

A Destination Management Organisation for Oxford and Oxfordshire

Proposal for Discussion (Outline Business Plan)

Introduction

With its distinctive blend of natural beauty, rural character and world class cultural heritage, Oxfordshire is one of England's most popular visitor destinations. Its prime attraction, the city of Oxford, with its superb architectural and academic heritage, and quality cultural, dining and retail offer, receives over 9 million visitors each year, and is regarded as one of the UK's 'must see' cities. By contrast, Oxfordshire's other key 'brand' - the Cotswolds, and the county's rural districts, offer the bustle of market towns or the tranquility of stately homes and gardens, riverside walks and picturesque hamlets. Consequently, visitors make a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of both city and county, and to the quality of life enjoyed by the people who live and work here. Visitor spend supports around 30,000 jobs within the county; approximately 10% of all employees.

Tourism ensures that Oxford, and towns such as Witney and Henley, sustain a greater range and variety of hotels, shops and restaurants than they would do otherwise, while tourists also boost the footfall for museums, visitor attractions and events. However, having the assets that attract visitors brings with it a number of challenges, both in terms of promoting those assets, and in managing the visitors' experience when they get here. Furthermore, with increasing competition from other destinations at home and abroad we need to ensure that our region maintains its appeal and keeps apace with the demands of an increasingly sophisticated market.

Our aim therefore is to build an effective infrastructure that can develop and support our tourism industry and the wider visitor economy, and provide the basis to deliver and build continuous improvement in the sector long into the future. We believe that this will best be achieved through the establishment of a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for Oxford and Oxfordshire.

The DMO would be a public-private partnership agency responsible for the development and delivery of the visitor offer across the county. It would provide strategic leadership for the sector, backed up with marketing expertise and resources to support and promote a sustainable visitor economy. Its scope would include not only UK domestic and international visitors, but also residents who spend and travel within the county and indulge in retail spend.

The DMO would play a leading role in tourism delivery and promotion, working closely with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. It would champion the sector and seek to influence all aspects of the visitor experience in order to nurture a thriving tourism industry; and it would employ tangible outputs to measure improvements in the value of the county's visitor economy.

Emergence of the DMO initiative

The idea of establishing a DMO with a county-wide remit has come out of a wide consultation process across the sector (ref. below), and is founded on the success of similar models in other parts of the country.

Oxford Tourism Study* (October 2008) identified that there is no consistent, integrated approach to tourism across Oxford and the wider county, and that consequently we lag behind other destinations. It also highlighted that, although there are numerous agencies involved with initiatives at both local and county level, the approach is generally fragmented, uncoordinated and poorly resourced, making it difficult to manage the visitor economy and realise its full potential. The report proposed that a DMO would be the most effective way to unlock this potential.

As a follow up to the Tourism Study an options appraisal workshop was held in March 2009, at which key public and private sector stakeholders examined successful DMO models elsewhere in the UK and considered a range of management options. A county-wide DMO was selected on the basis of its ability to engage widely at a strategic level, attract financial "buy-in" across the sector and deliver best value for money. See bottom of page for website location of the report: **Oxford Tourism Management Review Options Appraisal **** (April 2009).

The DMO initiative is being led by Oxford City Council with extensive support from all parts of the industry including Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, County and district councils, the commercial sector, and major stakeholder agencies including Tourism South East, SEEDA and Oxford Inspires. The OEP's Tourism Task Group under the joint-chairmanship of Charles Holmes and John Hoy, acts currently as steering group for the DMO. Tourism SE's new Chair, John Williams has put forward its Commercial Director Nigel Smith to both advocate and advise on the scheme.

Creating a DMO

Creating the Oxford and Oxfordshire DMO would involve a planned operational integration of new and existing resources to achieve economies of scale, with commensurate benefits to the tourism community. The industry and its partner stakeholders will enjoy a range of advantages, including:

- More focused and cost efficient promotional activity
- Stronger, better marketing of key brands across the county, generating more – and longer visits, and therefore increased spend.
- Better business engagement across the area, and more involvement of the private sector in driving forward tourism activities
- The ability to complete more effectively with other heritage destinations with strong DMO's.
- The opportunity to tap into a wider pool of private and public sector funding
- More effective advocacy for the tourism sector and ability to influence strategic support

Together these industry benefits will add value to the visitor experience and nurture a healthy visitor economy.

