Case study: Queering Spires – a history of



The temporary exhibition reducing waste with eco-friendly practices won Sustainable Project of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards 2020.

The organisation

The Museum of Oxford is dedicated to telling the story of Oxford and its people.

The project

The temporary exhibition, Queering Spires aimed to tell the untold stories of hidden queer spaces in the city of Oxford.

The local authority-run museum wanted to focus on the principles of a circular economy and to counter the fact that temporary exhibitions tend to generate lots of waste.

Their aims for the exhibition were to reduce waste and ensure its procurement practices were socially and environmentally responsible.

The exhibition ran at Oxford Town Hall from September 2019 to March 2020.

Minimising waste and C02 emissions

From the beginning the museum built new relationships with nearby socially responsible businesses. This cut waste and CO2 emissions and also supported the local economy.

The museum commissioned new artwork created with recycled shoeboxes, old magazines and boards of reclaimed plywood. These materials came from an Oxford based social enterprise that employs, trains and supports people who face prejudice and barriers to work.

Ethical and charitable organisations

The majority of the elements used in the exhibition were borrowed or reused. Other items were purchased from ethical and charitable organisations within Oxford. These included furniture and décor from an organisation working to cut homelessness in the city, and a local eco-friendly printer.

They collected items using sustainable transport such as bikes and buses, avoiding the delivery of items. When this was not possible, the museum used an eco-friendly, low-emission taxi service instead.



The entrance hallway to the Queering Spires exhibition at the Museum of Oxford

The Award

Queering Spires won the inaugural Sustainable Project of the Year Award at the Museums + Heritage Awards 2020, sponsored by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This category was launched last year to recognise the efforts of the cultural sector in tackling sustainability and climate change.

The panel of judges praised the Museum of Oxford's "commitment and authenticity in putting sustainability at the very heart of the project". They felt their approach was a good model for the sector.

The Museums + Heritage Awards were hosted online for the first time on 22 September 2020. The Fund also sponsored the Sustainability Project of the Year Award in 2021.

The results

Marta Lomza, Community Engagement Officer at the Museum of Oxford, said the award was validation of the museum's efforts.

"We now know it's possible to have sustainability at the heart of exhibition curating. We will continue to hold ourselves to that standard and keep pushing our own boundaries."

Raising the profile of the museum's 'green' efforts

The award has been instrumental in raising the profile of the museum's 'green' efforts.

This has resulted in its participation in the Green Arts Charter for Oxford. It has also featured in online talks for the Museums + Heritage Autumn Series and the Arts Marketing Association festival.

The future

Marta said the Museum of Oxford is now more conscious of its environmental impact and of ways to minimise this with every new project.

The museum is participating in the Happy Museum's, 'No Going Back' peer learning programme. Following the learnings from this programme, it hopes to shape a new programme centred around the question of food sustainability (past, present and future), which will be co-created with its communities.

Top tips

Marta shared her top tips on creating a sustainable project:

- Before you start the project, ask yourself what 'sustainability' means to you in this particular context.
- What are the areas you have control over that you can improve?
- Tailor your actions to your staff resources – if you're a small organisation, maybe focus on one aspect.
- Work with your local environmental activists and networks. They can help guide you through your processes and help you build new partnerships.
- Don't beat yourself up if you can't ensure absolutely everything is 'green'.

Find out how the Museum of Oxford is currently undergoing a £3.2million museum redevelopment with the help of a £1.63m National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.



efyd mewn ...

Brighton Pride, 1995. Credit: Sally Munt



vice from Brighton LGBT+ leaders



Cara McCann. Credit: Pacemaker Press

Hope for Northern Ireland’s LGBT+ community, thanks to emergency funding