Oxford’s Hidden Histories – the redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main benefits of the redevelopment project?
The redevelopment project will improve and integrate the visitor experience by providing seamless physical access to currently separate museum and gallery spaces in the Town Hall through one main entrance.

A new entrance will be created using the existing ‘Explore Oxford’ galleries. This ‘welcome’ space will provide:
• A single visitor entrance
• A place for information and orientation
• Improved visitor retail experience. The shop will sell exclusive merchandise related to our collections with a range of products to suit all ages and budgets.
• Access to new learning space and ‘Museum Makers’ area

The redevelopment project will enhance the overall visitor experience providing:
• New galleries throughout the ground floor
• Two high quality activity spaces for use by schools and community groups
• Improved accessibility for disabled people, families and groups
• Additional toilets
• Hireable spaces for private, business and function use
• Removal of the 1970s intrusive building work and restoring the 19th century grandeur of the Grade II* listed Town Hall

What previous work and/or consultation have you undertaken to prepare for this project?
Prior to Oxford City Council’s Round 1 grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, we consulted with our partners including, Oxfordshire History Centre, Oxfordshire Museum Service, Oxford University Museum Partnership, Oxford Jewish Heritage Committee, and MIND. We also consulted the community through surveys for visitors and non-visitors and we have run focus groups comprising volunteers, museum staff, excluded youth and an over 50s non-academic research group.

Will there be more spaces to display the collections?
Yes, this is one of the main reasons for the redevelopment project. Overall new permanent gallery space will offer approximately 264 square metres, an increase of 201 square metres over current ‘Explore Oxford’ gallery spaces.

Will there be improved facilities for Education and Community use?
Yes, spaces for learning and activities will see the provision of two new dedicated spaces the ‘Museum Makers’ area and Learning Space both located in the basement of the building.

• Museum Makers: This area will provide room for “hands on” activities. It will be a place for staff and volunteers to work on the archive and museum
collections. Located next to our new Learning Space, it will also be an inspiring learning space for school parties, putting them at the centre of the collections.

- Learning Space: The new space will be flexible and functional, a place where groups can leave the displays and learn in a more controlled environment. Schools will be able to access the galleries, just above, and then retreat for hands on sessions away from the other museum visitors. It will also be flexible and have seating so that conferences, talks and meetings can be held.

**Will the collections be displayed differently?**
The collections will be displayed thematically rather than by collection or object type. The Hidden Histories project will have 5 key themes:

- Oxford people
- Every community leaves its mark
- Change and continuity
- The story of Oxford’s Town Hall
- Civic Pride

The new interpretation will support, respect and enhance the character, aesthetics and conservation requirements of the environment in which it sits. It will be in keeping with the Grade II* listed Town Hall and will build on the work we have undertaken in the Explore Oxford galleries.

Information and activities, both low-level and digital, will be thoughtfully integrated to communicate effectively and realise the potential for learning, discovery and participation. The new spaces will be planned to be logical and easy to use, attract attention and provide an entertaining and enjoyable experience. Stories and ideas will be made personal, interesting, meaningful and fun.

**Are you doing anything else other than building work?**
Yes, Oxford City Council are working with Cultural Consulting Network to develop an exciting Activity Plan. This will include

- Projects working with schools and community groups
- New ways to get involved through volunteering
- Expanding our Reminiscence programme

**How much will the project cost?**
The estimated cost of the project is £2.8m. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Oxford City Council are major funders of the project.

The Museum of Oxford has been successful in securing a first round bid from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for development stage funding and is currently working towards a second round bid in December 2017.

In addition to funding from HLF and the City Council we need to raise £450,000 from other sources to complete project.
Who is doing the work?
Architectural firm Purcell will lead the project design and Simon Leach Design are working on our exhibitions.
https://www.purcelluk.com/
http://www.simonleachdesign.com/

When does the work start?
Detailed planning for the redevelopment is still underway and the project is expected to cover a 4 year period.

We are due to submit a Round 2 Heritage Lottery Fund application in December 2017. If successful, the delivery phase will commence in Spring/Summer 2018 and is planned to last three years. The build and fit out is planned to be completed in the Spring/Summer of 2020 and elements of our exciting activity plan will continue to be delivered until September 2021.

Will the Museum be closed during that time?
There will be some reduction in museum services from Spring 2018 as staff begin packing objects for the move. The Explore Oxford galleries will also close to the public once the build and fit out gets underway (Spring 2019). However we hope to display objects and explore new stories in our Gallery space in the Town Hall whilst build work is taking place.

What will happen to the Learning Programme during closure?
As part of our Activity Plan we will continue working with groups in the community, developing new partnerships and projects and building audiences for when we reopen in 2020.

We will also be working with partner schools to develop new learning resources based on the redisplayed collections.

In addition, we aim to run a range of talks and family events throughout closure, some with our partners at community events, to raise awareness of our progress.

What will staff be doing whilst the facilities are closed?
There is a lot of work to be done to prepare for the re-opening of the museum We will be:
• Packing collections and transferring them into storage or temporary redisplay
• Working with contractors on the detailed design of the building and display spaces
• Managing the building works and exhibition fit-out contracts
• Identifying collections for new displays
• Preparing documentation on the new displays including the production of display labels
• Consulting community groups and other stakeholders on project details
• Updating documentation details on all collections
• Transferring collections back to site, unpacking them and placing them on display or in storage on-site.
• Increasing work with schools off-site and a range of audiences in the community
• Developing a new website and brand identity for the new facilities
• Planning new projects and community displays from reopening and into the future
• Preparing new education packages for schools based on the new displays
• Reviewing systems and operational procedures
• Fundraising for future projects
• Promoting the new facilities

How can I keep up to date with the project?
We will post information regularly on our website and promote project updates in the local media.
www.museumofoxford.org

You can also keep up to date with all the news on our Facebook page /museumofoxford and on Twitter @museumofoxford.

How can I help and get involved?
You can help in a number of ways including:

• Complete and submit the on-line questionnaire about the redevelopment project on our website
• Volunteering – work includes working with collections, packing and research, working with the education team on community projects
• By making a donation, or joining our Friends Scheme
• Spreading the word about the project!

If you would like to be more involved please email museum@oxford.gov.uk