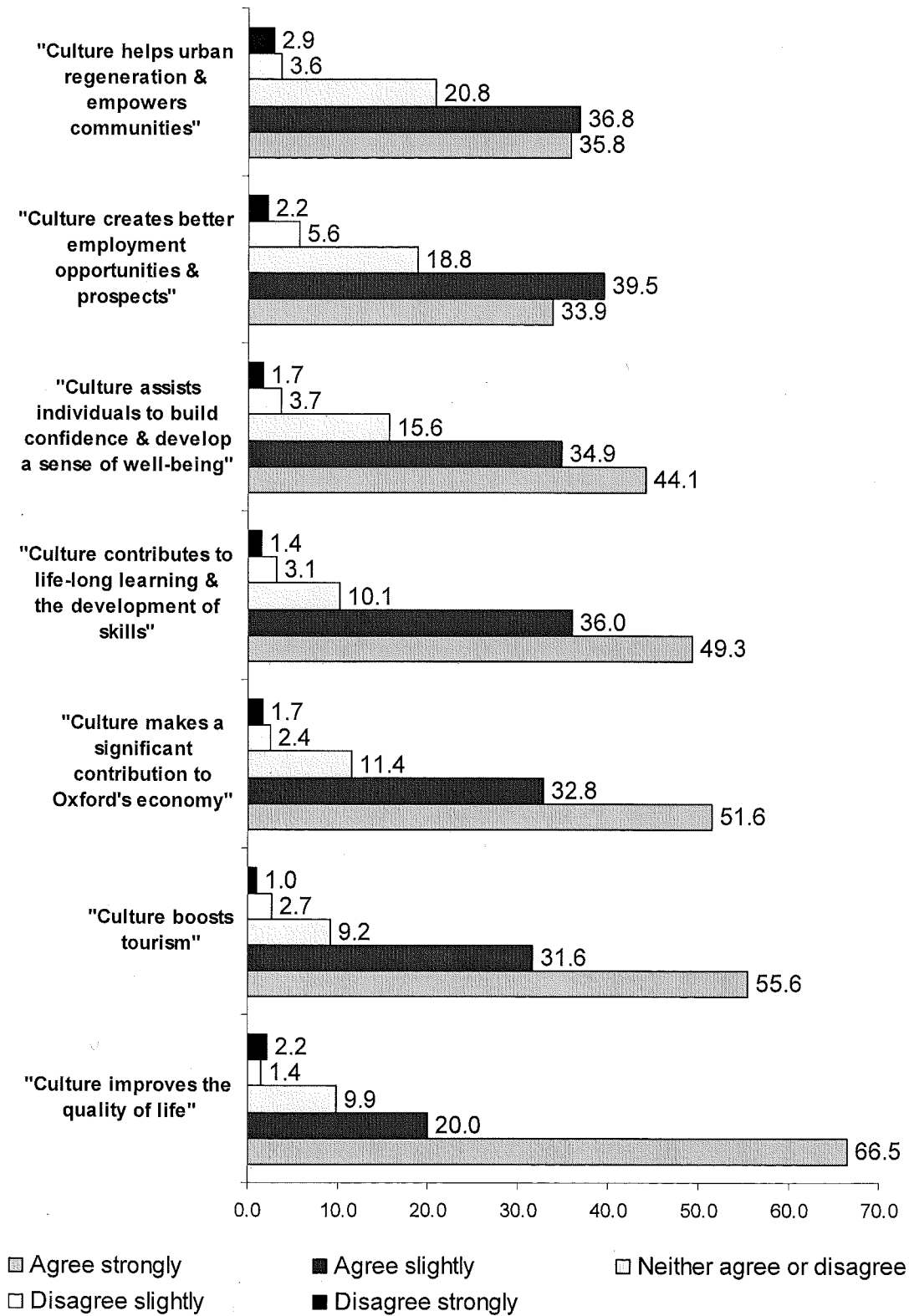
There was stronger support for statements that suggested the potential for culture to enhance quality of life and boost the tourist economy than there was for those that were proposing that culture could enhance economic opportunity for local people.

Whilst all the statements produced a high level of agreement, some provoked slightly more contention than others.

- 8% of respondents disagreed that culture produced better employment opportunities, whilst 6% disagreed that culture helped to empower communities and regenerate urban areas. These two statements also produced the highest level of non-committal answers, with 19% and 21% respectively, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- Of the levels of disagreement to these two statements, 87% of the disagreement to the statement on employment and 82% of the disagreement to the statement on empowerment and regeneration came from three areas within the City: the North East, the South East and Cowley.
- There were no significant differences in the levels of disagreement by age or ethnicity.

The Table overleaf shows the results graphically.

How important do you think cultural activity is for the City?