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http://mediafiles.thedms.co.uk/Publication/OS-OX/cms/pdf/Oxford_Tourism_Study_FINAL_REPORT_V2_201008.pdf

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http://mediafiles.thedms.co.uk/Publication/OS-OX/cms/pdf/Report_on_Oxford_Tourism_Management_Options_Appraisal.pdf

The DMO's mission and objectives

The DMO's mission would be to make Oxford and Oxfordshire a thriving and sustainable world-class destination for visitors, local residents, and local businesses. It would achieve this through delivery against seven key objectives:

1. To increase the value of the visitor economy, providing measurable social, cultural and economic benefits to local residents and businesses alike.
2. To engage the energies of businesses, community groups and public sector stakeholders in order to support and sustain a healthy visitor economy.
3. To undertake and coordinate tourism marketing on behalf of Oxford and the county with its component districts, enhancing the visitor offer and promoting longer stays.
4. To develop and implement an integrated tourism strategy that promotes the area's strengths, while enhancing its current brands and destinations.
5. To lead on improving the management of resources and infrastructure, and have responsibility for research and dissemination of visitor information
6. To work across the sector to improve the visitor experience and to help sustain a world class destination.
7. To represent and promote the tourism industry, championing the sector and speaking with authority on its behalf.

The DMO's operating functions

The DMO's operations would be rolled out in a phased manner over a 3 year period as the agency's capacity increases. The immediate priorities however would be to develop its infrastructure and deliver promotional services that provide early benefits for its members.

Phase 1 (2010-11)

Collaborative Promotion and Marketing – incorporating a targeted range of activities and publicity: themed local and county-wide campaigns, website and e-marketing, national newspaper and other consumer advertising, travel trade and PR programmes, and dedicated print promotions for the UK and near overseas markets.

Membership services – Devising and promoting a portfolio of membership packages targeted at local tourism businesses.

Web services – Developing and maintaining a Destination Management System (DMS) that provides a Single Point of Entry to information on the county's visitor offers, a database of consumer contacts, and online accommodation booking, event ticketing and e-sales.

Future planning for Tourism – Developing and delivering a holistic tourism strategy that enables Oxford and Oxfordshire to better position itself and attract targeted markets. Engaging with regional promotion / planning towards the 2012 Olympics.

Research – Collating tourism statistics to create benchmarks against which future economic impact can be measured.

Phase 2 (2011-13)

Conference Desk – Incorporating venue finding, conference organisation and event management services. This would also entail closer integration and co-development of revenue generating opportunities with Destination Oxford and University of Oxford, Brookes University and the colleges.

Film Office – Offering information and advice to film and television agencies that wish to use Oxford and Oxfordshire locations.

Detailed Market Research – Undertaking countywide research and analysis that allows the tourism sector to assess factors such as visitor trends, occupancy rates and business and marketing performance, and to gauge the incremental benefits of tourism and its financial impact on the community.

Business development and support – Improving the quality and capacity of businesses within the sector through:

- Engaging with the industry to identify needs, and utilising business support agencies to engage and develop tourism SME's.
- Developing training courses / workshops to aid businesses; leading on new initiatives similar to West Oxfordshire's successful green Tourism scheme.
- Enhancing the quality of the visitor experience by increasing the number of quality assured businesses.
- Engaging schools and colleges about careers in leisure and hospitality.

