

Special Interest Group – Promoting Oxfordshire
Monday 25 February 2008, 8am @ Unipart

Present: Keith Mitchell (KM) – Oxon CC
Frank Nigriello (FN) - OEP
Jean Mitchell (JM) - OEP
Elaine McKechnie (EMc) - OEP
Dave Waller (DW) - Oxon County Council
Helen Ryan (HR) – Oxon CC
Philip Wootton (PW) – Business Link
Rob McKay (RMc) – SEEDA
Martin Dare-Edwards (MD-E) – Infineum
Will Barton (WB) – West Oxon DC
Ross Hurley (RH) - SEEDA

Toby Warren (TW) – Vale of White Horse DC
Steve Daniels (SD) – Oxford City Council
Steven Newman (SN) – Cherwell District Council
James Dillon-Godfrey (JD-G) – Oxford Airport
Philip Campbell (PC) – Milton Park
Rebecca Baxter (RB) – BMW
David Kingham (DK) – Oxford Innovation
Mark Wittet (MW) - Newsquest
Nina Hutchins (NH) – Chase Marketing Solutions
Richard Mercer (RM) – The Oxford Trust

1. Apologies - Steve Moss

2. Welcome and background

KM welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the reasoning for introducing such a group. The group was formed as a result of recognition to promote the County as a place to locate a business in order to help grow the economy. However, developing an 'Oxfordshire brand' will be a complex process considering the other brands that already exist within the County. A county-wide brand could work well as an underpinning link between existing brands though.

3. FN Presentation

FN gave a presentation about the key elements this group needs to tackle (presentation attached with the minutes. FN highlighted that we need to promote the County internally, as much as externally, ensuring that existing businesses stay here.

4. Discussion

Oxfordshire has 4 major sectors operating within it:

- Science
- Engineering
- Retail
- Publishing

It also benefits from a great environment, providing a good quality of life for many, as well as an excellent location with good links into London and other areas of the country. Oxfordshire has been described as having the advantages of being in London, without the disadvantages.

There was a general consensus that Oxfordshire doesn't need any more warehouses or head offices sucking resources from other areas, but it does want to attract more high value-added businesses, particularly in the high-tech industries. The meaning of growth in this context also needs to be defined – 'smart' growth and 'physical' growth have varied meanings and this will be important when getting buy in from local authorities in particular.

Oxfordshire is home to a number of 'hidden gems', which could be added to the OEP website and used to help promote the County – businesses often want to be close to other similar businesses, especially in the high-tech sector. The first step should be identifying those hidden gems. This could also help the issue of low aspiration levels within school children and help inspire them to increase attainment by giving them something to aim for.

It is also important that we ensure the existing businesses stay in the County – this is as important, or more so, than attracting new businesses. RMc commented that Milton Keynes specifically target companies that

have recently had planning permission turned down – this is a particular problem in Oxfordshire and we need to be careful that we don't lose good companies to the competition.

There was some discussion about whether a brand should be specific to particular industries, or more general to form an umbrella brand with specific campaigns. No conclusion was reached however and it was suggested that we could invite a brand specialist to a future meeting to discuss in more detail. SN noted that they are using a brand professional when looking at the future of the Cherwell-M40 Partnership – he will feed in any information gathered.

Another issue to consider is company supply chains – the automotive industry is particularly good at building a local supply chain – this could be adapted for other industries and used to attract specific sectors, particularly the biotech industry.

The Quadrant project could form a key part of promoting the County. TW introduced a recently produced report on the Quadrant and the potential economic impacts. It is available electronically if necessary.

5. Next steps

It was agreed that undertaking an asset audit of the County and its hidden gems would be a good first step in this process. We can then promote specific success stories to help raise the profile of the County.

Action: OEP to initiate asset audit for County.

FN highlighted 5 elements to be considered when developing a brand which we can start thinking about at the next meeting:

- Emotional connection
- Value
- Accessibility
- Awareness
- Relevant differentiation

Data and intelligence on this topic is scarce but the OEP is starting to work more closely together with the Oxfordshire Data Observatory so could commission specific research. JM also noted that some information may be available somewhere so will investigate.

Action: JM/DW to investigate research available on place promotion and attitudes to business location.

Interesting data to collect:

- Why have businesses moved here?
- Why have businesses rejected Oxfordshire?
- Why businesses never considered Oxfordshire?

MD-E informed the group of a survey carried out to establish the attitudes of business leaders to their location, which he agreed to circulate details of.

Action: MD-E to circulate report on attitudes to business location.

Action: The group was asked to prepare a 50 word 'postcard' considering the following questions:

- What 'hidden gems' are you aware of and why are you nominating them?
- What attracted you to locate your business in Oxfordshire?
- What strategy do you think we should pursue when promoting the County?
- Who else should attend this group?
- Do you know of any brand professionals that could attend future meetings?

Deadline – Friday 28th March.

It would also be useful to develop a matrix of competitor activity to compare ourselves with. This could form part of a future project when the resources are available.

6. Date of next meetings

TBC