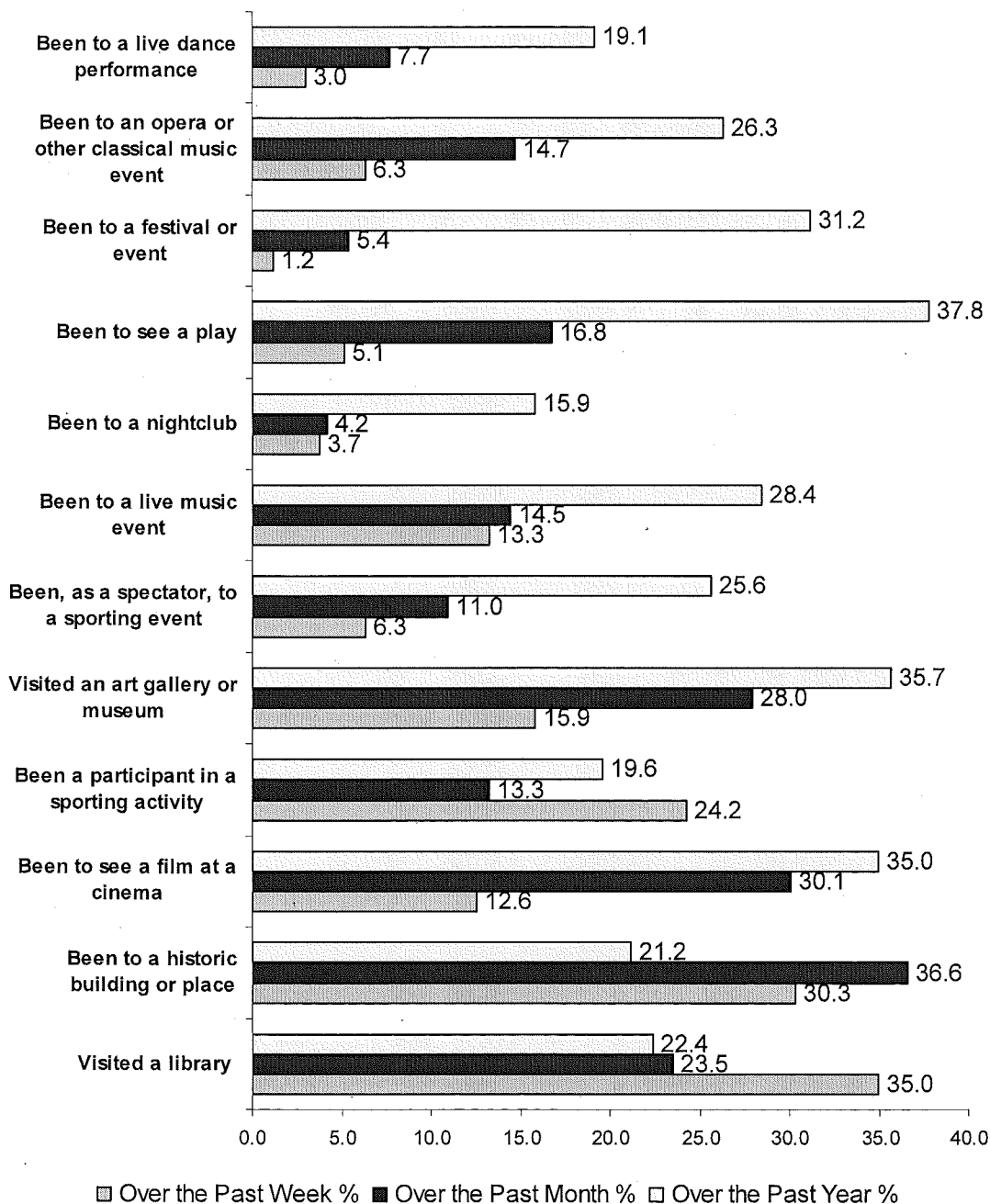


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Q4. Have you undertaken any of the following activities in the past year?

Question 4 asked the respondents about their personal use of cultural facilities within the past year. Respondents were asked whether they had been to any of the events listed within three set periods. Percentages are listed as a percentage of the total responses to the survey (i.e. 35% of the respondents visited a library in the past week) therefore percentages will not add up to one hundred as some respondent will have ticked more than one option. The results are listed below

Have you undertaken any of the following activities in the past year?



- The most regularly used facility within the City was libraries, with 22% or 150 respondents having used them in the week before filling in the survey. Historic buildings were also well supported.

- Within the previous month the largest numbers of respondents had been to the cinema, art gallery or museum, as well as to see historic buildings or places.
- Members of the panel noted their attendance of events such as plays, music events and festivals within the past year, reflecting that the opportunity to attend such events may not happen regularly.

Breaking down these results by area shows:

- Respondents in the North and Central areas of the city are likely to use cultural facilities more regularly than those in other areas. Respondents from these areas were most likely to have used a library, visited a historic building or been to a museum or art gallery within the past week.
- Participation in sport was concentrated in the North, North East and Eastern areas of the city, whilst regular attendance of sporting events as a spectator was most likely in the North East of the city.

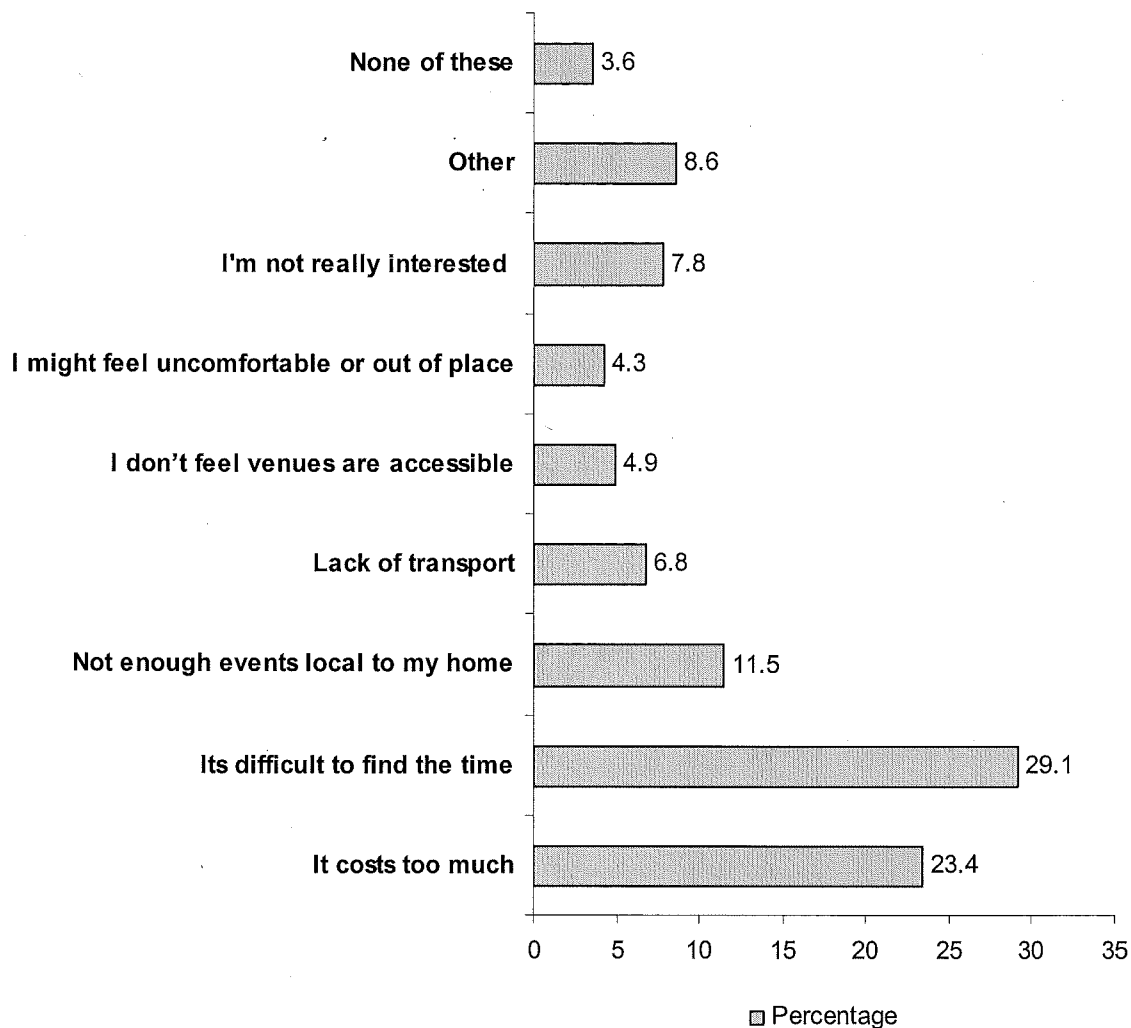
Q5. How much do you spend on average each month on the following?