Proposed KPI's

Once up and running the DMO would put in place tangible and measurable outputs to gain and measure a sustainable increase in the value of tourism to Oxford and Oxfordshire:

- Number of new visitor "package" tour promotions
- Number of leisure business/bookings
- PR: number of press articles. Approximate readership penetration & equivalent advertising value
- Increase in number of unique visitors to the DMS / conference website
- Number of visitor enquiries handled
- The value of attracted private sector support towards marketing campaigns
- Increase in subscribers to the tourism contact database
- Converted conference business
- Jobs created and safeguarded
- Percentage increase in the number of quality assured accommodation
- Percentage increase in accommodation bookings
- Tourism economic indicators (Cambridge model II benchmark)

DMO Membership

In return for its services, an annual membership fee would be levied by the DMO. This fee would vary according to two criteria:

1. The nature of the business:

- Hotels
- Guesthouses and other accommodation
- Public Houses and restaurants
- Retail
- Attractions
- Transport, and other services
- Conference
- Events
- Associate

2. The status of service desired:

- Diamond
- Platinum
- Gold
- Silver
- Bronze

The DMO's members would benefit from a range of marketing opportunities and related services, with the opportunity to buy into additional national and international promotions. Each membership tier would offer a specific package of benefits, with the opportunity to purchase additional services.

In return for their financial commitment to the DMO, Diamond status members would receive enhanced benefits, including automatic buy-in to high profile marketing campaigns and short break promotions. Membership of the DMO would be regarded as Accreditation, as achieving minimum industry standards would be a condition of acceptance into the organisation.

DMO Member benefits*

Below is a list of anticipated key marketing and promotional benefits to all members:-

- Website entry via a "Visit Oxford and Oxfordshire" portal to tourism facilities and events in the county.**
- Full searchability and bookability on the website
- Photo advert in annually printed Oxford and Oxfordshire guides (size dependent upon membership level). These high quality brochures would be distributed proactively to UK and overseas visitors
- Accommodation bookings and referrals from Oxford Tourist Information and contact centre and other Oxfordshire TICs.
- A one stop shop for "click or call" publicity and advertising
- Opportunity for ticket sales from Oxford Tourist Information Centre and Contact Centre (subject to terms and conditions).
- Opportunity to participate in a range of short stay visitor tour packages
- Opportunity to purchase additional PR, print and e-marketing opportunities, including national press campaigns, themed promotions and late availability websites.

In addition members would have access to a range of new business support and other benefits including:

- Full membership services of Tourism SE with benefits including web services, business advice, training and information sharing opportunities
- Opportunity to buy into the business visitor market through the DMO's Conference Desk facility
- Access to Welcome to Excellence and other bespoke staff training courses.
- Opportunity to gain industry accreditation, including VAQAS (for visitor attractions); AIM (for conference venues) and the Green Tourism award.
- Access to destination research and intelligence data.
- Free upgrade to the next membership tier for the first 10 subscribers in Year 1 (bronze and silver members only).

* It should be stressed that these are generic benefits. It is anticipated that additional bespoke benefits would be tailored for eg conference membership.

** Currently partner council websites are supported by two different software platforms; New Mind and New Vision; both of which are currently maintained through 2-3 year contracts. The "Visit Oxford and Oxfordshire" website would provide an overarching portal to each these sites ("hub and spoke"), with ongoing investment to improve each and create a seamless product, as part of long term web strategy.

'Added Value' Promotions

The DMO would offer its members the opportunity to buy into a series of campaigns each designed to generate longer stays and greater spend. A value proposition exercise has been undertaken with stakeholders around what form these campaigns might take. The proposals put forward below are indicative rather than prescriptive, but are designed to cater for a range of visitors from "cosmopolitans" seeking a sedate high quality stay with minimal cost considerations to families seeking a low cost vacation with a range of active leisure experiences.

Each package would be designed around the elements of Learn, Play, Eat and Stay, provide a good balance of activities and experiences and the opportunity for DMO members across the sector to participate. Once the DMO has secured buy in from a critical mass of member participants it would also be in a position to generate new themed packages on a regular basis or bespoke specialist tours on demand, to suit for example, a special interest or conference tour group, or to tie in with a weekend event or festival. Packages would be promoted through national press campaigns, and to the universities and conference agencies.

Proposed Campaigns:

"Break Away" Family offer

A value family break that includes overnight accommodation in a 3* hotel or quality guest house, plus entry to up to three pay-in "must see" attractions and leisure facilities in Oxfordshire. Families would be able create their own itineraries or take part in one of several themed "passport itineraries", such as "Wet and Wild" (River Thames and wildlife park safari), "At the Movies" (locations tour and cinema trip), "History / Mystery tour" or "U see 'em Museum" (selection of Oxford city and private museums / galleries).

