

Background to Libraries and Culture

What is happening in Oxfordshire now

Oxfordshire County Council currently provides 44 libraries, Oxfordshire History Centre and Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock. Our city and district councils support regional museums, heritage sites, art and cultural centres. Free access to libraries, archives, heritage and cultural centres are essential for creativity, recreation, health and wellbeing, social and digital inclusion, community cohesion, freedom of information and lifelong learning.

Libraries play a vital role in acting as an information and social hub where communities can connect and regenerate in a safe, inclusive and empowering space. Libraries also provide essential free digital access to computers and the internet while staff and volunteers provide digital help. Currently, 11.3 million people in the UK don't have the basic skills or capabilities to thrive (Good Things Foundation, 2021). Oxfordshire libraries have a crucial part to play in bridging this wide digital (and social) divide.

Oxfordshire has a wealth of heritage, history, arts and culture, including many regional theatres, live music venues, arts centre, galleries and museums – which contribute to community wellbeing as well as international tourism and local economies. However, Covid-19 and Brexit have hit these organisations hard and there needs to be a strong commitment to investment and support for them in the immediate future.

What the Green Party needs to do

- Seek to position libraries, museums, arts and cultural venues at the heart of each super-connected '15/20-minute neighbourhood' (i.e. where most of the things we need to live well are within a 15/20-minute journey from home by bike, on foot or by public transport – shops, restaurants, some businesses, schools, recreation, community centres, etc).
- Seek to sustain and improve our local libraries as vital community hubs with excellent digital access, information and books.
- Seek to retrofit libraries, museums and heritage sites, when needed, to become carbon-neutral and fit for purpose. This is currently happening at Benson Library, South Oxfordshire.
- Work with the people who are employed in museums and heritage sites (across the private, public and charity sectors) to develop a strategic approach in order to Build Back Better. This would include a commitment to:
 - free public access;
 - an inclusive and decolonised heritage and history for all;
 - the digitisation of archives and exhibits for wider access and engagement.
- Work with the people who are employed in our regional arts centres, theatres and live music venues to co-ordinate a strategic approach to:
 - sustainability and carbon neutrality;
 - paying all staff a living wage;
 - providing high-quality community education and outreach;
 - community regeneration;

- increased accessibility and participation for all.