By far the largest number of respondents stated that they did not spend anything on the activities listed. Of those who did spend money in the last month, most spent £1-10 at the cinema, gallery or museum, or to see a play.

The biggest spenders were those visiting opera or classical music concerts, major sporting events or plays.

Average Spend	£0	%	£1-10	%	£11-25	%	£26	%
Cinema	117	8	203	27	58	18	8	8
Gallery or museum	202	13	131	18	12	4	1	1
Play	150	10	110	15	77	24	13	12
Opera or classical music concerts	176	11	75	10	53	17	24	23
Dance performance	224	15	45	6	19	6	5	5
Musical concert (not classical)	174	11	80	11	35	11	11	11
Major sporting events	214	14	33	4	23	7	17	16
Nightclubs	225	15	25	3	15	5	7	7
Other	58	4	43	6	23	7	19	18
	1540		745		315		105	

Q6 Which, if any, of the following prevent you from visiting or attending more events?



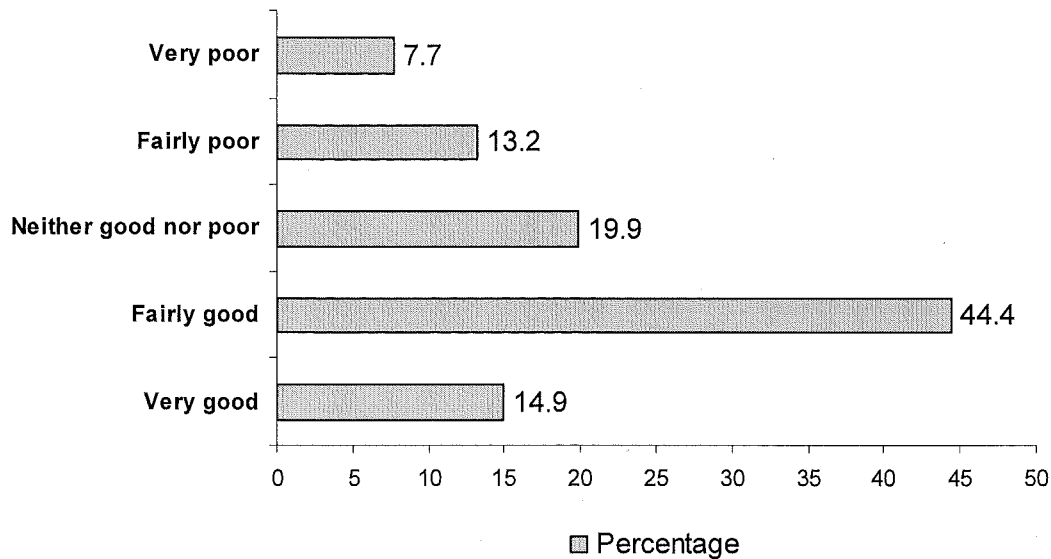
Cost and lack of time were the two most cited barriers to attending cultural events amongst the panel and this was relatively consistent across the different age groups.

Q7. Thinking about the local area where you live, how good do you feel your local facilities for cultural/leisure time activities are?

Whilst over half of respondent were happy with the cultural facilities in their area, 21% of all respondents felt that the cultural facilities in their area were fairly or very poor. This was particularly apparent in the South East (34% of respondents from this area) and the North East (30%) of the city.

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How good do you feel your local facilities for cultural/leisure time activities are?



Q8. Do you have any further comments about culture in Oxford you would like to make?

This section attracted a diverse range of comments, several of which stressed the importance of making the most of culture that is already found in Oxford.

In Oxford we are rather blasé about the quality/quantity of culture around us- ways of targeting the promotion of cultural centres should be found.

Accessibility emerged as a key theme, both in terms of transport access, the desire for more events in areas outside the city centre and the need for a more inclusive cultural programme:

Being close to a regular bus service would encourage us to attend more evening activities, e.g. the theatre.

Headington does not have many local cultural/leisure activities.

As an elderly person using public transport (or walking) to attend events I would like to feel safer when returning home after an evening concert.

I wish the events were more diverse in terms of who they attract. Most events seem to attract white North Oxford types. We need to see more interpreted and sign language performances.

