Sustainable tourism

This topic addresses: **SA Objective:** (16): To encourage the development of a buoyant, sustainable tourism sector

Introduction

Oxford is a significant player in the British tourism economy. It is the seventh most visited city in the UK by international visitors and is the tourism gateway to the rest of Oxfordshire. The city attracts approximately 7 million visitors per year, generating £780 million of income for local Oxford businesses. Oxford is a major draw for visitors from overseas and also for domestic tourists and day visitors.

As well as the significant financial and profile benefits of Oxford's popularity with tourists, the volume of visitors does make additional demands on the city's infrastructure, in particular transport, but also the pressure of hotel and other tourism uses competing for development sites amongst other uses.

Plans, Policies and Programmes

NPPF

The NPPF only has one relevant reference to tourism, and this is in the context of town centres: *"Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:*

- *allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, **tourism**, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability. Local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites"* (paragraph 23).

The current situation

Overseas tourism

The Office for National Statistics' International Passenger Survey collects data on visits by overseas residents to UK towns and cities (where visitors report spending at least one night during their trip). It is possible to track the pattern of overseas visits over time and Oxford's relative ranking against other British towns and cities.

Figure 7.4.1: Overseas visits to Oxford

	Total number staying visits of overseas visitors	City ranking
1999	390,000	6
2000	410,000	6
2001	360,000	6
2002	390,000	6
2003	360,000	6
2004	400,000	6
2005	437,000	7
2006	449,000	7
2007	460,000	8
2008	437,000	8
2009	416,000	8
2010	412,000	7
2011	465,000	7
2012	430,000	7
2013	454,000	7
2014	489,000	7

This data can also be interrogated by country of residence, for 2014 this can be summarised as:

Figure 7.4.2: Origin of overseas visitors to Oxford in 2014

Oxford 2014	Total visits
Western Europe	255,000
North America	71,000
Asia	48,000
Australasia	32,000
Eastern Europe	32,000
Middle East	6,000
South America	5,000
Africa	5,000
Central America	1,000
Other	35,000

The survey also provides information on type of stay, nights spent and expenditure although these details are only provided at an Oxfordshire level. To mitigate this difference in the basis of the data the following aspects are expressed as percentages rather than actual numbers. For comparison purposes, visits to Oxford make up something like 77% of the Oxfordshire total; the total number of overseas staying visits to Oxfordshire 2014 was 631,568 compared to 489,000 for Oxford more specifically.

Figure 7.4.3: Details of overseas visits to Oxfordshire 2014

Seasonality of visits (Oxfordshire 2014)

	% of all visits	% of all nights stayed	% of all spend
Jan-Mar	17.65%	19.49%	15.76%
Apr-Jun	25.50%	24.61%	22.24%
Jul-Sep	39.84%	38.07%	40.89%
Oct-Dec	17.01%	17.83%	21.10%

Journey Purpose (Oxfordshire 2014)

	% of all visits	% of all nights stayed	% of all spend
Holiday	36.94%	24.64%	25.04%
Business	23.65%	19.32%	31.33%
Friends/Relatives	29.85%	29.56%	14.19%
Study	6.10%	24.79%	26.62%
Misc	3.46%	1.70%	2.81%

Duration of stay (Oxfordshire 2014)

	% of all visits	% of all nights stayed	% of all spend
1-3 nights	28.75%	8.91%	15.75%
4-7 nights	30.67%	17.81%	29.72%
8-14 nights	23.21%	21.79%	20.05%
15+ nights	17.37%	51.49%	34.48%

Domestic tourism

Visit Britain's Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS) is a national consumer survey measuring the volume and value of domestic overnight tourism trips taken by residents of Great Britain. In 2015, British residents took 102.7 million overnight trips in England, totalling 300 million nights away from home, with an expenditure of £19.6 billion. £191 was spent per trip, and with an average trip length of 2.92 nights, the average spend per night was £65.

Visit Britain's Great Britain Day Visits Survey (GBDVS) measures the volume, value and trip characteristics of tourism day visits in Britain. During 2014, Great Britain residents took a total of 1,585 million tourism day visits to destinations in England, Scotland or Wales. Around £54 billion was spent during these trips. This is very similar to the volume of visits taken in 2013 (1,588 million tourism day visits). Total expenditure during these visits also remained stable year on year at £53.9 billion in 2013 and £53.8 billion in 2014. In 2014, visits to cities and large towns were most commonly for the purpose of seeing friends or family (20%), followed by special shopping (11%), eating out (10%), nights out (10%) and entertainment (10%).

Data from the GBTS and GBDVS can be used at an Oxford level when expressed as a three year average.

Figure 7.4.4: Domestic visits to Oxford 2012-2014

Oxford 3 year average (2012-14)		
Day visits	total visits	5,561,000
	expenditure	£205,000,000
All overnight tourism	total trips	646,000
	total nights	1,526,000
	expenditure	£105,000,000
Total tourism	total visits	6,207,000
	expenditure	£310,000,000

Hotels

Business rates data shows that there are 26 hotels and 46 guest houses in the city. The most recent study of Oxford's hotels and short stay accommodation was produced to inform the Core Strategy in 2007. This study is now somewhat dated but does provide a detailed analysis of the sector in the city at that time. If this study were updated it would provide a good picture over the trends over time. In 2007 the city had 23 hotels and 74 guest houses together providing 2,416 rooms, 72.5% of which were at the hotels and 27.5% at the guest houses. (In addition there were 3 hostels, 34 serviced apartments, 61 self-catering units and 6,500 rooms at the colleges.) In the previous 5 years the hotel supply had increased by 17.6% and the guest house supply had reduced by 6.9%.

