

The Future of the Museum of Oxford

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Executive Summary

This report discusses and makes recommendations for the future of the Museum of Oxford.

It assesses the current state of the Museum and the case for and against closure in March 2010 and examines options for how best to present and access the history of Oxford, encapsulating the city, its neighbourhoods and the university, to residents, visitors and educational users.

Its main conclusions and recommendations are as follows :

The Challenge

- Oxford is one of Western Europe's most important cities. A regional capital and a cultural centre of world stature. Its history and heritage deserve to be commemorated and celebrated in a city museum worthy of the city.
- The existing Museum of Oxford does not do that and it never will if it remains where it is. Oxford needs a new city museum.
- However, in most circumstances, building huge new history museums is now rarely feasible. In Oxford's case, the city itself is still rich in historic buildings and other accessible heritage; it is not confined to a collection of relics salvaged from modernisation and kept in a museum.
- Residents and visitors to Oxford need both signposts to the 'obvious' heritage and also an introduction to Oxford's 'hidden history' – the social and industrial history of the city, the history of the neighbourhoods and the heritage of the city's many communities. It needs a new type of history museum.

The Long Term Vision

- The new Museum of Oxford should consist of a bundle of exhibits and activities. It is a concept for curiosity and discovery rather than a big building with lots of things beautifully displayed inside.
- There is still a place for a modest sized city museum where the sort of artefacts in the present museum can be professionally cared for and displayed in a modern way. It will also have equally important space for temporary exhibitions and indoor events. But it does not have to be a standalone building; it could, for example, be attached to a centre dealing also with local studies and archives.

- Linked to that should be an educational activities programme for schools; informal learning opportunities for young, mature and elderly adults and special courses for special people. A community centre for learning, not stand alone but linked into mainstream education provision and community work.
- Museum collections should provide a spring board for work out in the community with the most vulnerable and especially where a contribution can be made to healthcare, using objects as , for example, part of reminiscence therapy with the elderly.
- The museum will also be taken out to the neighbourhoods. Small exhibits in libraries, community centres, schools and health centres will both introduce people to the history of Oxford and to the story of their neighbourhood or particular places within it. This is not confined to places but could also include the stories of communities which define themselves by their heritage.
- These in turn might be the starting point or stimulation for groups of local people to get to know and understand each other better by exploring their diverse histories together. People could begin to participate in the researching, writing and creating of their own histories which they present to others from across the city.
- In the new Museum of Oxford the emphasis will not be on bricks and mortar or access to ‘treasures’. Other places in Oxford already do that very well. The emphasis in this museum will be on people – creating opportunities for people facilitated by skilled professionals.

The Short Term Reality

- This Vision is not going to be achieved overnight. There will need to be a number of ‘stepping stones’ towards it. The pace at which we proceed will depend upon opportunities presenting themselves and the availability of resources (largely from outside of the City Council). Some short to medium term actions can however be initiated.
- Keep the existing museum open for at least another 12 months, for the duration of the *Renaissance* funded community history project and while the existing resources are re-focused on promoting the city’s heritage in the neighbourhoods (especially in south and east Oxford).

Recommendations

We **recommend** the following course of action.

Given the short timescale available to resolve the museum’s future, the option to continue and to develop within the existing location is the most realistic way forward in the short term. Closing the museum, even for an interim period, could be counter-productive, and recommended that, to enable ample time for this option and some of the longer term ideas to

be given serious consideration the Museum of Oxford should remain open for a further 12 months

Delivering a multi-phased scheme would also require keeping the Museum of Oxford open for another 12 months to enable key long term options for a revitalised Museum of Oxford to be explored fully. During this period an intensive programme of developmental activity would be undertaken involving:

1. Follow up consultancy support to review and develop new proposals for the museum at the Town Hall including:
 - A development plan identifying the future operating mechanism as a charitable trust and creation of a viable business plan
 - Review of museum spaces including new museum entrance from the Town Hall foyer and expansion into Long Room / café areas
 - Identifying the thematic content of future displays
 - Identifying funding sources and preparing grant applications
2. Developing the Dispersed Museum concept as an innovative parallel initiative; drawing up a new Museums Strategy which identifies neighbourhoods to be targeted, details the exhibits to be created, and plans the associated activities (including the development of Community Archives). A part of this should be a costed Business Plan and preparation of an application to the HLF.
3. Building on new Renaissance projects at the museum to develop a focused outreach programme that engages diverse communities in interpreting their heritage through community and museum based exhibitions and displays. This project would use the museum spaces as a canvas for local people to formulate their own ideas of what the future museum of Oxford should take.
4. Creating an Oxford City Museum Partnership that enables the City, County, University, Oxford Preservation Society, Oxford Civic Society etc to work more closely together to develop a plan for future museum delivery and coordinate the most effective and efficient use of resources.

Under this scheme the proposed 2010/11 cut of £90,000 in the Museum of Oxford's budget would need to be restored. In addition the museum would require a development budget of £30,000 for consultancy support (specifically to help prepare a new Museums Strategy, a Development Plan and a Business Plan) for a part-time Development officer to support the Cultural Development manager in developing the concepts for future delivery, and preparing details for fund-raising, thus giving a total budget increase for 2010/11 of £120,000.

Section A : The Long Term Vision : What Oxford Deserves

A 'SENSE OF PLACE' FOR OXFORD PEOPLE

There are few people who aren't made happier by a sense of being at home – of belonging both to a community of people, and to a particular spot on earth. The longing of the traveller for home is a theme in stories of all kinds from all parts of the world.

People are also constantly looking for a better life. For thousands of Oxford residents their neighbourhoods have acute social problems – poor housing, poor health, dysfunctional services, high crime rates and anti-social behaviour is rife. They need help to improve their neighbourhood environment.

An important aspect of achieving improvement is having a belief and faith in their city; that its leaders are not only willing and able but also believe that the city is made up of and has an equal responsibility for *all* its neighbourhoods. Part of this process is being convinced that the city has overcome difficulties in the past and can do so again. This is often misunderstood by museums as being about 'civic pride'; it is not. It is much closer to 'civic gospel', a determination to harness all resources for the benefit of society.

What is the proper role of a museum in this ? What does the experience of other city museums and academic research tell us are the tangible social and economic benefits of having a city museum ? These are some of the most important :

- The museum can be a place where the city can be 'explained' to residents and visitors, increasing awareness of and respect for the heritage
- It can provide residents from across the city a 'sense of place'
- It can be a platform for promoting citizenship and the 'civic gospel'
- Museums have a great many volunteering opportunities
- Its exhibition galleries are safe public spaces where difficult, sensitive and contentious issues can be explored
- Museums contribute to regeneration through helping to create a better place to live and work
- People who engage in cultural activities, including museums, enjoy better health and longer lives
- Museums can take their collections out into the community and engage directly with recognised health therapies such as reminiscence

WHAT MIGHT A 'MUSEUM' BE?

There are all sorts of museums, but the kind of museum we mean is a local museum, one that celebrates the locality and tells the stories of local people. We believe that it should be rooted in Oxford's story and help explain and interpret that story for those who have lived in Oxford for a long time, those who are new to it and those who visit it.

There is a danger here. Whatever they mean to do, too many 'local museums' end up presenting a bland (and sometimes even misleading) picture of 'the good old days', a dreamworld to which only history enthusiasts can relate, and which means nothing to most ordinary people.

Oxford can avoid this danger. To celebrate the locality and to tell the stories of local people needs three things:

- a clear idea of who we are talking to: experts? schoolchildren? local families? tourists?
- a clear story or stories, based on sound research.
- a clear idea of *how* that story is to be told.

The new Museum of Oxford

The new Museum of Oxford should consist of a bundle of exhibits and activities. It is a concept for curiosity and discovery rather than a big building with lots of things beautifully displayed inside. It will work on the principle that our history and heritage should not all be herded together in one place called a museum – in a way like old-style zoos – but that the museum is a base camp for interpreting the whole of the city's heritage wherever and whatever it is. So what museum staff do *outside* the museum is at least as important as what they do in its exhibition areas.

There is still a place for a modest sized 'city museum' or 'museum of the city' where the sort of artefacts in the present museum can be professionally cared for and displayed in a modern way. It will also have equally important space for temporary exhibitions and indoor events. But it does not have to be a standalone building; it could, for example, be attached to a centre dealing also with local studies and archives. Here the story of the whole city could be outlined and the more precious or vulnerable paintings and objects carefully displayed. The purpose would be to show the whole story in a way that it is both a story and a starting place for those wishing to understand the history of the city better and maybe go on to find out more for themselves or explore the richness of Oxford's architecture, for example.

Linked to that should be an educational activities programme for schools; informal learning opportunities for young, mature and elderly adults and special courses for special people. A community centre for learning, not stand alone but linked into mainstream education provision and community work. The educational value of museums is demonstrated by the thousands of schools that use them every year to enhance and expand upon their classroom curriculum work.

Museum collections should provide a spring board for work out in the community with the most vulnerable and especially where a contribution can be made to healthcare, using objects as , for example, part of reminiscence therapy with the elderly.

The museum will also be taken out to the neighbourhoods. Small exhibits in libraries, community centres, schools and health centres will both introduce people to the history of Oxford and to the story of their neighbourhood or particular places within it. This is not confined to places but could also include the stories of communities which define themselves by their heritage.

