A World Class Visitor Welcome

"Oxfordshire's name will be known throughout the world. It will be synonymous with our rich, distinctive cultural heritage, our world class arts, tourism offer and welcome."

That's our aim for Oxfordshire. But...is our 'tourism offer and welcome' world class?

Quite simply...no.

There's plenty to be very proud of, but too often visitors and businesses tell us our welcome falls short of the 'world class' standards we aspire to. The Oxford Strategic Partnership, Experience Oxfordshire, and Oxford Town Team, working with businesses have identified a number of priorities for change for the city and county.

A blueprint for a World Class Visitor Welcome
The priorities we need to address have come from:

- **Visitors**
  Survey of UK visitors to Oxford throughout 2012-13 on their 'experience': benchmarked against similar English cities Oxford scores below average, with specific pointers to improvements needed.

- **Businesses**
  - **Leaders Roundtable, Oct:** Identified a need to improve the "welcome and sense of arrival" in the city centre – for the benefit of both visitors and residents. Experience Oxfordshire was tasked to develop a blueprint for a world class Oxford Welcome.
  - **Hotel manager workshops, Autumn:** Established barriers to growth as staff recruitment, retention & skills
  - **Annual Tourism Forum, Nov:** Workshop to identify priorities: attractions, activity operators, arts & culture, transport, accommodation – city and county
  - **Tourism business leaders dinner, Jan:** See improving our welcome as hugely important. Strong desire to get behind a county action plan, to lead and take responsibility.
  - **Visitor Welcome Action Planning Event, Jan:** Event focussed on identifying ways to deliver the change required. Business and local authority representatives.

A Blueprint for a World Class Visitor Welcome

PEOPLE

The people who welcome, serve and come in contact with our visitors

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
Skills gaps in 'front line': - **Customer service** - **local knowledge** (transient working population)	Town Team development Local business exemplars of high customer service, incl Land Securities Oxford Business Improvement District?	**Oxford City Centre Ambassadors Scheme** Businesses to commit to training staff in world class customer welcome, and incorporate visitor welcome training including familiarisation with tourism offer. Develop a model which incorporates or extends in-house schemes e.g. Land Securities training, bus co.s, and recognises in-house resource. Taxi scheme could be incorporated into / sit alongside licencing. Could include volunteers, and "welcomers" at key arrival points. Develop as pilot for county roll-out.	**LEAD** Town Team, EO, City Council, Oxford College **RESOURCE** New resource needed – via BID? Supplemented by: Businesses own in-house training resources. Taxi licencing?
Staffing issues: - **Recruitment & retention** difficulties, particularly for hotels (high housing costs) - **Skill and attitude** gaps amongst local applicants (lack of interest from school leavers)	LEP Skills Strategy; O2i, ESF funded projects Educational establishments keen to strengthen their links with business	Student work placements Increase Apprentices Businesses help shape curriculum & courses Change perceptions & understanding of career opportunities and reality before students choose their options Bring long term unemployed/in capacity benefit into the industry	**LEAD** LEP: Skills Strategy via ESIF funded projects e.g. O2i Supported by: Colleges & Uni.s / Experience Oxfordshire / Town Team **RESOURCE** ESIF EU£
		Create a new 'Hospitality Worker Accommodation Hub' providing low cost housing, linked to businesses and education	**LEAD** Experience Oxfordshire **RESOURCE** tbc

PLACE
The built and public realm, the ambiance and vitality of place.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
Planning system: - Protect unique and valued assets which attract visitors	As part of the BID review that took place in 2014 one of the recommendations is to increase BID bodies in planning, by encouraging a bespoke approach to consultation.	Planners to take into account potential impact of developments on tourism economy / quality and distinctiveness of Oxford Commit to use quality materials (Street Scene Manual) & declutter streets. Improve street cleanliness	**LEAD** City & County Councils planning & highways **RESOURCE** Existing budgets plus BID & self-control over business rates
Oxford Street Scene: – Not enough pavement space for the number of people who arrive in peak periods	City Centre Charter-Town Team Environment, Safety and Wellbeing Group	Create more open space in the City centre – to sit, pause & enjoy e.g. Broad St, St Giles. Widen pavements to create more space to wander, and businesses to create café culture e.g. High St. Create a necklace of spaces from railway station to city centre.	**LEAD** City & County Councils as planning & highways authorities. Supported by businesses & colleges. **RESOURCE** BID & self-control over business rates
Events & Marketing Develop **city events** programme to create more high profile, big draw events	Town Team 'Events & Marketing' group	Consider developing 'Quarters of Oxford' approach to zoning, character and visitor orientation. Support growth and development of events to boost business at key times of the year. Gain support of University colleges for events	**LEAD** Town Team **RESOURCE** City Council events & city businesses
Make more of our **waterways**		Better signage and links to and along the Thames, particularly within Oxford, plus Cherwell & canal	LEADER Revive project UMBEG – boat mooring City Council

TOURISM SERVICES
The services people expect and want to find, and the ones that set us apart