Participants would be able to choose from a selection of participating hotels and guest houses across the county. The package would also include discount vouchers to eat at a number of member cafes and restaurants. A similar campaign by Leicestershire DMO has generated 1,987 bednights in 2008/9.

“Spires and Shires”

A short stay (1 or 2 night) “mix and match” vacation package aimed at the cosmopolitan market, taking in the quality and diversity of the Oxford and Oxfordshire experience.

The package would incorporate the “Classic” Oxford guided tour: Christchurch; covered market, Oxford Castle, colleges, Bodleian Library, Ashmolean Museum, punting; an evening meal and indoor or outdoor theatre experience. The county experience would include the Cotswolds; Blenheim or another stately home, Bicester village and a stopover in a country town or village for afternoon tea. Overnight accommodation would be in a 4* hotel.

“The Thames Experience”

A selection of river-based 2 day packages aimed under 30's and cosmopolitan markets, incorporating a range of activities along the River Thames between Henley and Oxford, including pleasure boat trips, rowing and punting, riverside walks, cycling, Rowing and River museum visit, nature trails and pub / restaurant dining. Overnight accommodation would be in a quality hotel near the river.

Governance

It is proposed that the DMO would be a Company Limited by Guarantee, administered by a **Chairman** and **Board of Directors** (Executive and non Executive). Board members would be drawn from both public and private sectors and led by a private sector Chairman. Public sector representation would be from the key core funding partners, while private sector members would be elected by the DMO's members. This is the model employed by most DMO's, allowing the organisation a necessary degree of independence while providing full accountability to its stakeholders.

For the first few months of its existence however, the DMO would be run as a partnership agency overseen by a **Shadow Board**, under an **Interim Executive Chairman**, while those staff seconded across to the new organisation from Oxford City Council would remain on the local authority's payroll. This would allow time to undertake the legal requirements associated with establishing a company, and resolve issues relating to employment status, TUPE, support services etc. The Shadow Board would play a central role in facilitating all interim arrangements that may be necessary to support the successful establishment and early development of the DMO.

Role of the interim Executive Chairman

Appointed from within the commercial sector, the remit of the interim Executive Chair would be:

- To champion the DMO within the private sector
- To liaise extensively with the industry's key public and private sector stakeholders to secure funding and advocacy
- Support the partners in developing the DMO business plan and infrastructure
- Instigate and oversee the remit of the Shadow Board

Role of the Shadow Board

The proposed remit for the Shadow Board would be:

- To appoint an interim Executive Director
- To draw up a constitution for the DMO and make recommendations on plans and actions for adoption by the Board of the fully constituted DMO Corporate Body when it comes into existence.
- To oversee the operations of the DMO and agree its role and areas of activity
- To oversee the procurement of legal and financial advice and the development of proposals, plans and actions for the establishment of the DMO.
- To facilitate liaison with and decision making by key stakeholders as proposals and plans, are developed and to secure agreements as required.

Shadow Board members would be drawn from both public and private sectors and led by a private sector Chairman. Public sector representation would be drawn from the key core funding partners, while private sector members would be selected through the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership.

Once constituted the full Management Board's role would be:

- To engage widely across the public and business realms to develop agreed actions and oversee delivery of:
 - a DMO business plan, and
 - an integrated tourism strategy for Oxford and Oxfordshire.
- To actively engage with existing partnerships to align roles and responsibilities in order to reduce duplication and increase effectiveness.
- To ensure efficient and effective use of funds, to support fund-raising activity and to monitor expenditure and outputs.

The Board would meet bi-monthly, hosted by partner organisations.

In order to ensure the widest level of engagement across the sector it is also proposed to establish a **Tourism Forum** for DMO members and associated bodies. This Forum would meet bi-annually and provide opportunity for feedback between the Board, members and the industry generally.

Relationship of the DMO to the current regional tourism structure

The establishment of the DMO would entail a fundamental change in Oxfordshire's relationship with the region's Tourism agency, Tourism SE, and with its partner counties in the BBO (Berkshire / Buckinghamshire / Oxfordshire) sub-regional group. This has been the subject of discussion with Tourism SE.