These in turn might be the starting point or stimulation for groups of local people to get to know and understand each other better by exploring their diverse histories together. People could begin to participate in the researching, writing and creating of their own histories which they present to others from across the city.

This may be developed through Community Archives. The official archives of a city are often just that. They are strong in the records of city government, the records of the judiciary (church and state), the records of enumeration (parish registers and censuses), the records of control (poor law and taxation) and the records of the legal profession (deeds and writs). But they tend to be weaker when it comes to telling the stories of everyday lives. Community Archives can restore the balance.

They can become a focus for local people loaning photographs and documents for copying or an oral history project to record the memories of those in the community whose histories are overlooked in the official records. The histories of everyday home and working life; the histories of immigration, discrimination, bias and loyalty; the histories of families and relationships.

All of this can be encompassed within this new concept of a Museum of Oxford.

In the new Museum of Oxford the emphasis will not be on bricks and mortar or access to 'treasures'. Other places in Oxford already do that very well. The emphasis in this museum will be on people – creating opportunities for Oxford people facilitated by skilled professionals.

Section B : The Short Term Vision : What Can Be Achieved

Introduction

The Museum of Oxford receives about 60,000 visits each year and has strong support from the Oxford Civic Society which may reflect a significant body of opinion in the city. While the displays are looking 'tired', they are still functional. The objects and pictures are as good as ever and the information with them is intelligible to the casual visitor and capable of interpretation to younger audiences through the educational programme. In other words, the existing museum is not yet at the end of its life and to close it would be a loss to the cultural and heritage resources of Oxford. So, while Oxford may deserve the longer term vision, while that is being worked towards it is desirable to develop a shorter term alternative which delivers immediate benefits for the people of Oxford.

The Short Term Vision

While it is accepted that the existing location of the museum is not *perfect*, it is easy to overlook the advantages of its central position. The cost of moving from this position, whether to one of closure or certainly to another location will be high. In the short term, therefore, it is sensible to see a refurbishment of the existing museum displays. This will provide a better base for developing outreach services, based around the Renaissance project (see below), which will carry the museum service to neighbourhoods and communities in east and south Oxford, begin to create a more dispersed service and ultimately can form the foundation of the longer term concept of a museum for Oxford, described above.

Section C : The Current Situation

Introduction

The Museum

- Opened in 1975 by Oxfordshire County Museums Service and regarded as a pioneer
- Relatively little investment in display renewal since, partly because of the restraints imposed by the space it is in and the original design
- Limited temporary exhibition space and few changes to the main exhibit have made it difficult to attract return visits from Oxford residents
- It has gradually become the 'lost museum' of Oxford
- The spaces it occupies no longer meet criteria of good physical accessibility if it was being created today then the present location would simply be considered unsuitable
- The narrative interpretation is now considered largely intellectually inaccessible and inflexible for the purposes of learning and education
- Despite this, the museum has hosted educational programmes and events which, although small in scale, have been popular with schools and parents in holidays. Furthermore, until the arrival of *Renaissance* funding for the university museums this was virtually the only museum education service operating in the city

Oxford City Council

- The County Museums Service concept developed in the 1970s did not require the City Council to initiate or operate a city museum. It provided space and the County created and operated a museum as part of its countywide network
- Following a period of resource reduction, the County Council proposed closing the museum.
- The City Council intervened and provided the resources to keep the museum open
- The prospect of severe cuts in public expenditure from 2009 has forced the City Council to propose closing the museum in March 2010
- It may be possible to persuade Members to withdraw that proposal but the case will have to be a good one

Oxfordshire County Council

- Retains an interest in the Museum of Oxford because the collections on display (which include a large number of items of considerable historic importance) either belong to them or have been borrowed by them from other owners (most notably the university museums)
- There is no short term prospect of the County Council investing in the Museum of Oxford

Oxford Civic Society

- The Society has taken a leading interest in the future of the museum and is a platform for the articulate sections of Oxford society
- It has organised a public meeting (October 7th 2009) and is campaigning to find a 'solution' which will keep the museum open
- It feels very strongly that if the museum is allowed to close in 2010, it will never re-open

Existing Museum Service Delivery

As a result of this year's savings requirements museum staffing and opening hours have been reduced. The museum opens five days a week and operates with five part-time staff, but still delivers a full programme of temporary exhibitions and educational activities. Museum operations are now being supported through an excellent volunteer programme introduced in July 2009 and facilitated through Oxford Civic Society.

The museum is benefiting from participation in a 'Renaissance in the Regions' programme being run through the university museums and involves the county museums service. The programme involves two projects hosted by the Museum of Oxford and involving two newly appointed Renaissance project officers: a reminiscence officer, and community volunteer officer.

The Reminiscence officer is working in partnership with *Hands On Oxfordshire Heritage* (Oxfordshire County Council) to deliver core reminiscence sessions to regular groups across the city, develop creative projects with local artists and arts agencies, and develop sustainable partnerships with service providers and target user groups.

The Community Volunteer Officer is working in partnership with the University Museums to work with difficult to reach groups such as ethnic minorities, homeless, asylum seekers and young offenders within key target areas of the city, i.e. East Oxford (Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill, Cowley, Botley Road, Barton). The museum's collections and displays are providing a catalyst to engage non-users to explore their city and cultural heritage, and then interpret it through exhibitions at the museum or within their own communities, in empty shops, open spaces or community centres.

The projects have a total revenue budget of £160,000 to be delivered over an 18 month period.

Financial Appraisal

Oxford City Council is in the process of reducing its annual net expenditure of about £30m by £1.9m, a saving of just over 6%. This cut is very challenging. It is entirely appropriate that the Museum of Oxford should take its share of the cuts. The 2008/09 budget has been reduced by 21% (a £90,000 saving). It is further proposed that an additional £100,000 be taken off for the 2010/11 budget, a level at which the museum is no longer sustainable and will have to shut.

It is possible that the £90,000 saving demanded of the museum budget this year (2009/10) has already taken the museum to the point where the present operation is not sustainable. At the time of writing (October 2009) it is predicted that only about one half of the saving will be achieved, a similar sum to that which was actually achieved by bringing in the outturn at less than the budget in 2008/09.

To say that this year's budget (after the £90,000 saving has been taken) is £290,762 is an illusion. Just over 61% of that is allocated to Support Services, made up of an apportionment of central Council costs and not available for spending. The remainder, £111,900, is insufficient to cover the remaining identified costs – employees, supplies & services and premises. It is not clear how controllable costs were or are going to be reduced to this level.

The relevant budget details are tabulated below : (all figures are £)

Budget Heading	2010/11 Optimum Budget (£)	2010/11 Proposed Budget (£)	2009/10 Budget (£)	2008/09 Outturn (£)	2008/09 Budget (£)
Employees	150,000	143,733	143,733	154,221	
Premises	28,000	0	27,133	19,100	
Transport	0	330	330	291	
Supplies and Services	55,000	53,058	53,058	39,784	
Operational Sub-total	233,000	197,733	224,254	213,346	
Support Services	198,000	0	178,862	144,207	
Income	(25,000)	0	(24,354)	(35,669)	
Sub-total	406,000	197,733	380,762	321,984	365,999

Saving (2009/10)		(90,000)	(90,000)		
Saving (2010/11)		(107,733)			
Total	406,000	0	290,762	321,984	365,999

There are very few areas of controllable expenditure within the budget. Employee wages and salaries are tightly monitored. Within Supplies & Services, the key areas of expenditure are listed in the table below :

Heading	2009/10 Budget (£) before £90,000 saving	2008/09 Outturn (£)
General Contracted Services [GCS]	30,294	20,738
Furniture & Equipment Purchase	1,100	1,036
Goods for resale	3,300	2,835
Materials	1,320	897
Photocopier/Stationary	4,567	4,378
Postage/Telephones	1,320	1,534
Subscriptions	880	369
Advertising & Publicity	2,750	545
Other	7,527	7,452
Total	53,058	39,784

From these figures it is possible to see that probably no more than £30,000 (£26,000 of GCS and £4,000 in materials and advertising) is available this year to actually deliver services to the public in terms of temporary exhibitions, events and schools programmes, and that is *before* the £90,000 saving has been allocated. It is inevitable that it will fall most heavily on areas of controllable expenditure.

If the planned savings for this year are successfully implemented and then the museum is closed at the end of March 2010, the total real saving to the Council will be just under £200,000 less, in 2010/11, closure costs such as redundancy payments and removal of the collections (up to £50,000 in total).

If the original budget for 2009/10 were restored (ie the £90,000 saving reinstated), then it is possible to identify 1 FTE professional member of staff plus a budget of £30,000 (see above) as being “available” to deliver public services. We will consider what the most effective use might be of this resource later.

The remainder of the budget (about £140,000 management, front of house, and services costs plus the ‘reinstated’ nominal premises and support services costs) would remain available for the running of the museum.

Section D : The Short Term Options

1. Introduction

If the long term Vision outlined in Section A is accepted as the desirable long term outcome for investment in the new Museum of Oxford concept, then the immediate task is to identify what is the best use to be made of existing resources, which will start Oxford on the road towards that vision.