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
Desire for more **locally distinctive Shopping, Food & Drink**	Good Food Oxford & GFO Charter / Bitten Oxford	Better promote independent traders. Dress & use empty city retail properties e.g. pop up food markets	**LEAD** Town Team & City Council (Town Centre Scrutiny Panel) **RESOURCE** ?
		Review Covered market management so that the mix of tenants can be better managed. Promote market as starting point for county markets.	**LEAD & RESOURCE** City Council
		Develop a 'Distinctively Oxfordshire' programme to develop links between producers and hospitality/tourism businesses.	**LEAD** Experience Oxfordshire **RESOURCE** Uni &/or EU£ via LEP?
Need for more **mid-market hotel accommodation** in Oxford	Northern Gateway and Oxpens plans. South & Vale District accommodation study completed, including city fringes. Cherwell study ongoing. Bicester development including links to Oxford.	Co-ordinate district accommodation studies to properly understand current position and future supply/demand for city & county. Pro-actively demonstrate and promote market opportunities to developers & inform Council planning – co-ordinated county approach.	**LEAD** LEP & District Councils **RESOURCE** Councils / LEP
Large conferences lost due to lack of **large dedicated conference venue**	Northern Gateway, Parkway & Begbrook locations ideal. Include within development plans	Feasibility study, including demand evaluation	**LEAD** LEP / Experience Oxfordshire **RESOURCE** LEP?

TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

Reaching, arriving and exploring Oxford and Oxfordshire

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
Arrival by car: - Visitors unclear about how to access Oxford by car. "Perception is Reality" - Roads too congested. - some routes are to / from destinations that can't be reached easily by public transport / radial system	'Open for Business' campaign Smart City vision / project EO taking on destination management role Wifi on buses	More / better information prior to and at arrival points. Integrated travel & visitor information online / via Apps	'Open for Business' lead officer & partners
	Infrastructure investment via LEP & County Council	Ban free parking spaces in centre to fund better transport services Temporary city centre congestion charge to change driving habits – or permanent? Workplace charging for parking space? Understand journeys better, e.g. which ones e.g. school runs, to / from inaccessible locations?	County Council Transport Strategy
Oxford bus station outdated, creating a poor image e.g. first thing to see are bins! **Railway station** – similar (cluttered by bikes?)	Oxford railway station plan includes a new bus station – funding to be identified	Invest in improving existing, or develop new bus station (Re)move bins at Gloucester Green	**LEAD** County Council Transport Strategy Operators
Public Transport Ticketing - confusing with variety of names, ways to purchase, different conditions for different types of tickets (overnight use) etc.	County Council SMART transport project	Explore simpler, more streamlined ticketing and presentation of options	**LEAD** County Council SMART transport **RESOURCE** tbc
Park & Ride: - Visitors charged twice in a day if using as parking base for	Proposals for outer ring of	Pay once for a whole day regardless of exits	**LEAD** County Council

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
overnight stays then taking day trips - Buses take too long to connect to city centre / not the best types of buses - Too expensive, encourages people to drive into city - not a welcoming environment at all, mostly no services at all, off-putting notices ("we'll fine you...) and no or poor signage *[note Water Eaton P&R ticket machine extremely difficult to figure out how to use!]* - no way of knowing beforehand if there will be a space for you	additional P&R in county (as long as co-ordinated with existing!) Existing P&R spaces information Live traffic information panels at ring road junctions	Express bus service with no stopping en route / different buses (e.g. airport-style type?) Reduce parking fees – or scrap them altogether (different business model) Allow advance booking of parking spaces Check signage / information available (incl. about what to find in town) Improve welcoming feel to sites Develop services, e.g. waiting rooms, coffee / tea, toilets Find way to capture people's actual experience at 'touch points'?	Transport Strategy SUPPORTED BY City & County Councils / Bus companies
Perceived lack of street signage in Oxford and Oxfordshire to help visitors find their way (upright markers not in different languages, hard to decipher) - lack of integration / matching between existed printed map and way markers in town - unclear where 'University' is / colleges don't look open or welcoming, information on opening can be difficult to spot	Railway station development Link to portal / apps (Smart City) project	Station can be a hub for information	**LEAD** Station Master Plan
		Continued support and development of Oxford mobile way-finding website Explore matching map and way markers	LEAD City Council with Town Team & Experience Oxfordshire
Rural areas and attractions poorly connected by public	DEFRA rural tourism public	Extend rural bus services	**LEAD**

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES	SUGGESTED ACTIONS	LEAD & RESOURCE
transport	transport research project		County Council Transport Strategy Stagecoach
Make more of our **waterways (a real asset?!)** - too hidden away – no-one knows (also homeless people at Folly Bridge)	Use waterways for commuting as well as pleasure (e.g. Abingdon, also north of Oxford)?	Better signage and links to and along the Thames, particularly within Oxford, plus Cherwell & canal	LEADER Revive project UMBEG – boat mooring City Council