In addition a number of responses were critical of the concert hall:

We desperately need another concert venue- the Sheldonian is so uncomfortable. I would definitely attend more events then!

Oxford needs a purpose-built international-level concert venue for classical, acoustic and jazz performances, and/or a theatre that can take top quality theatrical tours (nb

Glyndebourne Touring Opera no longer comes here because the New Theatre is a terrible venue).

Other key points raised included a need for events aimed at children, the importance of stressing the different cultures in Oxford and possibilities for expanding cultural involvement through using different venues:

More events in the parks. We love the sculpture garden at the local Summertown library

Section 1 Conclusion- Culture in Oxford

The main aspects of culture in Oxford that were commended by the panel were the museums and art galleries and the parks, as well as the diversity of people within the city. Responses indicated that the panel felt that culture improved the quality of life for those in the city and boosted the tourist economy.

Whilst the responses to the question on whether culture can improve the opportunities open to Oxford residents were slightly less positive, there was still a majority in agreement.

The main improvements supported by the panel were the promotion of parks and public spaces for cultural events, more 'world class' cultural events and the extension of cultural facilities to those areas that are lacking them. This final point was a recurring theme through the culture questions as many panel members felt their particular area of the City was not well served.

The most used facilities were libraries, historic buildings, cinemas, museums and art galleries. More money was spent on opera and classical music, sporting events and plays.

The chief barriers to attending cultural events were cost and lack of time, whilst 11% of respondents felt there were not enough cultural events close to where they live.

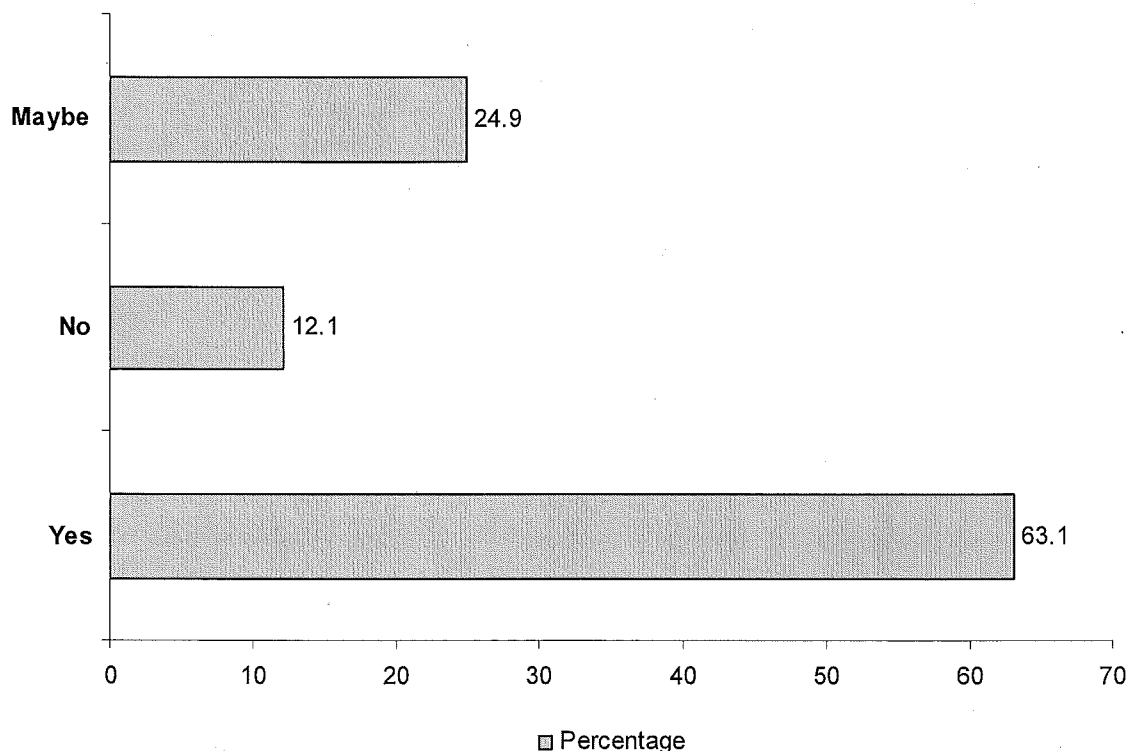
Section 2: The Culture Strategy

The second section of the survey asked for the panel's view of Oxford City Council's Cultural Strategy. A summarised version of the Cultural Strategy was included in the survey booklet: this included a brief overview of cultural activity in Oxford, the definition of culture used in the strategy and a vision for the future incorporating three key priorities.

Q1. Do you agree with the way that culture is defined in the strategy?

Responses to the definition differed quite strongly according to the demographic profile of respondents.

- Men were twice as likely to disagree with the definition in the strategy as women.
- 75% of 25-34 year old respondents agreed with the definition in the strategy, by far the highest percentage of any age group.
- The highest levels of disagreement with the strategy were found in the East of the City (19% of respondents in that area).



If no, what is missing/should be left out?

In discussing what is and what is not culture a number of different responses were received, with little common ground between them:

I think that defining culture in the form of a list inevitably leaves things out and includes things that are disputably not culture. Hence, I think the definition should be more general (e.g. as given in the Oxford English dictionary).

The most popular comment was that the history of Oxford should be stressed in the definition:

Oxford is renowned the world over for its academic achievement. Why is the Council trying to 're-brand' Oxford as anything else?

Innovative is not necessarily what people love about Oxford although it may well be important. The history and timelessness of the city is just as important and should not be commodified for tourism but celebrated for itself.

However, the second most popular complaint was the inclusion of tourism in the definition:

Do we really need any more tourists?

Q2 Do you think anything is missing/ needs to be added to the vision?

In considering the vision there was some concern that the emphasis on Oxford becoming a world leader would take away from local cultural activities.

I think it is more important that people who live in Oxford feel ownership of the culture in the city, than that it is renowned the world over.

I would prefer more emphasis on provision of culture for local people rather than world wide.