2. Options from the Brief

Clearly the straightforward options are well known to members of the Steering Group. As we see it they range across the following:

- Do nothing – i.e. closure at the end of March 2010 with no substantial plan for City Council museum services in the future
- City Council to maintain an operational level of funding in current location – limping along, not a real solution to the problems
- City Council to increase funding, including refurbishment of displays (possible HLF application)
- Relocate to:
 - new build (city centre or elsewhere)
 - existing building to be refurbished (city centre or elsewhere)
- Relocation options could be done in physical/operational partnership with other institutions (Story Museum, Oxford Brookes, Oxford Preservation Trust, local library/archives etc)
- A new, collaborative and distributed model of museum delivery throughout the city – whatever we want to call this evolved museum service, this approach seemed to be the one getting more support at our start up meeting. However, it could still include a relocation option or indeed maintaining some/all of their current space as a city centre showcase.

Even though consultation may uncover another solution along more conventional lines, we think any option needs to include at least an element of this new model of delivery as a way to ensure community engagement and long-term sustainability. This will certainly be an important part of the vision for a new Museum of Oxford.

A number of stakeholders have observed that they think the Council needs to take a decision as to where their focus is – tourism or community. This is of course an over-simplification. However, without sufficient funding, we don't think they can achieve excellence on both counts. The brief makes it clear that the City Council feels a stronger community focus is now called for.

The City of Oxford is clearly so much more than the central 'university district'. Getting over this perception of the museum and engaging with local communities on a real and meaningful level is therefore perhaps the most important task. That the City Council doesn't own any of the collections should be used to our advantage. Our suggestions for the long- and short-medium term options are based on the development of a new model of museum delivery, the vision which we outlined in Section A above.

Constraints

Before listing the Options that have been suggested as part of the consultation process and we have considered, it is essential to note the constraints upon both generating options and then upon considering their suitability.

- **Financial.** None of the stakeholders consulted have yet indicated any commitment to financial investment in the current Museum of Oxford or the services it supplies. The Oxford Civic Society has discussed the possibility of running the museum by volunteers and even creating a Charitable Trust to which the museum could be transferred. However, at the time of writing there is absolutely no money on the table.
- **Closure incurs costs.** If the museum closes in 2010 there will be cost implications to the City Council. These include (1) redundancy payments; (2) cost of maintaining the museum space in the Town Hall; (3) cost of removing the exhibits; (4) because collections cannot be received at Standlake before November 2010, there will be additional insurance costs.
- **'Doing Nothing' is not an option.** The proposal to withdraw funding and close the museum in March 2010 means that some sort of a decision has to be made between now and then.
- **Existing commitments.** The museum is about to commence a *Renaissance* funded oral history project which will run until March 2011. Securing this financial support (external to the City Council) has been a major achievement and is strongly community-focused, exactly the sort of project that Members have been asking to see happen. The project is based in the museum and the exhibitions generated by it will be shown there.

3. Short Term Actions

3.1 Refurbish the existing museum

We estimate that the cost of total refurbishment would be £750,000 - £1m. Even when refurbished it would still be a museum on a very restricted site with limited access and facilities. However, a phased refurbishment of the museum has a number of attractions :

- Phased refurbishment could proceed at the pace that additional funding becomes available
- Phased refurbishment could reflect a change of approach to delivering museum services in Oxford and introduce more opportunities for neighbourhood and community groups to become involved in the museum
- Phased refurbishment could engage the Oxford Civic Society and volunteers in decisions about storylines
- Phased refurbishment could include an expansion into adjacent parts of the Town Hall, particularly creating more opportunities for temporary exhibition space.
- Consider new museum entrance from the Town Hall foyer and expansion into the Long Room/cafe spaces.

3.2 Develop the existing Museum : the Charitable Trust option

All the 'professional' opinion seems to speak against trying to seriously develop the existing museum on its existing site.

The public meeting did however raise the possibility of the museum being transferred to a charitable trust, provisionally under the eye of Oxford Civic Society. To make this work – if only in the sense of retaining and running the museum as it stands – the following minimum annual requirements would, in our opinion, have to be met :

- One F/T Curator with sufficient resources to be able to do minimal programming with schools [£50K]
- Sufficient voluntary time to keep the museum open at least days a week
- Negotiate a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to include rent, rates etc [£20K ?]
- Maintenance budget [£10K]
- Temporary Exhibition budget (minimum and assuming voluntary contributions and sponsored materials/activities) [£10K]
- Stationery costs [£5K]
- Postage & Telephone costs [£3K]
- Subscriptions and Insurances [£5K]
- Advertising & Publicity [£3K]
- Accountancy & Audit [£5K]
- IT support [£5K]
- Caretaking/cleaning [£5K]

- Goods for resale [£5K]

This suggests that the Museum would need a minimum of £126,000 pa to run in anything like an acceptable manner.

Income to offset these costs might include £5,000 from shop sales and perhaps £60,000 if admission charges were re-introduced (say 20,000 visits at an average of £3 per head). A Charitable Trust might of course look to the City Council for an annual grant. We would suggest that a lump sum endowment (minimum £100,000) plus £70-100,000 pa for a guaranteed period (minimum 5 years) is the least requirement if a museum trust is to have any hope of being sustainable.

Apart from the financial issues, there is also the matter of finding sufficient reliable and sustainable voluntary support, critical for the governance and running of the museum.

At first sight this all seems very daunting. But much would depend on finding people sufficiently determined and energetic enough to *make* it work. Some of the overheads could still be absorbed by the City council, while an entrepreneurial and enterprising Board might develop new income generation lines.

Charitable trust status is certainly worth looking at further. We suggest that it would require a Development Plan identifying the future operating mechanism as a charitable trust and the creation of a viable business plan.

3.3 New Museum of Oxford

One of the more exciting institutional opportunities would be to develop a new kind of community-university museum in partnership with Oxford Brookes. The Council has very recently rejected Oxford Brookes £132 million scheme for the redevelopment of its Headington Campus (having been agreed once and then rejected after what looks like local opposition). No doubt the university will be reconsidering its options, which might include a new kind of community museum/facility and showcase? Whether or not this happens, Oxford Brookes could become a key partner, particularly through the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of the Built Environment. There is actually very limited potential in this suggestion. The scheme as it stands has no space included for a museum and seems unlikely to be a priority for the University. However, the Oxford Brookes historians and built environment staff would be willing to participate as partners in other projects or initiatives.

Another option – as yet not explored – would be to create a new Museum of Oxford as part of planning gain within a major regeneration project. However, the time does not seem to be good for such a development.

Our recommendation would be to assess all the new museum options and identify the requirements. And then wait for an appropriate opportunity. There is no doubt in our minds that Oxford does deserve a City Museum to reflect its historical status. But the right opportunity to replace what it has may be some time coming, so in the meantime other models of museum provision should be looked at.

3.4 The Ashmolean Museum

Senior staff at the Ashmolean have raised with us the possibility of accommodating an Oxford History Gallery within the new (and transformed) Ashmolean Museum. It must be stressed that this is at the moment no more than an expression of 'willingness to consider'. A similar offer was made some years ago and rejected, and it had been assumed that the offer would not be made again. However, the Ashmolean would appear to be interested in re-opening discussions and this has to be regarded as a serious option. It may be that the best that can be offered is temporary exhibition space to host a major exhibition on the history of the city. This would be very welcome, being a significant way of promoting the city's history, the vision for the future and perhaps offering fundraising opportunities.

3.5 Oxford Unlocked

One apparently simple solution to the Museum of Oxford dilemma might be to re-locate it to Oxford Unlocked. We think there may be space there to accommodate a complete story of Oxford city. The essential support facilities are in place – staff, shop, cafe etc. There could be two options; simple incorporation into the existing commercial attraction, improving its attractiveness to visitors and value for money. This suggestion has been warmly received by the Steering Group. There was a general feeling that this might work for the 'earlier' part of the story. There was some discussion as to where the line between 'ancient' and 'modern' Oxford might be drawn (1300 ? 1800 ? 1840? 1914?) but basically it was felt that Oxford Unlocked could have a role.

Alternatively, it might be possible for it to have its own entrance and maintain free admission. However, this may not be legally feasible. In any case, to have a free entry museum in the middle of a commercial tourist venue would run risk of reducing admissions to Oxford Unlocked and was not the sort of place that people from South and East Oxford would want to come to. There are a number of commercial factors to consider and there would be a significant cost in re-vamping the story in its new location and of course adding the post-1970 story.

3.6 The History Centre

Oxfordshire County Council have ambitions to create a 'History Centre' near Cowley Library and storage facility, where they are already amalgamating their local studies collections. No substantial progress yet, but could clearly accommodate exhibition space sufficient to host the 'modern' Oxford story. We are reluctant to split the story, but it may be pragmatic to do so.

The History Centre would eventually become the focal point for the Museums Service's community outreach programme, which is now the mainstream of their museum work.

Again there was agreement within the Steering Group that outreach work needed a base from which to operate effectively.

The City Council have advanced plans to re-develop the Cowley Swimming Pool site, which suggests some opportunity for the City and County to work together. However, it must be stressed that this is very much at early stages.

