

Oxton Society Strategy, 2011

Introduction

This strategy was adopted by the Executive Committee at a special workshop meeting in March, 2011. It was presented to AGM in July 2011. It has been used as a framework for our Annual Report for 2013/14 which will be presented to the AGM in September 2014.

Our revised aims

We agreed four strategic aims which covered our “core business” and embraced everything that we might want to do. Our activities could then be seen as measurable steps towards meeting our aims.

Aim 1 – Promote and secure high standards of planning, landscape and architecture to preserve, improve and develop the area and its environs.

Aim 2- Enhance public awareness of Oxton’s history, architecture and environment.

Aim 3 – Foster community and business involvement to encourage civic pride.

Aim 4 – maintain the Society on a sound basis and sustainable financial footing, including working in partnership with others

We looked at all our existing and potential activities in terms of how they contributed to our new aims. We considered what this would mean in terms of three levels of ambition:

- Steady as you go
- Modest Growth
- Ambitious Growth

We quickly came to the view that “Modest Growth” was the most realistic direction to follow. We looked at what that would mean for our activities and the resources we would need (people and finance) to achieve this ambition.

Our financial profile

We need to maintain the Society on a healthy financial footing and make sure that our income matches our ambitions. Our financial profile of income and expenditure for a notional year is shown in the table below.

Typical year Regular commitments	Income	Expenditure
Membership fees	£2,000	
Grant aid	£400	
Administration		£1,500
Newsletters and website.		£1,000
Secret Gardens	£6,000	
Tree planting		£900
Lights shortfall		£400
Hanging baskets		£2,500
Contingencies		£100
	£8,400	£6,400

Amount available for projects	£2,000
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The administrative requirements for the society to function on a sound basis are:

- Communication with members (Newsletter and website)
- Provision for the AGM and annual report.
- Professional examination of the accounts.(Reporting to the Charity Commission)
- Civic Voice membership.
- Public liability insurance and committee members insurance.
- Provision of a meeting room for committee and members.
- Ideally the membership fees should cover this expenditure – which is roughly the case as the table shows.

The rest of our expenditure is covered by income (profit) from Secret Gardens and from reserves. Existing regular commitments include hanging baskets and tree planting. Possible future commitments include support for the History Group (up to £400 pa plus £600 for the history supplement) and dog bags (£500 pa). Also, we should be putting money aside each year to replace the Xmas Lights.

Our revised activity list

This section sets out the activities that we will pursue over the next 3-5 years in order to meet our aims. Note that some of these contribute to more than one aim. Some of the activities we do already and some are new.

Aim 1 - Promote and secure high standards of planning, landscape and architecture to preserve, improve and develop the area and its environs.

We will continue to:

- Comment on planning applications in or affecting the conservation area via a Planning Group.
- Comment on applications for work on trees.
- Make grants for members who want to plant new/replacement trees
- Help with litter reduction
- Install and maintain over 40 hanging baskets in the village centre
- Maintain Conservation Area signs at the entrances to the area
- Upgrade replacement street signs to heritage standards

And

- We are in the final stages of seeking an extension to the conservation area
- We have produced a draft Management Plan, including proposals for an Article 4(ii) Direction. This would protect historic features on the most valuable groups of dwellings in Oxtou and all sandstone walls and is now being considered by council officers.

Over the next 3-5 years, we will:

- Progress the implementation of the Management Plan.
- Promote the development of a Traffic Management and Parking Plan for Oxtou, in partnership with the Council. This will involve:
 - Drawing up a vision for how traffic circulation might be improved
 - Conducting traffic counts in order to model the impact of possible changes
 - Helping to finalise a traffic circulation plan
 - Assembling ideas about how parking might be improved
 - Helping to implement a new parking plan

- Investigate the possibility of Heritage Lottery funding so that we can offer support for the repair and maintenance of sandstone walls.
- Promote the improvement of shop fronts as and when opportunities occur
- Review the Oxton Design Award
- Maintain dog dirt bag dispensers and seek sponsorship to help finance the dog dirt bags.
- Seek opportunities for the financing of benches and additional litter bins

Aim 2 - Enhance public awareness of Oxton's history, architecture and environment.

We will continue to:

- Maintain and develop a website which includes latest news, history, policies, back copies of newsletters, advice notes, etc
- Publish a newsletter 5 or 6 times per year.
- Support the History Group which conducts local research, produces a history supplement for the newsletter, holds archive material and organises guided walks
- Seek appropriate funding to develop the archive and make it more accessible to local people.

Over the next 3-5 years, we will:

- Continue to support the History Group
- Consolidate improvements in the design of the Newsletter
- Further develop the website – both in terms of coverage and topicality.
- Examine ways of improving feedback from members, eg by using focus groups.
- Look at the possibility of developing the website to allow fees and tickets to be managed online.

Aim 3 - Foster community and business involvement to encourage civic pride.

We will continue to:

- Organise the annual Secret Gardens involving contributions from over 200 of our volunteers and garden owners with the cooperation of local charities.
- Organise the hanging baskets involving over 20 volunteers for installation and maintenance and arrangements for storing the bowsers.
- Organise a successful Xmas Lights community event
- Continue to encourage volunteering, including the “young volunteer of the year award”.
- Promote civic pride, including organising events in conjunction with Civic Voice.
- Liaise with Oxton businesses and consult on our activities

Over the next 3-5 years we will:

- Consider ways of improving our involvement with young people, including a Facebook presence,
- Continue to increase our membership, especially in the extended area.
- Strengthen our pool of volunteers by creating a register of volunteers with details of availability and support offered
- Look at ways of formally recognising the contribution of volunteers eg. an annual social event
- Strengthen our links with Oxton businesses by helping to improve their viability and the workings of the village centre.

Aim 4 – maintain the Society on a sound basis and sustainable financial footing, including working in partnership with others.

We already:

- Have a clear picture of our financial profile and operate within the limits of what we can afford.
- Finance the Society’s activities with a regular “profit” of about £5,000 pa from Secret Gardens.
- Have a healthy membership.
- Receive generous donations from local businesses towards Secret Gardens and Xmas Lights.
- Have an on-going drive to retain existing members and recruit new ones

- Work in partnership with the Council, Friends of the Arno, Friends of the Williamson, Oxtou Artists and Oxtou businesses including the Business Association.
- Have invested in new Xmas Lights, new facilities for the hanging baskets and Oxtou signs
- Have encouraged members to remember the Society in their will
- Have started to produce “fact sheets” to capture key aspects of our activities
- Have organised a range of Sub Groups to help us meet our objectives (see list in Appendix)

Over the next 3-5 years we will improve sustainability by;

- Producing a manual detailing how our finances are managed.
- Trying to maintain Secret Gardens on the current scale
- Producing a manual on how the Secret Gardens is organised.
- Examining ways of introducing on-line payments for fees and SG ticket sales
- Trying to make Xmas Lights self-financing
- Further strengthening the Committee e.g. History Group representative.
- Creating a register of volunteers with details of availability and support offered

And we will increase our income by:

- Reviewing the formula for the distribution of profits from Secret Gardens
- Agreeing an increase in membership fees
- Increasing the number of members
- Exploring the possibility of introducing a tiered “business membership (gold, silver, bronze) to replace our present ad hoc requests for donations
- Including periodic request for legacy donations in the newsletter.
- Applying for appropriate grants and external funding and looking for other opportunities to raise income.