I think one cultural sector in the sense of one physical place would limit the range of involvement - there need to be many areas of diverse cultural opportunities.

There was a corresponding concern that an emphasis on international recognition could marginalize some residents:

We need to do more to promote accessibility for lower socio-economic groups - too many of the world class events are expensive.

Making Oxford a cultural city is very laudable, but access to the centre from outside is not easy. Car parking is difficult and the public transport does not seem to be joined up.

Finally, there was some disagreement between respondents on the extent to the Council should concentrate on diverse cultural events. Several respondents wanted to see a wide range of events, but others felt the cultural strengths of Oxford lay within certain areas and it would be best to concentrate on these:

My concern would be that the emphasis on diversity may be at the expense of excellence, perhaps spreading the net too wide rather than seeking to specialise in certain high profile events- if the goal is to 'put Oxford on the cultural map.

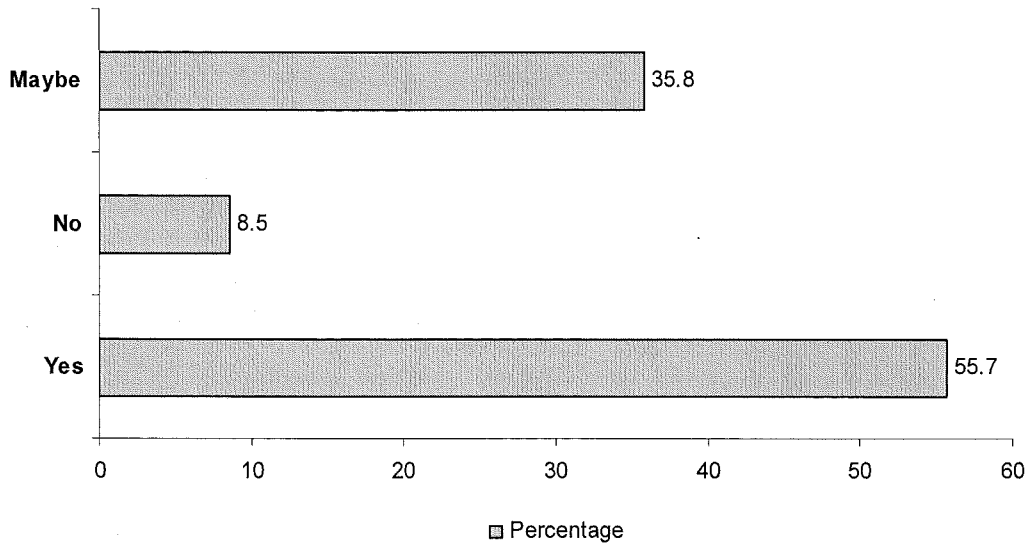
Concentrate on a fewer number of cultural areas do not try to be known for diversity (by all means be diverse on a local level).

Q.3 Do you agree that the priorities are the appropriate priorities for culture in Oxford over the next 5 years?

Whilst only just over half of respondents agreed with the strategy, only 8% of respondents actively disagreed with it. A large number of respondents were non-committal.

- The highest levels of disagreement were from respondents in the South East of the City (17% of respondents in that area).

Do you agree that the priorities are appropriate for Oxford over the next five years?



Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

This space provoked a wide range of responses, mostly focused on the need to make Oxford's existing cultural institutions more accessible to all its residents.

Involve the elderly in cultural events.

I think funding for cultural events for young people with special needs is important.

Involve the massive resources for 'culture' at the universities and colleges. Don't go it alone.

All should mean all, all, all, not centralised, but involving all the peripheral areas of the city, it should not stop at Magdalen Bridge.

In addition there were many calls for the improvement or replacement of the concert hall and some consideration for the role that public spaces could play in promoting culture, for example:

Culture linked to the development of a city centre that gives people space to perform, relax and talk. I feel the city centre is controlled by retail, buses and closed off college grounds. Space for skateboarders, street artists, benches, quiet spaces etc. would make a big difference to a sense of an inclusive centre in Oxford- at present it feels behind closed doors.

It seems strange that the Council wants to harness potential of leisure industries given that they intend to close a number of sports facilities down, Peers, the Ice Rink, Temple Cowley pool etc.

Section 2 Conclusion: The Cultural Strategy

The key message to come from the section on the Cultural Strategy is that whilst respondents were keen to support the expansion of culture in Oxford, they were also concerned to make sure that this was not focused on one particular area of the city, or a particular elite group of people.

In defining culture and setting out a vision for culture in Oxford, respondents also questioned whether the history of the city as an academic seat of learning was being fully utilised.