3.7 Dispersed Museum Model

The principal proposition here is to assume that the existing museum will be closed and the storylines and (as far as is practical) the collections, will be dispersed around the city in a number of neighbourhood locations.

These locations might be a library, community centre, school or some other publicly accessible space. It should be stressed that what we are thinking of would need very little space.

The model for each exhibit in each space could be something as basic as :

- Two exhibition panels summarising the history of the city as a whole
- Four exhibition panels exploring the history of the neighbourhood
- Two cases containing artefacts relevant to the neighbourhood

The approximate cost for setting up such an exhibit might be as little as £5,000. Obviously, if the exhibit was larger and/or more sophisticated, then the initial cost would increase. Depending on the quality of the exhibit, it might have a useful lifespan of 3-5 years.

Such exhibits would be unchanging but could form the focus or starting point for local, oral or other history projects. They might also be the springboard for the development of a **community archive** (see appendix).

Under this model there could be a town centre neighbourhood version, albeit perhaps an exhibit larger than the standard exhibit. This could be located in the ground floor space currently occupied by the Museum of Oxford.

Researching, planning, maintaining and developing activities based upon these neighbourhood exhibits would, we suggest, need 1.5 FTE professional staff/consultants (you do not necessarily need permanent staff for these developments) and a small working budget, perhaps £50,000 pa in total.

There is a strong chance, in our opinion, that this model would be attractive to the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Your Heritage' grants scheme.

Another significant factor in its favour is that if it were possible to start creating these neighbourhood exhibits and promote community archives alongside them, then this would be a tangible and important contribution to creating the long term vision of a new Museum of Oxford.

3.8 Community/Collaboration Model

Another model that we think is worth pursuing, would be to develop a radically new kind of museum service, but one based on the good work that the Museum has been doing in terms of museum-based school programmes and what other museum services (the County and the University museums) have been doing in terms of outreach and community based programmes.

Please note : ‘Outreach’ museum programmes are defined here as those which specifically target ‘difficult to reach’ audiences, those which would normally not consider museum visiting as a worthwhile activity. They tend to coincide with C2DE demographic groups and deprived parts of the city.

To be effective, outreach services need to ‘outreach’ from somewhere. They need a public space base, especially because community groups are usually keen to display the products of their work, not just to people in their own neighbourhood, but also to city as a whole, in part to challenge the perception stereotypes found in relation to their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, outreach work only works when it prompts change in the host institution.

In a collaborative model, paid staff would be more enablers and facilitators than direct providers. The Museum of Oxford would therefore be shaped directly by local communities where they live, not in some city centre site that few have any connection to. The new Museum of Oxford would always be happening, never be complete or ‘finished’. It could appear in a local library, bus stop, black cab, main train station, church hall, school classroom, disused shop front. There could still be a city centre showcase space for more developed exhibitions, but again, these would be perhaps annual exhibitions on a particular aspect of the city’s history, present or future. The new Museum of Oxford would therefore be something of a collective collage of activities, events and programmes.

In terms of the collections, these would be returned to the County’s storage facility or to other lenders. However, those collections (or the more robust part of them) relating to the city could become a more mobile resource that is used by local people where they live. The County Museum Service already runs a well-respected loan service.

Based on the different geographical and cultural communities of Oxford, each community could – through a service level agreement – begin the development of their own museum/collection projects that explore ideas and issues that matter to them and interest them in their locality. This could be developed through the existing network of schools and community centres/community development managers. The Museum of Oxford will in effect always be ‘in the making’ as new projects, people and places come together.

Perhaps the main issue with this idea is whether this is attractive enough to the City and local stakeholders in terms of its critical mass. That said, if the idea is to develop a more sustainable, community based service, then this would seem to be a way of achieving this in the short-medium term. There are still opportunities for developing a city centre or other space for longer-term exhibition and activity as part of this new model, but we suspect that will need more research and development than can be achieved by us right now (unless of course something emerges out of left field from the consultation) – i.e. something more shiny and tangible that people can more easily grasp.

4. Assessing Short-Medium Term Ideas

We believe the short-medium term ideas and possible actions should begin delivery of the long term vision. Possible scenarios are outlined in the table below.

Long term possibles	Short term options
Close the Museum of Oxford	None.
Total Refurbishment	Begin search for funding. Draw up a prospectus articulating what a total refurbishment would achieve
Phased Refurbishment	Draw up a phased refurbishment plan, related to a strategy to re-focus museum activity outside and into neighbourhoods and communities. Identify the thematic content of future displays. Review museum spaces and opportunities for expansion.
Charitable Trust option	Secure Museum of Oxford for at least 12 months; City Council and Oxford Civic Society to start talking. Needs a Development Plan and a Business Plan.
New Museum of Oxford	Agree the necessary conditions for its creation – especially location and funding
Ashmolean Museum	Secure Museum of Oxford for at least 12 months; City Council and Ashmolean Museum to start talking.
Oxford Unlocked	Secure Museum of Oxford for at least 12 months; City Council and Oxford Preservation Society to start talking.
County History Centre	Secure Museum of Oxford for at least 12 months; City Council and County Council to start talking.
Dispersed Museum Model	Begin to plan new service/model
Community/Collaboration Model	Secure Museum of Oxford for at least 12 months; begin to plan new service/model

Section E : Options Appraisal

Some initial Options Appraisal

Clearly, a number of the ideas mooted above can be combined in different ways to produce a range of options. We have tentatively begun to do this and also do some preliminary thinking about the viability (are the costs reasonable ?), feasibility (is it likely that this idea can be achieved ?) and acceptability (will the key stakeholders support it) ? While we will not do the formal options appraisal until the Steering Group approves the options, we have noted some strengths and weaknesses of some of the principal options. These are tabulated below.

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
Close the museum	Council might save £300K pa but in reality probably no more than £200K pa	Public outcry/media condemnation Oxford has no museum telling story of the city Experienced staff made redundant or relocated
Phased refurbishment of the existing museum to a modern standard and expansion into adjacent town hall spaces	Oxford has a city museum to be proud of ? Opportunity to change the audience target (AB1 to C2DE ?) and to develop services more directly targeted at and relevant to neighbourhoods and communities in east and south Oxford. Good base for developing the existing services to schools (if additional revenue funding is forthcoming)	Will require Council expenditure and HLF support (not guaranteed) Will still be a museum partially located in a basement with poor access for disabled
Convert the Museum to a Charitable Trust	New lease of life. No longer City Council's responsibility	Sustainability will need to be tested through a Development Plan and a Business Plan
Create a new Museum of Oxford through	Fresh start. Opportunity to bring city and universities	No prospect of this happening at the moment

regeneration	together	but we should plan for it
Re-locate concept to Ashmolean Museum	Fresh start in a transformed location	Only a possible suggestion
Re-locate the museum to Oxford Unlock'd	<p>Oxford retains a museum about the city.</p> <p>Opportunity to refresh displays and perhaps change audience target.</p> <p>Oxford Unlock'd acquires additional attraction which improves perceptions of VFM.</p> <p>Minimal revenue implications for Oxford Unlock'd.</p> <p>Educational teams could merge and be more effective (assumed that City Council continues to support prof. staff).</p> <p>Existing Museum of Oxford could remain open until ready to move.</p> <p>From 2012/13 City Council might save £230,000 pa</p>	<p>Admission charge (currently £7.50 for adults) will deter many Oxford citizens</p> <p>Funding will be required for relocation and refurbishing of displays</p>
Museum of Oxford to become part of a new County History centre at Cowley	Good synergy with archives. Purpose-built spaces.	Location not central. Unattractive to tourists. Only an idea at present.
Create series of community history exhibitions in neighbourhoods such as Blackbird Leys, Cowley, Quarry, Barton and Rose Hill. Place mini-displays/history panels in many neighbourhood locations, using	<p>Outreach work with local Oxford neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Might attract HLF support.</p> <p>Opportunity for museum staff to work with community development workers and other community-based professionals. Oxford</p>	Insufficient City Council funding support ? No Museum of Oxford.

community centres, libraries, shops, schools, colleges and health centres. Link them with trails, pamphlets and website.	histories everywhere. City Council might save £250,000 pa	
Create a “community museum”. Invite neighbourhood community groups to re-design and re-display a section each of the existing museum, to tell their stories	Museum of Oxford stays open and is re-vitalised from the community perspective	Funding ? Who would want it ? City Council saves no money

Section F : A Way Forward

We **recommend** the following course of action.

Given the short timescale available to resolve the museum’s future, the option to continue and to develop within the existing location is the most realistic way forward in the short term. Closing the museum, even for an interim period, could be counter-productive, and recommended that, to enable ample time for this option and some of the longer term ideas to be given serious consideration the Museum of Oxford should remain open for a further 12 months

Delivering a multi-phased scheme would also require keeping the Museum of Oxford open for another 12 months to enable key long term options for a revitalised Museum of Oxford to be explored fully. During this period an intensive programme of developmental activity would be undertaken involving:

1. Follow up consultancy support to review and develop new proposals for the museum at the Town Hall including:
 - A development plan identifying the future operating mechanism as a charitable trust and creation of a viable business plan
 - Review of museum spaces including new museum entrance from the Town Hall foyer and expansion into Long Room / café areas
 - Identifying the thematic content of future displays
 - Identifying funding sources and preparing grant applications
2. Developing the Dispersed Museum concept as an innovative parallel initiative; drawing up a new Museums Strategy which identifies neighbourhoods to be targeted, details the exhibits to be created, and plans the associated activities (including the development of Community Archives). A part of this should be a costed Business Plan and preparation of an application to the HLF.
3. Building on the new Renaissance projects to developing a focused outreach programme that engages diverse communities in interpreting their heritage

through community and museum based exhibitions and displays. This project would use the museum spaces as a canvas for local people to formulate their own ideas of what the future museum of Oxford should take.

