

Town Team's Written Responses to Local Economy Scrutiny Panel

March 2015

The Local economy Scrutiny Panel posed the following questions to members of the Town Team:-

What can the City Council can do to mitigate disruption to the city centre economy while major developments are taking place?

How can communications be improved for lasting benefit to residents and visitors?

The following responses have been provided:-

Oxford has gained itself an awful reputation for being difficult to get to. When Oxford is mentioned people invariably mention the transport problems, even if they never actually come to Oxford. This needs to be counteracted through positive publicity. The message that Oxford is still open for business during the Westgate refurbishment and the road infrastructure works is one of the key communications that needs to be sent out, both from the perspective of the retailers and other businesses in Oxford and also as part of Experience Oxfordshire and the visitor economy perspective.

It needs to be explained what is going on and why, in such a way that visitors actually see and understand the potential impact.

A key issue that needs to be addressed is who leads on this type of communication? The City it is felt has traditionally seen the County as the Highways Authority so 'anything to do with roadwork's is their responsibility'. Is this a particularly helpful approach?

The City and the County need to get together and decide what the united channel of communication is going to be and stand behind it with everybody's logo included etc. This could make use of existing channels such as the new 'Transforming Oxford' campaign, the 'Oxfordshire Travel Choices' bulletins or indeed our own Town Team fact sheet to increase awareness of the disruption at Stage 1. Park and Ride bus stops would make ideal mini exhibition centres, with large posters showing the completed vision with the intended benefits, and giving current information of how best to travel around the centre avoiding any construction work, Enabling information on potential disruption to get out much further in advance. These exhibition sites could become a permanent feature and later be used to showcase the different areas in the centre of Oxford.

There are virtually daily e-mails from the city events team on what event applications have been submitted so perhaps anybody interested in how events might affect them should be encouraged more proactively to subscribe to this system and comment accordingly?

If the City feels it can make a contribution there needs to be an identifiable contact number and person that concerned retailers / restaurant owners / accommodation providers can contact for more information on disruptions and what the impact might be on their business. Who should this be? It will require some serious thought as the last thing people want to hear is 'that isn't us, it's them at the County' or similar. Joe public doesn't really understand the difference.

It is felt that perhaps City, County and Experience Oxfordshire (and other key stakeholders that are trying to improve the visitor experience) all need to get together and agree a single web address that can be accessed in advance via the web with links to all the different things that people look for. It could be called something like 'Oxford at your finger tips' and could be promoted widely with a very high profile campaign. With super connected Wi-Fi throughout the city, including on all the buses it would be really good to have a central source of info on a whole range of things that people can access.

Improving the appearance of empty units in the city centre is purely dependent on who owns the unit. There are however many examples across the country where this has been achieved and the opportunity has been taken to use the window space either to market the unit, or to rent the space for advertising.