It is proposed that Oxfordshire would breakaway from the BBO to become a sub-region in its own right, with the DMO acting as Tourism Association paying a single fee to Tourism SE based on its number of members. In return for this DMO members would receive all the benefits of being part of Tourism SE. The DMO would reserve the option to administer its own membership services.

Relationship of the DMO with its core funders

The DMO's key contributors; the OEP and local authorities, would be expected to make a 3-5 year financial commitment to the agency as it builds partnerships, programmes, skills and momentum. A Commitment Level Agreement (CLA) would be in place through which the partners pledge their support to the DMO in delivering an improved visitor experience.

The local authorities would have a key role to play in supporting and engaging with the DMO through their policy development and the delivery of a range of services that complement the DMO's activities. The DMO would be fully engaged in the wider economic agenda through representation on appropriate strategic fora at both city and county level. In return, the core funders would be represented on the Board and robust Service Level Agreements would be in place with the DMO, setting out performance targets, which would be the prerequisite of renewed support funding.

Management and Staffing

The agency would be run by an **Executive Director**. This position would be interim pending the establishment of the DMO as a limited company. The priorities for the new post-holder in the run up to the launch of the DMO would be:

- Preparation of a detailed business plan and private sector prospectus
- Proactive securing of members/partners' contributions
- Establishing 'early win' promotion and marketing campaigns
- Preparation of Service Level agreements
- Establishing supplier requirements and contracts
- Establishing organisational infrastructure; recruitment and team development.
- Premises and office set-up

The interim Executive Director would be supported initially by a team of officers seconded across from Oxford City Council's Culture and Tourism service:

- **Tourism manager***: responsible for strategic marketing and promotional development, fundraising and TIC services
- **Tourism officer**: responsible for publicity, PR activity, press familiarization visits and visitor research
- **Website manager**: responsible for Destination Management System (DMS) development and maintenance.

Additional staff would be taken on as required to increase the commercial capacity of the organisation, funded through income generated through sales and marketing activity.

*Oxford City Council is currently in the process of filling the Tourism manager position, with a view to the appointing a candidate with the strong commercial and marketing skills an emerging DMO would require.

Outline Income and Expenditure projection for the DMO

INCOME

	INCOME (£)		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Core Funding* contribution			
Oxford City Council	100,000	100,000	100,000
Oxfordshire County Council	42,000	30,000	30,000
Oxfordshire Economic Partnership	10,000	10,000	10,000
District Partners (£3,000 each; TBC)	12,000	12,000	12,000
Sub Total	164,000	152,500	144,500
Generated Income			
LAA Reward grant (£200,000 over 3 years)	<u>100,000</u>	<u>60,000</u>	<u>40,000</u>
Membership fees (see table below)	140,000	210,000	290,000
Enhanced trading activities	<u>40,000</u>	<u>120,000</u>	<u>200,000</u>
TOTAL INCOME	444,000	542,500	674,500

* Core funder contributions in the form of grants or secondments.
 Figures are subject to verification and formal approval by the governing bodies, and a successful LAA Reward grant bid.

Estimated income from External sources (private sector)

Membership scheme, operated on a five tiered basis*:

STATUS	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Members	Income (£'s)	Members	Income (£'s)	Members	Income (£'s)
Diamond	5	50,000	6	60,000	7	70,000
Platinum	6	30,000	8	40,000	12	60,000
Gold	10	20,000	20	40,000	30	60,000
Silver	20	20,000	35	35,000	50	50,000
Bronze	40	20,000	70	35,000	100	50,000
TOTAL	81	140,000	138	210,000	199	290,000

* The fees above are similar to those in other UK DMO's such as Chester and Cheshire, and Shakespeare Country. For the lower tiers in particular the fees may vary within each status band. For example, the fee for a guesthouse could vary depending on room rate and number of rooms.