4. Create an Oxford City Museum Partnership that enables the City, County, University, OPS, OCS etc to work more closely together to develop a plan for future museum delivery and coordinate the most effective and efficient use of resources.

Under this scheme the proposed 2010/11 budget cut of £90,000 in the Museum of Oxford's budget would need to be restored. In addition the museum would require a development budget of £30,000; £20,000 for consultancy support (specifically to help prepare a new Museums Strategy, a Development Plan and a Business Plan) and £10,000 for a part-time (2 days a week) Development Officer to support the Cultural Development manager in developing the concepts for future delivery, and preparing details for fund-raising, thus giving a total budget increase for 2010/11 of £120,000.

Further details of the component parts of these recommendations are below :

1. Keep the Museum of Oxford open for at least another 12 months

Why ? For the following reasons :

- There are at least three very promising long term options for the development of an outstanding city museum fit for the twenty-first century and of a quality worthy of a city of Oxford's importance. It will need **at least** 12 months to make significant progress on appraising these and laying the foundations for funding applications.
- Both the existing *Renaissance* funded project and any other 'outreach' initiatives require a **base** to operate or 'outreach' from. If the Museum of Oxford is not open then it casts a serious question mark over the usefulness of the outreach work.
- The case for significant savings is not convincing, particularly when one takes into account the costs incurred by closing the museum.
- While the museum is open there is an opportunity to engage constructively with the Oxford Civic Society and look at how voluntary support might help sustain the museum in the short term and maybe in the long term.
- Whatever its shortcomings, it is still the only place in Oxford that explores the social and economic history of this important regional capital.
- Oxford merits, deserves and needs a first-class museum of the city. What it has does not now come up to the top standards. But it is much better than nothing and while it remains open so too do the channels for finding a way to create a replacement worthy of the city.
- The Museum of Oxford does make a contribution to the city's tourism offer
- It does receive 60,000 visits pa and its learning and education services are admired.

2. Develop the Dispersed Museum concept

- Brigade all available resources (from existing museum budget and from the *Renaissance* project)
- Draw up a new **Museum Strategy** which identifies neighbourhoods to be targeted, details the exhibits to be created, and plans the associated activities (including the

development of **Community Archives**). A part of this should be a costed Business Plan.

- Prepare an application to the HLF (discuss with them first)

3. Develop a focused community outreach programme

- Liaise with those already active in the field and agree where the Museum of Oxford should focus its efforts.
- Synergise with the existing *Renaissance* project
- Possibly apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a small grant to take this work forward (but not if the long term choice is the Dispersed Museum model).
- If the Dispersed model is favoured, then the 'outreach programme' becomes (in modified form) a key part of developing the neighbourhood exhibits.

4. Create an Oxford City Museum Partnership

There is a lot of museum activity going on in the city of Oxford and although there is a certain amount of informal discussion between officers, there is no formal coordination. A short term action might be to initiate a more formal partnership and ask the City, County, University, OPS,OCS etc to work more closely together to coordinate the most effective and efficient use of resources.

There might be a long term benefit too. If the recommendations of the Renaissance Review Panel are accepted, then Renaissance Hubs may disappear in March 2011, to be replaced by a small number of English core museums. Oxford would be better placed to 'make the list' if it could demonstrate a strategic approach to museum services in the city (even if, for example, the University of Oxford were the formal applicant for core museum status).

We would strongly recommend that a meeting of the South East Hub museums, Oxfordshire County Museums Service and Oxford City Council be held as soon as possible to start building bridges.

5. Do a full Feasibility Study for the new Museum of Oxford vision

- The objective here is to prepare the ground for the creation of a new Museum of Oxford worthy of Oxford and which all stakeholders – including residents and tourists – will be proud of.
- It may take a few years for the appropriate conditions to exist (location and funding being the two key factors) but the vision will be maintained and the Dispersed Museum concept will be continually contributing to this vision and helping to regularly refresh it.

Appendices

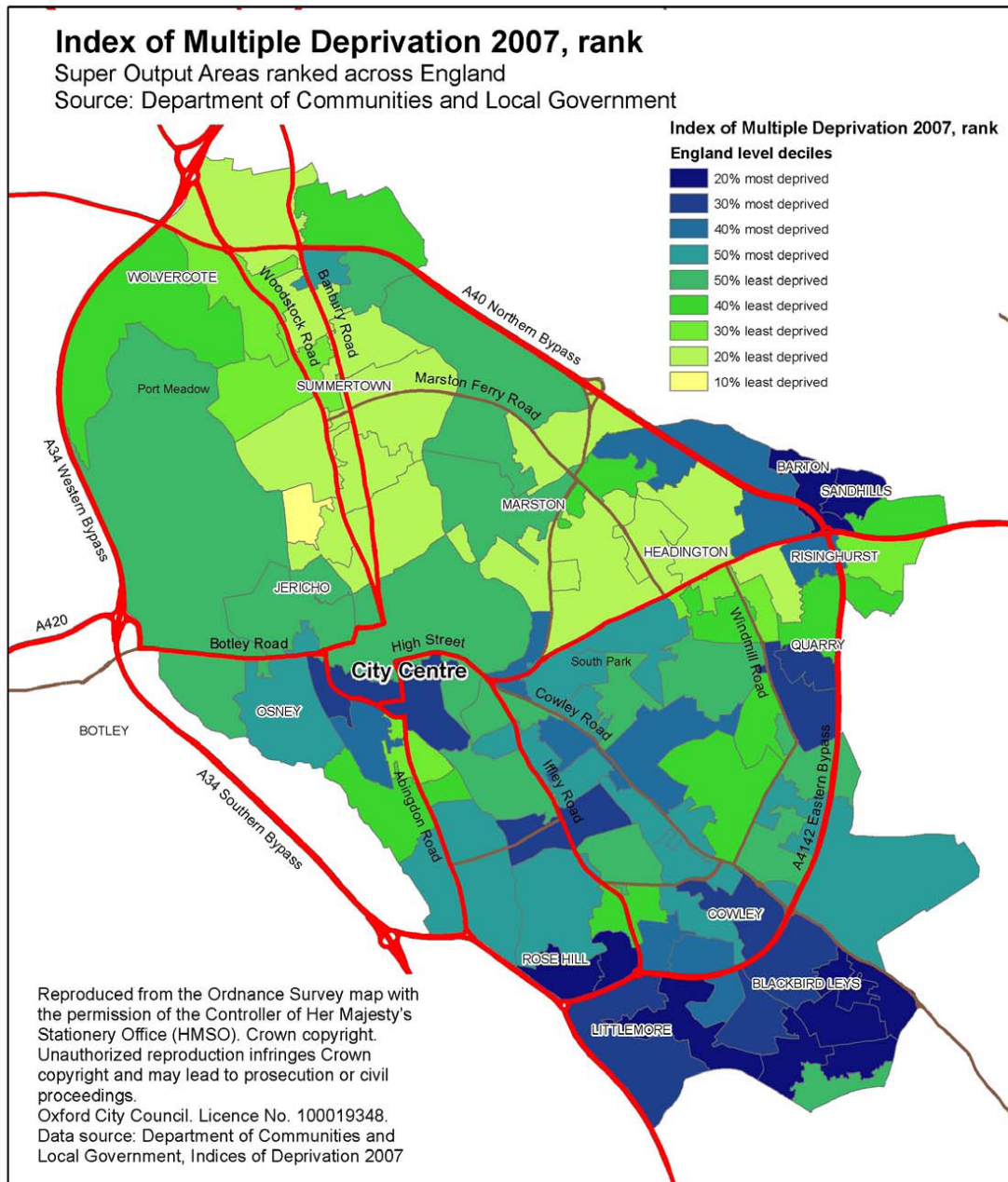
Appendix 1 : Oxford and Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 ranks Oxford 155th out of 354, placing it in the top half most deprived local authority areas in England. Of 85 areas in Oxford, ten are among the 20% most deprived areas in England - this is illustrated on the map below:

These areas, which are in the Leys, Littlemore, Rose Hill and Barton areas of the city, experience multiple levels of deprivation - low skills, low incomes and high levels of crime.

The deprivation map (see below) indicates that the six most likely target areas are :

Barton/Sandhills; Blackbird Leys; Littlemore; Rose Hill; Quarry; Cowley



Appendix 2 : Consultation

We have consulted **X** individuals in one-to-one meetings or in focus groups, not including the public meeting in Oxford Town Hall on October 7th, which was attended by about 80 people.