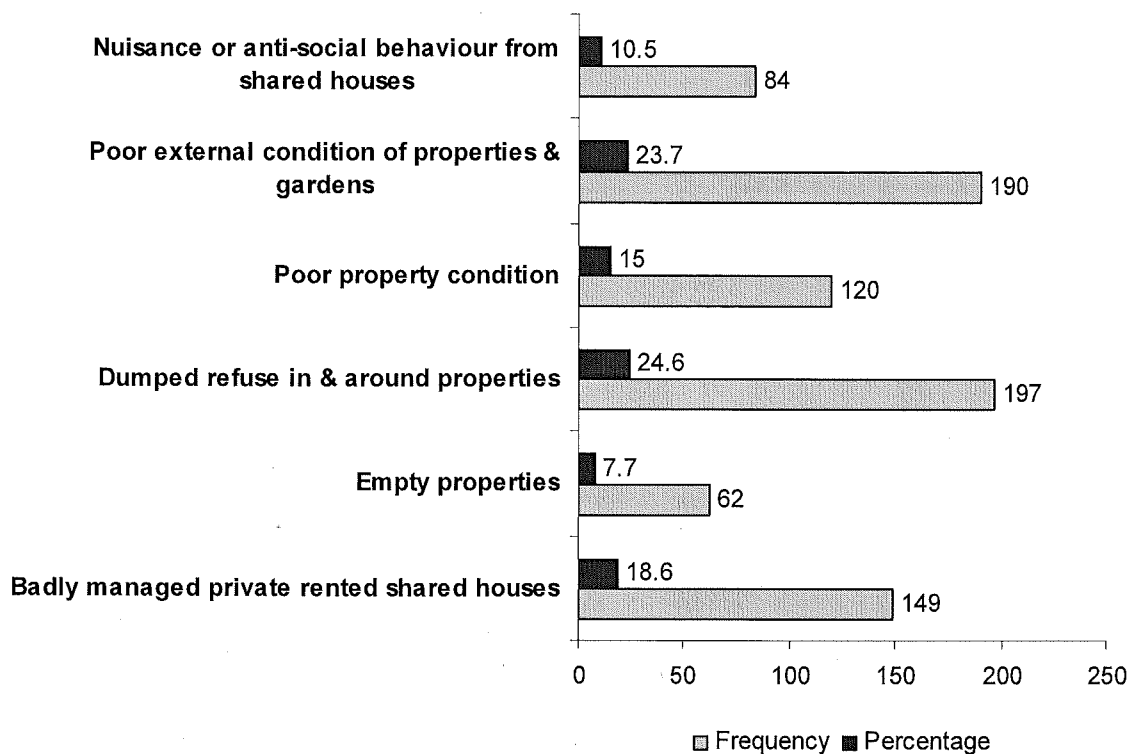
There were also concerns to ensure that the strategy took particular account of the needs of the disabled and younger people.

Section 3: Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing

The third section of the survey asked for the views of the panel on additional licensing for the landlords of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The panel was asked whether they experienced difficulties in the area they lived because of private licensing, whether they agreed with the idea of additional licensing and who they would like to see it applied to.

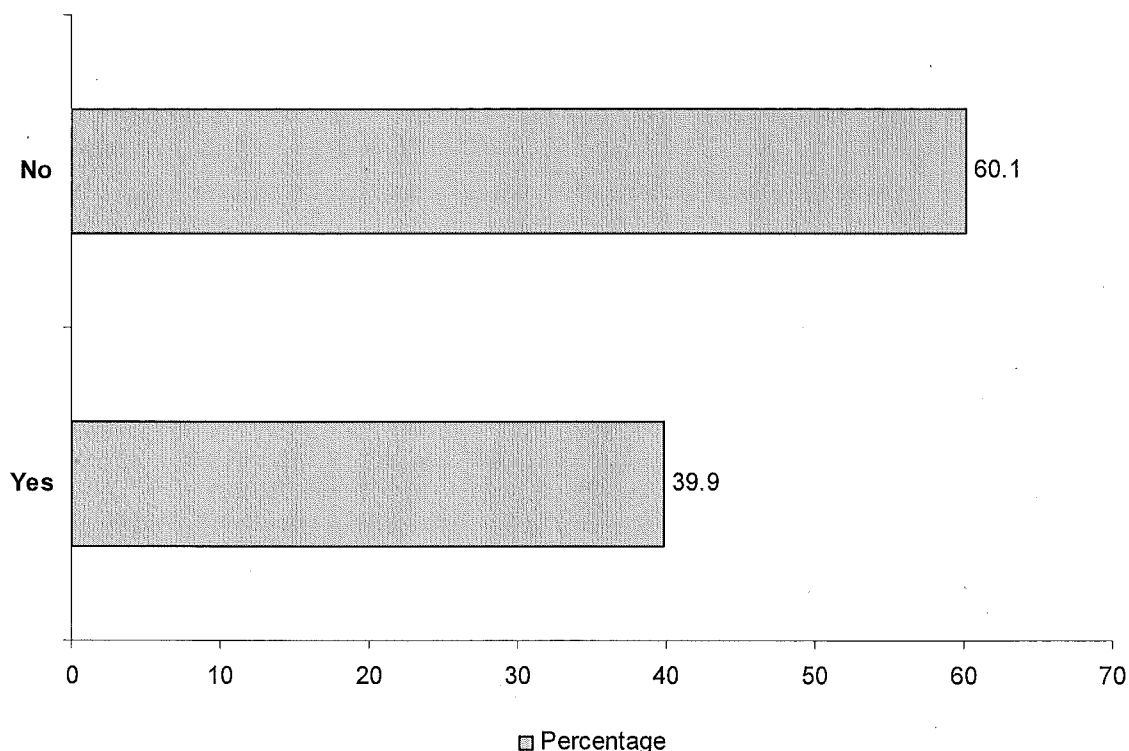
Q1. Do the areas where you live have any problems?

The biggest problems were around rubbish and poor external condition of properties, followed by poor external condition of the properties.



- The largest variation in these results occurred in Cowley and the eastern area of Oxford where 65.9% and 78.4% respectively reported badly managed private rented shared houses.

Q2. Have you had any problems with privately rented properties in your area in the last 5 years?



As would be expected from the quantitative results above, the majority of the responses here also related to the external condition and cleanliness of rented houses.

Problems can be caused by absentee landlords and disinterested letting agencies, also tenants have no regard for properties or neighbours.

Poor maintenance of houses and garden, rubbish bins left in gardens, over grown hedges.

No social problems but the condition of rented properties can be appalling and affects the quality of the neighbourhood.

I live between two multi occupied houses. The state of one is appalling with missing guttering, overflowing pipes, gates off, fence fallen down and rubbish all over the garden. I have been in touch with the Council since I had a rat infestation and the tenants have cleaned up the mess in the front. At the back of the garden there were old mattresses and clothes strewn all over the garden and these have now been removed by the landlord. However, the tenants move out frequently and new tenants create the same mess each time they move in. The house next door to me is ok at the moment but it will deteriorate in exactly the same way. The landlord does absolutely no maintenance so I am considering moving since I don't want to live next door to a slum. I think that all rented properties should be inspected not only to force landlords to maintain their properties but to protect the tenants from exploitation i.e. living in sub-standard and sometimes dangerous housing.