The study also looked at hotel developer interest: *"Over 40 hotel developers, operators and investors were contacted to test their interest in investing in Oxford. Of the 30 responses received, all were interested in investing in Oxford. The interest ranged from 4 star and luxury offers through to 'super budget' hostels, and included emerging offers such as serviced apartments and budget boutique hotels. There was a general perception that the city is under-hotelled and very difficult to get into…By far the greatest barrier to investment cited by developers and operators was the difficulty of securing sites, in terms of availability, values, competition from other higher value uses, and ownership and control."*

Colliers UK publish a Hotel Market Index to identify which markets are attractive for both the acquisition of existing hotels and the development of new properties. The index analyses nine performance indicators of the hotel sector and ranks cities accordingly. (The performance indicators used are: GDP per capita; room occupancy; active pipeline as a % of current supply; land prices; 3 year revenue per available room trend; valuation exit yields; market appetite; build costs; average daily rate). Oxford ranks at number 28 in this analysis, scoring highly in the active pipeline, market appetite, average daily rate, and valuation yield criteria; but particularly poorly in build cost and land price. This would seem to support the developer interest findings of the 2007 study.

Visitor attractions

Visit Britain's Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions records visitor numbers at attractions; note the survey only features those attractions that choose to participate and make their results public.

Figure 7.4.5: Visits to selected visitor attractions in Oxford

Attraction	2010 visitors	2011 visitors	2012 visitors	2013 visitors	2014 visitors	% 13/14
Ashmolean Museum	1,042,350	739,339	844,340	754,957	875,407	16.0
Cycle Tours Oxford	/	/	/	200	550	175.0
Museum of the History of Science	181,586	183,738	189,044	175,778	184,551	5.0
Oxford University Museum of Natural History	522,731	554,159	548,672	/	644,747	n/a
Pitt Rivers Museum	337,496	349,787	372,542	338,494	423,603	25.1
Sheldonian Theatre	15,000	16,633	17,753	18,202	20,435	12.3
St Michael at the North Gate	/	/	/	75,000	75,000	0.0

In this survey, the four Oxford museums all ranked in the top 20 most visited free attractions in the South East: Ashmolean Museum (2), Oxford University Museum of Natural History (3), Pitt Rivers Museum (5) and Museum of History of Science (9).

Tourism as a source of employment

The Economic Impact of Tourism on Oxfordshire Estimates for 2014 prepared by Tourism South East provides an assessment of the economic impact of tourism in Oxford.

Figure 7.4.5: Economic impact of tourism in Oxford

Full time equivalent employment supported by tourism spending

	Total 2014	Total 2013	% change
Oxford	9,746	9,356	4.20%

Actual employment supported by tourism spending

	Total 2014	Total 2013	% change
Oxford	13,310	12,779	4.20%

Proportion of jobs sustained

	Total employee jobs[1]	Total actual jobs supported	% of total workforce supported by tourism spend
Oxford	105,100	13,310	12.70%

[1] The information comes from the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) an employer survey conducted by ONS in December of each year

Trends

It seems likely that Oxford will continue to maintain its position as a popular destination for overseas visitors, the past trend has shown little variation with the city being ranked between 6th and 8th most popular destination over a period of 15 years.

In terms of domestic overnight tourism, the national trend is an upward growth in in the number of domestic trips (11% growth year on year) and corresponding growth in spend (8% growth, reaching an all-time high in nominal terms). This may be in part due to economic circumstances with families in particular, swapping overseas trips for domestic ones. It seems reasonable to project that some growth will continue in this sector and that it would also be seen at an Oxford level. In contrast, the number of British day visits nationally has been steady over the last few years as has the total spend.

Visit England has produced a report[2] which identifies five sets of trends that will influence domestic tourism over the period to 2023 and beyond. These include:

- population changes (including longer healthy life expectancy and a changing shape of families from horizontal to vertical i.e. families with more generations – but fewer people in each generation) which could mean more travelling older people and more cross-generational groupings
- economic recovery, it is unclear whether this would mean that the upward trend for domestic overnight visits continues, or is reversed, however the length of the downturn does seem to have imbedded some changes in behaviour including a new focus on value.

It seems likely that Oxford will continue to be an attractive destination for hotel operators and that if sites are available there would be a good degree of interest in their development and competition with other uses for sites.

Sustainability / Plan issues

- Tourists will continue want to access the city centre and the large number of day visitors (or part-day visitors) will mean many additional trips to the city centre with significant implications for traffic congestion and air quality.
- The quality of the visitor experience is likely to become a more important factor in travel choices as more options become available and competition between destinations increases. Quality and management of public realm, availability and accessibility of attractions and services will be key.
- Need to consider what priority hotel (and other tourism) uses are given in the plan due to latent demand and competing pressures for limited sites.

[2] Visit England (2013) Domestic Leisure Tourism Trends for the Next Decade