Here are a selection of key comments or observations :

'The Museum of Oxford has been badly neglected and now needs either substantial investment or it should be closed.' [Member of the team that created the Museum in 1975]

The Museum no longer meets the public's expectations of a modern urban museum

Content and collections are still good but presentation rather 'old-fashioned' especially in regard of its audience target

If you were planning a Museum of Oxford today you would not locate it in the basement of the Town Hall

Oxford people – especially those from south and east Oxford - may come in to do shopping but for much of the year the city centre belongs to tourists and students

For many ordinary working (or unemployed) residents, they think first of being from their neighbourhood and second as being from Oxford.

If you close a museum without firm plans in place to replace it with something else...then it will probably be lost for ever

For a city of Oxford's importance not to have a museum devoted to its past seems inconceivable

The University does its own thing. It may be doing some good outreach work now but it is all based on external money. If that goes then so will they. There is no real commitment to engaging with Oxford's communities

Many of our respondents alleged that the City Council had a very ambivalent attitude to tourism. Whether or not this is the case, the Museum of Oxford is part of the city's tourism offer, as the 60,000 visits per annum demonstrates. No one believes that it alone could attract tourists but it is part of a package that encourages at the very least a very full day trip or, better still for the economy of the city, enough to encourage visitors to stay overnight.

The city does need to be clear what it wants to spend money on, as any positive idea will need a development phase (funded) to establish partnerships and an action plan that could then attract external funding.

Sustainability an issue. Do Oxford see their contribution tapering to £0 over 3-5 years or are they committed to a smaller but long term (well ok 3-5years, as far as anyone can tell) contribution.

Thinks it is essential for Oxford to have a museum depicting the history of the city and story of its development. This is vital for both school users and visitor to Oxford.

Closing the Museum in town will mean a loss of identity for local residents – it's the last cultural/historical element of the town not enveloped by the University.

Outreach hubs will NOT work without a central museum 'hub'. Cites several reasons:

- 1) Tourists will not visit the suburbs
- 2) schools find it easier catching buses into town
- 3) Bus links between suburb areas are not good
- 4) Teachers find having everything in one place best for school groups
- 5) families pop in whilst doing shopping on the high street
- 6) would take a lot of work to keep the satellite exhibitions fresh with changing regular displays
- 7) this would not best serve local communities.

Does not think it should become just another part of another university museum – loss of local 'non-university' identity.

Thinks that outreach museums or displays targeted at or placed within particular communities is artificial and that these sectors of the community come in the form of school visits which then turn into repeat visits with parents – they know the museum is there, so doesn't think it should be forced on them. We need to remember the needs of North Oxford residents too.

Thinks that a city of this size and with the number of tourists it receives really must have a museum telling the story of the city.

Having a city centre location is the most fair – easiest for everyone to get to and receives a lot of passing foot traffic.

If it were to be closed, then the university would be the only real provider of a museum. The town is already overwhelmed by the university.

More outreach would be great, but only in addition to keeping a central main museum. People from the local and wider community could make their own displays with the help of museum staff and display them in the new museum

The prospect of merging with another museum is OK but worrying – if it were to be a university museum they may lose their identity.

Having a new venue with better access will bring new life into public interest.

Thinks having more space for education and exhibitions would be good – and they need better disabled access.

Keeping a museum in town is an absolute necessity for both tourists and residents alike. The city needs a museum like this which tells its story – unlike any other museum in town. It's an essential resource for schools and they like it being in town and easy to get to.

Tourists groups are not going to get on a bus and go out to the suburbs when they have all the university museums in town.

Sees outreach as problematic in terms of not being able to take museum objects out to communities. Also thinks it would be even more staff intensive to run.

Merging with another museum depends on the amount of control retained and a university museum would overpower perhaps and the museum would lose its city identity.

Would like a future museum to have better disabled access and space for groups and displays.

Thinks the city absolutely needs to have a museum about its history. Especially for a town of this stature.

Visitors need somewhere to visit to get a sense of their surroundings – this museum lets them do that on their own terms and not guided by bus tours etc.

The only real problems in terms of operation at the museum can be directly attributed to lack of investment.

Over the years the council has allowed many good opportunities to pass by and each time it took a bite out of the future of the museum. A terrible shame.

Lots of local community venues are now doing small exhibitions for arts and crafts which OM might have done if developed at an earlier opportunity.

The current way the story of Oxford is told at the museum is very good but need some updating.

Teachers have often commented that the layout etc is perfect for school groups – having chronological displays works well for ‘compare and contrast’ exercises which they do a lot of.

This museum already gives people what they want so no great changes need to be made.

Outreach is a good idea but still need a central location. This way we can still create encounters with people who don't come into town.

It's silly to think it could be economically OK away from the tourists in town – they are the ones who spend the most money.

Merging with another museum should have probably been done years ago. Now the castle is too small. Ashmolean might be good but its very intimidating and imposing for some people BUT by the same measure it might get different groups into the Ashmolean.

Communication within the council is poor and staff perceive there to be great inefficiencies in service delivery and staffing.

It is criminal. For a relatively small sum of money – something which would be chicken-feed to one of the big spending departments – we are losing a whole museum which has 60,000 visitors each year and has served the city for nearly 35 years.

Whatever you do ...it will need money...

Quotes from Oxford public meeting (November 7th 2009)

How can you get around several sites in the city to hear about the whole story of Oxford ?

Why haven't we got A Museum of Oxford to be proud of ?

I am horrified by the proposal to close the museum. How much money do we need ? Should the Museum become a Trust ? We need at least two years to sort this out.

This is our museum, not the university's. It helps people to understand how the museum ticks. Once it goes, it will never come back. We must not close it.

I helped Crispin Paine set it up. At that time the County Museums Service was the envy of the world. Oxford is a great cultural city. The museum is too important to lose. We should not close until we have a very concrete proposal to replace it.

The museum should be kept but needs to be located in a good new building. We must set a target that is high not low; survival is not good enough. Perhaps we should work with the Ashmolean to find a much better venue. Funding is something that will be attracted to good ideas, not cries for help.

The museum was based upon a Business Plan prepared in 1972, when the number of tourists each year was 100,000 ; today they number 9.2m.

I would like a concept to emerge that protects the museum from Oxford City Council.

The Council introduced free admission two years ago, hoping to attract new audiences. The new visitors came from postcode areas OX3 and OX4.... We should work with developers to find a possible 'planning gain' site... We need to take the museum out of the hands of the City Council...

The museum is shabby because of years of chronic under-investment.

I am horrified that it is suggested that the museum should close. Re-locating it to several different venues should not even be considered. What's wrong with the museum? Let's keep it going for another 10 years. Why isn't the County putting money into the city museum rather than smaller places around the county?

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to working in partnership with the City Council, the Universities, the Civic Society and others to try and find a solution, but is in no better financial condition than the City Council. The County Council is considering an idea to create a History Centre for Oxfordshire, in Cowley, and a new Museum of Oxford could be part of that. [Martyn Brown]

The City Museum tells the story of the city and the university. Need to reconsider how the Museum tells its story to many different audiences.

The museum should become a charitable trust.

Please do not close it until we find a solution.

Appendix 3 : Case Studies

We have compiled a short list of potential case studies to inform the discussion; they include:

- **Glasgow Museums Service – The Open Museum**, outreach and collaboration, evaluated by Leicester University Research Centre for Museums & Galleries There was interest in this – how did it work, what did it achieve etc
- **Lightbox, Woking** – example of grassroots initiative that became a shiny new building
- **Ecomuseums** – More favoured in France and other European continental countries. Essentially, telling a story by linking ‘attractions’ or ‘heritage assets’ together. More associated with rural areas (eg Ironbridge Gorge) and ‘urban heritage parks’(eg Castlefields, Manchester) but might work in Oxford.
- **HLF Landscape Partnerships** – examples include Purbeck in Dorset and the Wyre Forest in Worcestershire. Again, more associated with rural areas and untested in an urban environment.
- **Community/collaborative**: We are struggling to find **genuine** examples of whole museum services being run like this – a kind of guerrilla museum service if you like, not one based on a single building/site/facility, but distributed throughout a community where the community takes the lead. Interestingly, we believe Oxfordshire County Museums’ existing relationships with volunteer run museums might be something to think about here.

Appendix 4 : The Changing World of Museums and Heritage

“Heritage is a powerful mirror. Those who do not see themselves reflected in it are therefore excluded”

(Hall 2000)¹

The public perception and understanding of heritage has become more sophisticated in recent years. Heritage is no longer seen as confined to great houses, parish churches and large national museums. It extends to everything that makes up the character of an area or community. Not all of this can be preserved forever, but much of it can be cared for by local authorities, other institutions, owners and voluntary associations.

Nor is all heritage about buildings and artefacts. Oral history, photographs, film and other ‘intangible heritage’ like customs and traditions, folk song and dance and language are now seen to be part of heritage². One of the strongest movements in heritage in the last ten years has been towards the creation of Community Archives.

Compiling a community archive brings together people of varying ages, experience and ability. Some participants in community archives have limited formal educational qualifications, but this is no obstacle to working together to understand, value and celebrate the communities to which they belong.

(CADG, 2006)³

Local history societies and similar groups all over the country are recording their local heritage (oral, visual and material) and creating community archives in the community, making them accessible through digitisation and websites. Recent research carried out by the Community Archives Development Group (CADG), also found that,

..community archives complement rather than compete with the work of established heritage organisations, such as museums and record offices. Heritage bodies and community archives benefit from working together and in partnership, respecting and celebrating their different approaches to the same goals.