There were some complaints relating to student accommodation (particularly with regard to noise), but there was also a general agreement that landlords had a responsibility to maintain their properties:

I have rented property around the Headington area and landlords should do more to promote environmental health - we had awful problems with rubbish and the state of the house, inside and out. I now live in Barton where fewer students rent but the properties could still do with some improvement. I am unsure about the extent of problems in Barton, however.

The prevalence of let and HMO properties has increased especially along the Iffley Road and in the smaller streets with landlords packing in students now on short lets to avoid planning application change of use. More family houses are needed on the Iffley Road to prevent the population becoming transient and give people a stake in the area in which they live.

Another issue frequently raised in this section was the problem of parking:

Too many cars per household makes parking difficult.

Cars parked on pavements.

Two respondents did attempt to redress the balance by focusing on the potential problems faced by landlords of HMO's:

To achieve better management of private rented accommodation landlords will need greater powers to evict tenants who do not comply with their requests regarding anti-social behaviour, etc - in other words tenants need to take responsibility for their homes as well as landlords.

Areas

- The area that reported the most problems with privately rented properties was the East where 71% of respondents had experienced some problem in the last 5 years, which was 25% more than the next highest area.
- 56% of 35-44 year olds on the panel had experienced a problem in the last five years, which was significantly higher than any other age group. 17-24 year old respondents were the least likely to experience any difficulties.

Q3. Do you agree that additional licensing can have a positive effect on private rented houses in your area?

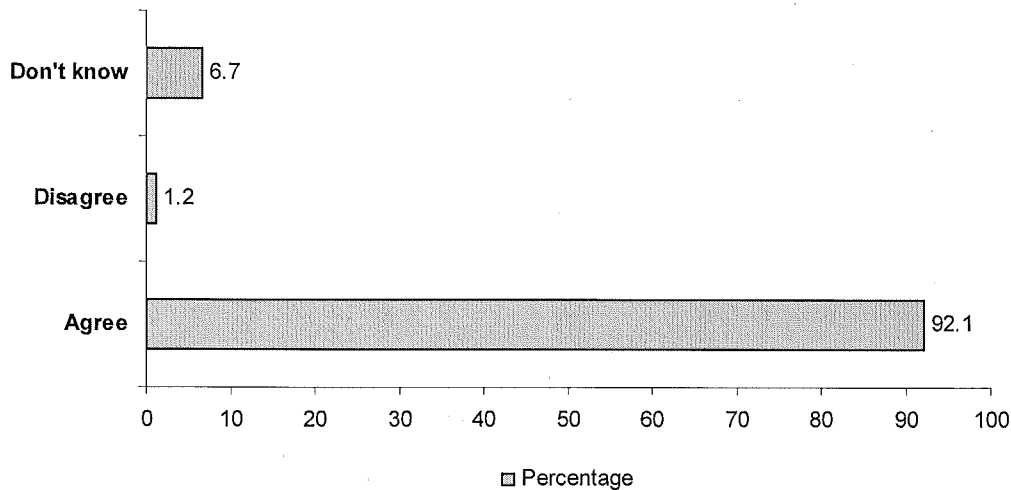
A quarter of respondents were unsure as to what effect additional licensing would have, whilst two thirds agreed that it would be beneficial.

- The highest levels of agreement with the statement occurred in the East of the City and the South East area.

Q4. Do you agree that poorly managed and/or maintained properties can have a negative effect on the area where you let or manage properties?

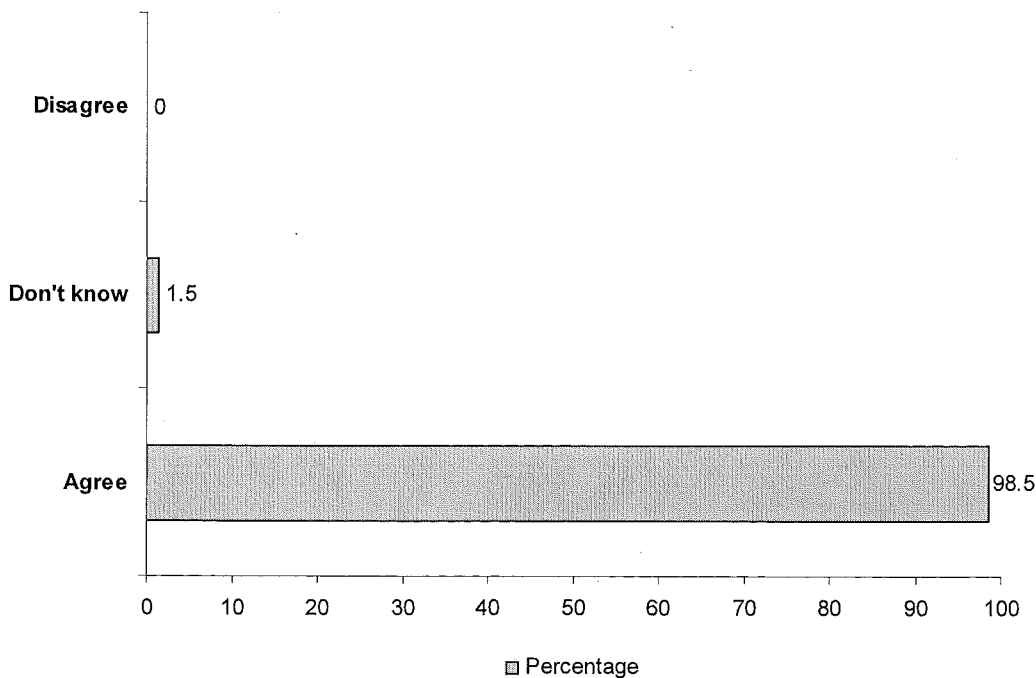
This statement produced very high levels of agreement, with only 5 respondents disagreeing.