Other Income generation

It is anticipated that income will also be raised from a number of other avenues:

- Industry contributions to targeted "package" campaigns
- Corporate Sponsorship
- Other trading activities:
 - Conference Bureau
 - Oxfordshire Film Office (from August 2010)
 - Booking commissions via website
 - E-sales

Core funding will be complemented through membership and enhanced trading activities (including that of the TIC) to generate an anticipated annual turnover of approximately £674,500 by Year 3 of operations. The aspiration would be to then increase this to £1,000,000 in the succeeding years by maximizing the income potential of e-sales, conference booking and film office activities.

The DMO's shadow board and management would expect to generate sufficient funding through membership pledges to enable it to commence its Year 1 programme of PR, marketing, short-stay packages and website development. This would entail early buy-in to the "privileged" Diamond and Platinum membership tiers from major industry stakeholders.

EXPENDITURE (Year 1)

Management Staffing

	Annual cost (£)
Executive Director	60,000
On costs; estimated at 20%	<u>12,000</u>
SUB TOTAL	72,000*

*An annual bonus would be available to the post-holder dependant upon performance against key objectives and KPI's.

Other core costs

	Annual cost (£)
Staffing (Marketing manager, tourism officer, web manager)	105,000
Office premises (rent)	20,000
Business rates and energy costs	20,000
Administration (HR, legal, finance, IT)	20,000
Destination management system, plus maintenance	<u>30,000</u>
SUB TOTAL	195,000

TOTAL £267,000

Project delivery costs

Generated through membership, Year 1 LAA reward grant and other income streams

	Annual cost (£)
Marketing and branding	90,000
Campaign package development	40,000
Website development	37,000
Fundraising, training (OEP)	<u>10,000</u>
SUB TOTAL	177,000

TOTAL EXPENDITURE £444,000

Tourist Information Services

The Oxford TIC would be run by the DMO as "cost neutral", but with potential to increase its income streams substantially through e-sales, ticketing commissions etc.

Income	Annual target (£)
Retail	175,000
Guiding commission	85,000
Accommodation commission	25,000
Ticket sales (bus and theatre)	20,000
Rent	<u>50,000</u>
	345,000
Expenditure	Annual cost (£)
Staffing	225,000
Premises	40,000
Supplies and services	<u>80,000</u>
TOTAL	345,000

The DMO's accommodation costs would be minimized by utilizing available office facilities in the Oxford TIC building.

When would the DMO begin operating?

Subject to the public sector partners' internal approval processes and successful start up funding bids, it is anticipated that the DMO would commence operating from 1st June 2010.

What are the next steps?

ACTION	TIMESCALE
1. Submission of LAA Reward Grant application for core funding contribution	August 2009
2. OEP consideration of revised DMO proposal	8 th September
3. Consultation period	September
4. Formal presentation of DMO proposal for political approval within partner authorities	October / November
5. Appointment of interim Executive Chair and Shadow Board	November
6. Appointment of Executive Director	January 2010

A Vision for the Future

Our vision is that:

- The Oxford and Oxfordshire DMO will become the voice of the local visitor economy, having a key input into the visitor experience and ensuring that our visitors' expectations are met.
- The DMO will focus on promoting the county's key brands, but through structured partnership campaigns that stress the diversity - and complementarities of experiences on offer across the county
- Information about the county's visitor offer will be easily accessible, (both locally and remotely), effectively branded and well presented, meeting the needs and expectations of the area's many visitor groups.

and through the efforts of the DMO and its partners:

- Oxford's World Class heritage offer will be matched by the quality of its branding and marketing, and by superlative customer service.
- Oxfordshire's countryside experience will be enjoyed by greater numbers of UK and overseas visitors.
- Visitors will stay longer, see more of our county, and spend more, contributing to a vibrant and sustainable tourism sector.
- The increase in longer stays will be supported by an enhanced range of quality accommodation, particularly in Oxford itself.
- There will be an appreciation of the visitor economy's value to our social, economic and cultural well-being, and this will be reflected in a continued high level of private investment into the sector.
- There will be investment in a number of signature projects that enhance the visitor experience and deliver real benefits to the local economy.
- The area will be renowned for its programme of events and festivals, and will be a key destination outside London for international visitors to the 2012 Olympics and beyond.
- Appropriate accreditation and performance standards will be in place to ensure the highest levels of customer service across the sector.

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