

## **Address to council in support of petition**

We represent nearly 2000 Oxford residents who were horrified to discover that the Council had decided to introduce entrance fees to the Museum of Oxford.

I started this petition and have been amazed to see how it has grown organically as word has spread. On the final day before charging started, people flocked to the museum to leave messages against charging. You can read them on the Save Our Museum website.

Today we want to set out three main areas of concern:

### **1. Introducing charges is the wrong decision for the museum and threatens its long-term viability**

- The museum will not be able to compete with the much larger and higher-profile university museums, which are all free
- We will likely see a serious drop in footfall which means the funding gap will not be filled - this is the conclusion the council's own commissioned research came to, but it seems to have been ignored.
- Meanwhile this has created barriers to entry for the local people of Oxford. All of us should have the right to access our own history. Furthermore, requiring people on benefits and seeking asylum to prove their status in such a public place to gain free entry is undignified, embarrassing and potentially dangerous in the current climate.

### **2. The decision was taken in an undemocratic and untransparent way**

- The introduction of charging was decided by Cabinet, not the full Council
- There was no consultation amongst museum users or museum staff
- But funding was applied for from the Arts Council, on the basis that charging was going to be introduced, even before Cabinet discussed and agreed it. This means the decision was actually made behind closed doors by senior councillors and officers with no transparency and accountability at all.

### **3. Councillors have been undermining the museum to make their case in the press, using inaccurate and inconsistent figures**

- Councillor Hollingsworth said to the BBC the museum's visitor numbers have significantly dropped. Actually, they have been rising steadily since the museum reopened and no doubt would have continued to rise. He is comparing them to pre-redevelopment visitor figures that, according to the Council itself, were counted in a different way and are not comparable

- Councillor Hollingsworth also claimed *‘the museum received around £5,000 in voluntary donations from visitors last year’* but actually it was nearly £12,500
- Councillor Hollingsworth claims the funding gap is £77,000 and Councillor Brown claims it’s nearly £100,000. Our FOI request showed a gap of closer to £50,000 that didn’t take into account nearly half the museum’s income. Why are different councillors using different numbers? Which is correct?
- The council argued in the Oxford Mail a month ago that if the funding gap cannot be filled the museum may have to close, as it’s taking funds away from other community groups. This is cynical and divisive when the museum itself is an amazing community resource, partnering with groups across the city on educational and outreach activities. Trying to pit community-focused organisations against each other like this is outrageous. We want a Council that will champion and support local history and community groups, not try to turn them against each other.

In conclusion, **we would like to see the entry fees dropped immediately.**

Ultimately, Councillors need to recognise that the Museum of Oxford is a wonderful community resource that they should be proud of. Instead of this negativity and divisiveness, we want to see a Council prepared to work in partnership with the talented and hard-working museum staff, and the Museum Development Trust, to find alternative ways to secure its future.

If you don’t know the museum well, please take 10 minutes out of your day to go and wander round. Read stories you will not find anywhere else in Oxford about events that have shaped our city:

- like the Cutteslowe Walls and the Florence Park Rent Strike
- ancient artefacts such as our Patron Saint Frideswide’s gravestone
- a celebration of our industrial past such as the Cowley plant
- a tin of Cooper’s Oxford Marmalade that went all the way to the Antarctic with Scott

The Museum of Oxford was never designed to have an entrance fee. It was designed to be a free resource for the people of Oxford. Please keep it that way.