Poorly managed or maintained properties can have a negative effect on the area where you let or manage properties

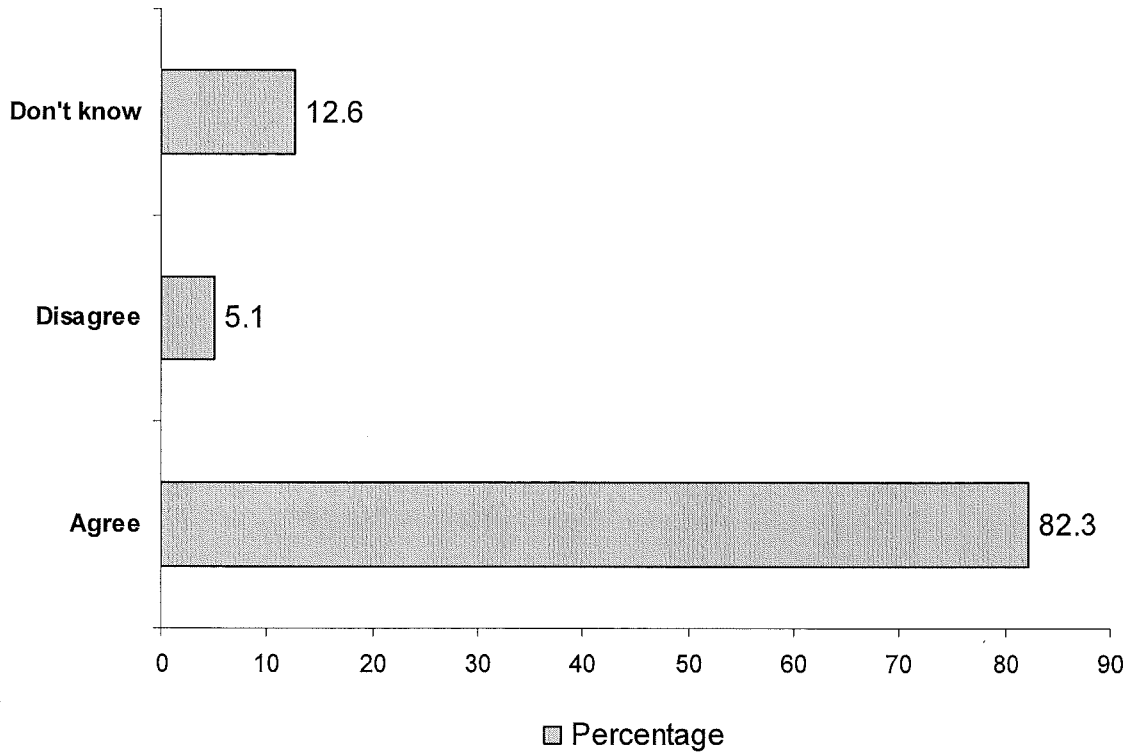


Q5. Do you agree that landlords have a responsibility to properly manage their properties?

This statement also produced very high levels of agreement, with no negative responses at all.

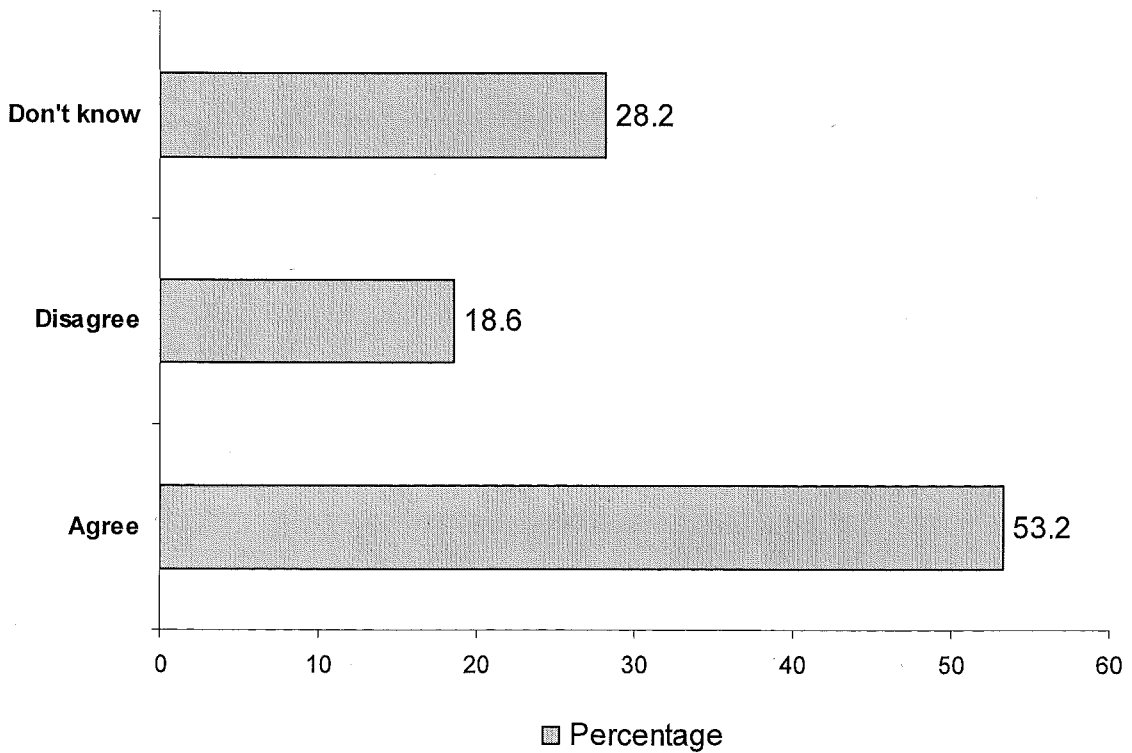


Q6a Do you agree that additional licensing will ensure privately rented HMO properties are well maintained & managed?



Results broken down by area revealed little variation, with the exception of the Eastern area, where only 61% expressed agreement - ten percent below the average.

Q6b. Additional licensing will reduce anti-social behaviour



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