(CADG, 2006)⁴

Recent Government documents, including the Lyons Report and the Local Government White Paper ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’ (2006) advocate a re-definition of the role of local authorities to be as much about ‘place-shaping’ as service delivery. How can

¹ Hall, S., (2000) *Whose Heritage? Unsettling The Heritage, Re-imagining the Post-Nation*, Third Text, 49, Winter-Spring. Kala Press, London

² Intangible heritage refers to non-physical collections which can include, but are not limited to, language, memory, oral traditions, songs and non-written traditional music, etc. See Article 2. *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage*. October 2003.

³ Community Archives Development Group (2006), *Impact of Community Archives*. Stuart Davies Associates, Ed: Siddons, A. CADG.

⁴ See footnote 3 above.

they help or guide people to value their environment – including their historic environment – to the common benefit of all, is a key factor in local government policy development.

The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities & Local Authority Partnerships (October 2007) includes Visits to Museums and Galleries (NI 10) as an indicator for the Stronger Communities outcome

Museums have traditionally had a role in the work of the local authority and political agendas;

Too often politicians have been forced to debate culture in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas – education, the reduction of crime, improvements in wellbeing – ...In political and public discourse in this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself.(Jowell, 2004)⁵

Museums have traditionally preserved objects and works of art for the inspiration, education and entertainment of their visitors, which has not really changed. But more recently museums have also been looking outside their walls much more. Museums have been engaging with their communities, encouraging more people to care for their heritage rather than take it away and put it in a glass case.

Over the past two decades, heritage practice has moved from seeing the definition of value as something driven by experts on behalf of society, to one that recognises the importance of wider public participation in identifying and caring for what is important... sustainable outcomes ultimately depend upon public involvement in, and acceptance of, heritage.(DEMOS 2004)⁶

Museums have become more agents of preservation and interpretation than simply keepers of all the artefacts worth keeping. Further, they have been helping those who wish to look after their own heritage to do so.

⁵ T. Jowell, (2004) *Government and the Value of Culture*, Retrieved June 20. <http://culture.gov.uk>.

⁶ DEMOS (2004) *Challenge and Change: HLF and Public Value*. Heritage Lottery Fund.

Appendix 5 : The ideal City Museum ?

What makes for a good Local Museum in the 21st century?

The concept (and desirability) of defining 'excellence' or 'good practice' in museums and culture in general is well established, and has led to a plethora of methods of benchmarking, review and assessment. These have included financial performance measures, establishing social benefits such as Generic Social Outcome indicators, and using data from comparator groups such as the Group for Small Local Authority Museums (GoSLAM).

Recent attempts at defining good practice or excellence in the cultural sector culminated in the McMaster report *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement* (2008), which aimed to define how excellence can be measured, and indeed what it constitutes. The extensive consultation undertaken for this report uncovered a set of themes under which excellence can be measured, and which have been taken into consideration when formulating our list below. These themes include diversity, risk-taking, innovation, financial security and relevance. McMaster's preferred definition of excellence in culture can also be used as an overarching aspiration for any cultural institution or system seeking improvement or change.

'...excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual' (McMaster 2008)⁷

The following list provides a considered analysis of aspects which can create or help shape a local museum seeking to provide a service with the capacity to 'affect or change an individual'. This is by no means intended to act as a definitive list, but more as guide which we, through our own experience, believe to help create all-inclusive, sustainable, and relevant museums with capacity for continuance into the long term.

1. *Tells story of local place, and illustrates / demonstrates / illuminates its unique cultural identity- it's 'sense of place' that we are trying to get over surely?*
2. *Audiences reflect local population*
3. *Valued and supported by community stakeholders*
4. *Lively and relevant public programme – a commitment to diversity and innovation*
5. *Resources to meet the needs of local schools and other learning groups*
6. *Staff with local expertise and knowledge*
7. *Collections to reflect local history and communities*
8. *Financially, socially and environmentally sustainable*
9. *Engages with local community through volunteering programme, outreach etc*
10. *Provides a professional standard of collection care*
11. *Addresses all access issues (physical, virtual, sensory, financial, cultural)*

⁷ McMaster, B. (January 2008) *Supporting Excellence in the Arts: From Measurement to Judgement*. DCMS.

12. Contributes to quality of life and the social and economic well-being of the local community

Our Vision of a Local Museum

Here we stand back from the immediate issue, and consider what a museum service for a town like Oxford might look like, and what benefits it could bring.

First, the benefits. A museum exists to help people learn enjoyably, and it does so through that extraordinarily powerful medium, the object. The museum needs, therefore, to tell a story. This can be a story about science, about art, about aeroplanes, about music, about almost anything. Here, though, we are planning to tell a story about a place: its history, its present and to some extent its future. And we are using local objects to tell it - backed up of course by photos, film, text, interactive devices, and people talking.

Who is a Local Museum Service serving?

How one tells a story depends, of course, on whom one is talking to. Usually museums say they are addressing the 'general public', but we need a clearer idea than that. We need to know whether we are devising displays and composing booklets for elderly graduates, or families, or teenagers or children. Are they local people who know the town, or are they tourists? Every museum needs to have a clear idea of whom it is aiming its different services at, and it needs regularly to check how successfully it is attracting and communicating with them.

But we should not forget that a museum's audience is not just this generation. We are building up our collections for the future: we must bear in mind the needs of people in the city in 50 years time and 100 years time.

What services can a Local Museum Service offer?

When most people think of a museum they think of objects in showcases. But a modern museum service is much more than that - it is a bundle of services offered to different groups of people and using different means. Some of the best are called something like 'Puddletown Heritage Service', drawing all local services involving museums and heritage together - and of course working very closely with the local arts.

- 'permanent' exhibitions
The core of the museum will still be the main displays, aimed at as wide a range of people as possible, and based on a well-chosen and well-researched storyline, using well-chosen and well-cared for objects, plus photos, text, models, interactives, film etc.
- temporary exhibitions
To keep visitors coming back, and to explore different - perhaps more adventurous - themes, the museum service will offer temporary exhibitions. Some will be home-grown, others organised by local groups, others brought in from other museums. Most will have publications and education programmes arranged alongside.
- events and outreach
By no means everything the museum service does will happen in the museum. There will be exhibitions in public places, historical reenactments, lectures and concerts, filmshows and plays - all sorts of fun activities all over the place.

- services for families
Families will be a major target to museum services, with much imagination going into activities and displays attractive to children of different ages.
- services for schools
'Museum Learning (or Education) Officer' is now a distinct profession within a profession, combining the skills of teacher and curator to help schools make the best use of the museum. Few museums nowadays don't have a steady flow of school parties through the door, or regular loan of exhibits for use in the classroom.
- services for the elderly
Many older people enjoy museums, especially when they can relate to the history of the home town, and when they can contribute to recording that history through oral history programmes. But reminiscence therapy, delivered by some museums in local old peoples' homes, directly contributes to mental and physical well-being.
- services for other groups
Museums provide services for many different communities and community groups: ethnic minorities, subject interest groups, religious groups, womens groups and 'mums and toddlers' among them.
- services for researchers
Museums are trusted by the public, and need to be sure that everything they say and do is reliable and based on good research. They need therefore to undertake much historical research themselves, and also to welcome and support researchers wishing to study their collections. Opportunities for links with local schools, colleges and universities are considerable.

Choosing the story

A local museum would normally be principally about the locality, its history, character and prospects. Too many local museums, though, are very very similar, and fail to reflect their community's distinct character. The best local museums avoid this by three things:

- rigorous historical research, so that they really do know how their local place evolved, and what has made it special,
- an imaginative interpretation of that history, focussing on its distinct character - what makes it different ("what is our town's USP?"),
- rigorous visitor/audience research, so they really know what local people want, what they are looking for, what they understand at present and how they might be helped to understand and enjoy more.

Building collections

A museum is fundamentally a collection of objects brought together to tell a story or stories. Museums use many techniques, but at their heart lies the collection. It is therefore crucial that they choose very carefully what they acquire, remembering that their responsibility is to look after their collections - and meet the costs - for generations to come. The best museums are careful to avoid accepting gifts for the sake of it, and limit their collecting to planned programmes of collecting and research.

Knowing what we've got

The first task in looking after its collection is knowing what the museum has got. There is now an internationally-agreed standard for inventorying and recording museum collections, and many computer programmes aimed to help do the job. These also enable the museum to put its catalogues on line, thus making them virtually available to the public.

Caring for our collections

Caring for museum collections has become a sophisticated science-based activity, involving not just good housekeeping and secure and well-designed premises and equipment, but continual monitoring of humidity and light levels, and an on-going programme of professional conservation work.

WHAT THE VISITOR SEES

What might a visitor to this excellent local museum expect to see? First, a smart and attractive building, conveniently sited for a passing-trade as well as for public transport and car-borne visitors. It is purpose-built or sensitively adapted, open at convenient times, and either free or with an easily-affordable charge. The entrance is attractive, and encourages one in to a bright and welcoming hall with friendly receptionist and at least a small shop. The displays are professionally designed and regularly refreshed, with well-written and understandable text supporting impressive and intriguing objects. The museum's storyline is distinctive and clear.

In the temporary exhibition gallery regular exhibitions encourage visitors to return again and again, and a good-quality café encourages them to linger.

Some visitors will want more information, and for them a small collection of relevant books is available, and a comfortable seating area. Some visitors will have a special interest, and they can make an appointment to talk to the curators, and in the study room choose from the computer catalogue the objects they want particularly to study, which will be brought from the reserve and study collections. These collections, too, are ideally open to the casual but interested visitor. Some visitors will be teachers, who can obtain information about arranging school visits, and a description of the services the Museum Education Service can offer. Others may be bringing objects for identification by the curators, or may want to get more involved with the museum, as volunteers helping with the big variety of tasks and perhaps helping develop a whole new kind of service.

For children there will be special parts of the displays with activities suitable for different ages, from dressing-up to interactives, both simple mechanical ones and computer-based games. Children will be encouraged to join the childrens' club and other activities. Every visitor will be given a leaflet outlining the museum's programme of temporary exhibitions and public events.

Appendix 6 : Community Archives

What are community archives?

Jack Latimer, the website editor of *CommunityArchives.org.uk*, offers the following definition :

The definition of 'community archive' is the cause of some debate. Broadly speaking, people think of projects as community archives for one of two reasons:

1. The subject-matter of the collection is a 'community of people'. The classic example is a group of people who live in the same location, but there are 'communities of interest' as well, such as people who worked in a certain profession.
2. The process of creating the collection has involved the community. Typically, this means that volunteers have played a key role, sometimes alongside professional archivists.

The only caveat is that to satisfy the requirement of being an archive, the organisation should have a collection of some sort. This collection should include primary source material such as photos, documents, oral histories etc. (rather than just articles or essays about those source materials). The collection could be either physical or digital - or both.

So, community archives are collections of primary source material about and generated by 'communities' widely defined. These are created by people who care deeply about their communities and believe that recording their history and their contemporary experiences is a useful and satisfying way of supporting and nurturing their communities.

What is special about them?

The importance of community archives is found in the process of creating them, the product of that process and to what uses that product is put. They also represent opportunities for the unrepresented to identify their own communities.

The **process** of people creating their own community archive is about a desire to find out about themselves, their community and the place they live in. It is about exploration and discovery for oneself rather than waiting for 'experts' to tell you. It is about the commitment of people in a community to come together to create something. And in the process they learn about themselves and their neighbours and create a more cohesive and tolerant society. Other community groups may to some extent achieve this, but the heritage and history element of community archives means that they can build community pride, a sense of place and a sense of being represented culturally, creating a much broader and more sustainable way to deliver skills, social inclusion and individual self-confidence. The benefits of this combination of creativity and learning can only real come from *starting* something. They are difficult to replicate by established organisations.

Community archives are also important as a **product** because they collect material of high *local* heritage value and significance. This is not necessarily old and valuable documents, but for example everyday records of life, experiences and work in the 20th century. They are

collecting oral history testimony, photographs, video clips, home movies – those personal records which people may allow to be donated or copied into an archive which remains in the community rather than swallowed up in larger institutions. They are collecting diaries, letters, old business records and other evidence of the past which larger institutions might never see. It is a community taking responsibility for recording its own past and present.

While putting together local collections of photographs and oral history tapes may be valuable in itself – creating perhaps an archive of unique historical evidence and knowledge which might otherwise have been lost – this is not the end of the community archive's importance. It is the **uses** to which the archive is put that is valuable to communities too. A digital archive covering village life over a couple of centuries or material that has high reminiscence value can be used to link with care the community services to help the elderly members of the community. Information from a Community Archive can enrich lessons for local schoolchildren. Photographs and reminiscences in the archive may help with contemporary environmental issues. Or the archive may simply be the inspirational starting point for more people to explore their communities, get involved in them and take a greater interest and pride in them..

Because Community Archives usually grow outside the usual public institutional world (although most develop links with this world), they create **opportunities** for those communities suspicious of or rejected by the 'mainstream' to build a base for their own community identity. Recent emphasis on supporting heritage that is relevant to all cultures, has also thrown into light the fact that many cultures in Britain house their cultural and heritage legacy in intangible ways, such as oral history and meanings associated with items and photographs for instance. Many of these have not been collected by traditional archive institutions. Many recent groups have concentrated on digital collections, oral history and records of their own social and community activities. Other community archive activity has focused on identifying and adding to traditional archives that have a bearing on the community but have been hidden up to now (see Northamptonshire Black History Project).

In summary, community archives are making a significant contribution to this country's **heritage asset**. Many collect unorthodox material or material limited by geography. Nonetheless, the heritage asset is better for it. Collections can be used: to represent people who are not present (or interpreted) in the orthodox records; to show another more popular perspective to events that are recorded by business or government documents and in doing so reveal new insights and; really contribute to a sense of place.

Many locally based community archives hold material that is of little significance outside the immediate area. However, that is not to say that the heritage does not have value. Collections of photographs, documents, accounts, plans etc can show how a parish or area has changed over the years, provide material for local studies and promote awareness of the value of a certain place.

Even some small archives have significant collections though, such as the photography collections of Keswick Historical Society. The collections of the Northamptonshire Black History Association are of wide significance, as nobody has ever collated an archive of such material and it provides new insights and is a highly useable heritage resource. Eastside Community Heritage has also managed to collect a significant and important collection of oral history from across East London over the last 13 years, it is becoming quite comprehensive and a fascinating resource. This is also true for My Brighton and Hove, who have worked hard at eliciting a wide variety of contributions on-line, thereby providing a useful service for people using the site. Wise archive is barely up and running and yet its activities too look like they will yield a highly useable research tool for the history of twentieth

century working life. Experiences of working in department stores, social work and factories already form part of the historical source material they will have on-line. This will be of local significance (to the town where the workplace was located) and national (to researchers).

Appendix 7 : Questions for Stakeholders

Stakeholder Questions Set 1

How much support is there for a Museum of Oxford ?

The Oxford Civic Society feels very strongly that there is a role for a museum devoted to the history of the city. They also claim that many regret that the 'Oxford Story' closed.

Has anyone actually complained that the museum is inadequate and ought to be closed ?

Primary Schools like the museum education service. **[numbers ? evidence ? letters of support ?]**

The Museum of Oxford and tourism

What might be the benefits of closing the Museum (or allowing it to 'go dark') ?

- (a) Savings
- (b) Opens up opportunity for increased outreach educational activity
- (c) Creates more potential office space in the Town Hall

What might be the benefits of keeping the museum open ?

- (a) Contribution to tourism
- (b) Budget already halved; cheap to run
- (c) Could have something much better in 3-5 years, especially with HLF help
- (d) Cannot leap from what is there now to a community-based museum service in months
- (e) Existing educational services based around the museum will continue
- (f) Still the only place in Oxford that explores the social and economic history of a highly fractured/fragmented city
- (g) Avoid the costs of dismantling it
- (h) Continued support from County Education Service for the museum education service

Stakeholder Questions Set 2

The questions below are in no particular order of importance or anything else...(they are numbered for ease of reference only)

1. Should Oxford have a museum dedicated to the history of the city, including the colleges ? Why or why not ?
2. The City Council seem pretty determined to close the museum. If this happens, what do you think the consequences might be ?
3. One set of messages from the City Council suggest that it *might* be saved if Members could be persuaded that museums can do exciting and valuable things with communities. What examples from your programmes might you be able to offer in support of such persuasion ?

4. A different set of messages talks of replacing the museum with some sort of dynamic community-based outreach programme in those neighbourhoods where the 'real' Oxford people are to be found. Do you think this is possible given low resources (probably only one part-time member of staff would be involved) and highly active 'educational' work coming out of the university's museums ?
5. Do you know of any suitable sites to create a new museum of the cit

Stakeholder Questions Set 3

The questions below are in no particular order of importance or anything else...(they are numbered for ease of reference only)

1. Should Oxford have a museum dedicated to the history of the city, including the colleges ? Why or why not ?
2. The City Council seem pretty determined to close the museum. If this happens, what do you think the consequences might be ?
3. If closure meant the immediate stripping out of the contents, you would do what with the collections (which I understand mostly belong to the County) ?
4. If closure meant the museum 'going dark' – ie still be there but closed to the public – would you be prepared to leave your collections there under those circumstances ?
5. One set of messages from the City Council suggest that it *might* be saved if Members could be persuaded that museums can do exciting and valuable things with communities. What examples from the County might you be able to offer in support of such persuasion ?
6. A different set of messages talks of replacing the museum with some sort of dynamic community-based outreach programme in those neighbourhoods where the 'real' Oxford people are to be found. Do you think this is possible given low resources and highly active 'educational' work coming out of the university's museums ?
7. Can you envisage a situation where the County might enter into partnership with the City to either (a) 'save' the existing museum or (b) create a new one on a different site ?
8. Do you know of any suitable sites to create such a museum ?
9. If the museum does close, the City Council may develop a community-based initiative – essentially outreach projects involving schools and community groups. It seems likely that this would involve only one part-time member of staff. Do you think they can do anything effective on that basis, especially given the existence of University and County teams already active in this area ?
10. What would be your favoured outcome of the Museum of Oxford 'case' ?