Strategy

2020 – 2023

Museum of
**Natural
History**

Contents

The Covid pandemic has imposed a profound shock across the UK cultural sector, and this extends to the Museum of Natural History which had to close to the public three times in 2020 with attendant commercial losses.

It is also clear that financial recovery from this point will be gradual, not least because it is anticipated that overseas visitors will be slow to return to international travel. At the same time, the crisis has created opportunities for this and other museums, and has dramatically accelerated the gradual drift to digital engagement and collections access. This short-term strategy aims to guide the Museum back to financial stability over a three-year period but also to maximise the benefits from new ways of engaging with audiences from local to global, and to utilise the rapid accumulation of digital expertise within the Museum.

The strategy will also help to deliver the major projects that are underway in the Museum and across the University of Oxford's Gardens Libraries & Museums (GLAM), including delivery of the masterplan and redisplay project *Life, As We Know It*; the creation of collections storage solutions for coming decades; successful completion of the NLHF-funded *HOPE for the Future* project; and continuing to develop our community of researchers.

At the same time, the Museum will contribute to delivering the major elements of the University's strategic plan in relation to research, teaching and supporting a strong relationship with our local community.

The principles of equity, diversity and inclusion underpin all of the Museum's work and will be reflected in our approach to collections access, our working practices, our audience priorities and our communications.

Our Vision

Using the Museum's collections to advance, communicate and share the sciences of the natural environment with diverse global audiences, by triggering, nurturing and sustaining a lifelong interest in the natural world.

Strategic challenges

The Museum continues to be guided by the five strategic challenges articulated in the 2017–2022 Strategic Plan:

Challenge 1

Connect the Museum's collections with increasingly diverse audiences – local, national and global – through innovative and creative engagement and programming, both physical and digital

Challenge 2

Take a proactive and innovative role to challenge established inequalities in order to inspire and support diverse new generations of scientists

Challenge 3

Ensure a continuum of engagement from early childhood through to mature adulthood, and enable a rich and sustained lifelong relationship with the Museum, its collections and the natural sciences

Challenge 4

Enable everyone to reflect and make decisions on issues relating to the natural world in an informed, evidence-led manner

Challenge 5

Support the mission of the University of Oxford and other higher education institutions in relation to research, object-led learning, and public engagement with research

Collections

The Museum will implement a series of digital initiatives to improve digital access to collections for research, teaching and engagement globally, and will collaborate with other GLAM institutions to develop long-term, purpose-built storage solutions.

1 Improve the care, conservation and accessibility of collections through improvements to buildings and facilities, including storage cabinets, display cases and the delivery of new purpose-built storage facilities shared with other GLAM departments.

2 Implement a digital asset management system (DAMS) to manage and commercialise the Museum's images and AV files and associated intellectual property rights, and set up effective workflows to enable staff from all areas of the Museum to store, retrieve and use the digital assets.

3 Increase the searchability and utility of Online Collections through targeted data cleaning and adding images, CT scan data and similar datasets, to enable researchers, the specialist amateur community and educators to use the collections during a time of restricted travel and constraints on the use of space.

4 Develop targeted digitisation projects, including internships, volunteering opportunities and/or external funding, that incrementally deliver objectives such as digitising high-use collections and diversifying the Museum's voice in terms of colonial legacies and women in science.

5 Review internal practice and workflows to move towards embedding all collections processes (e.g. loans, enquiries) in the Museum's collection management system, Axiell EMu, in order to increase the consistency and efficiency of systems, and to support collections staff.

6 Develop mechanisms to export collections data and images to consolidated metadata sites such as NBN, GBIF, Access to Archives and Art UK to promote the discovery of digital assets.

People

The Museum will place staff wellbeing at the centre of its activity and support career development at all levels.

1 Minimise the impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental wellbeing of staff, students and volunteers through clear communication, policies and support.

2 Further develop the welcoming, supportive and inspiring work environment across the Museum in order to provide maximum support to staff wellbeing and, whilst preserving this culture, review the flexibility of working arrangements post-pandemic.

3 Enhance training and skills development for all staff through an enhanced PDR process, and invest in the skills development of staff members.

4 Ensure that recruitment procedures enable a diverse and representative workforce, and that the Museum fosters an inclusive environment that promotes equity and values the diversity of all staff and volunteers.

Audience Engagement & Museum Learning

The successful programme of events and exhibitions will be expanded to have an increased digital reach, using the pilot work carried out in 2020. The Museum will continue to provide strong support for schools and universities, with science capital and diversity at the core of its ethos.

1 Work with partners to assess the needs and interests of our local and university communities. Use this work as a basis to inform programming that is accessible, equitable and sustainable.

2 Use a collaborative approach to develop high quality science exhibitions, displays and programming by being creative and experimental; exploring the arts:science interface; carrying out robust evaluation and benchmarking to improve our outputs; and embedding the most successful experiences into a sustainable coherent offer that balances programming across both physical and digital audiences.

3 Build and rebuild visitor confidence by creating safe and welcoming spaces for local people and the Oxford University community to meet.

4 Provide access to high quality science learning opportunities for people of all ages, valuing and building on the knowledge and skills that participants bring with them.

5 Contribute to the understanding and action required to respond to climate and biodiversity crises through our exhibitions, programming and communications on ecological and environmental science.

6 Develop the Museum's *Life, As We Know It* masterplan and redisplay programme, and its digital equivalents, to address the motivations of our varied audiences and provide them with an inspiring and illuminating space that stimulates curiosity about the natural world and our place within it.

Research

The Museum will continue to build its research team through the recruitment of independent research fellows and take a lead in supporting doctoral and early career researchers.

1 Sustain the Museum's research activity by recruiting additional externally funded independent research fellows and diversifying their funding sources.

2 Enrich the Museum's collections through targeted research-led digitisation, creating new opportunities for collaborative research and student project supervision.

3 Support researchers to restructure their time-limited research programmes following the postponement and cancellation of data collection trips and field work.

4 Support the career development of researchers on fixed-term contracts, enabling them to secure permanent employment in an academic or related post.

5 Further develop public engagement with research through the Contemporary Science & Society exhibition series, and associated display and events programmes.

Environmental Responsibility

As a museum of the natural environment, the Museum will be proactive in finding sustainable solutions to its operational needs and further developing a culture of sustainability within GLAM. It will also engage with its communities and audiences to enable an understanding of the need for action and what can be achieved through individual actions.

1 Develop and implement an ambitious Museum sustainability policy that is integrated with the new University plan, but which is specific to the challenges of a museum with large collections, large audiences and a historic building.

2 Develop and implement an internal transport policy tailored to the Museum.

3 Investigate options for a new café and external catering suppliers that operate to sustainability principles, both for the forthcoming *Meat the Future* exhibition and for the longer term.

4 Ensure that the Museum has the minimum environmental footprint possible in relation, for example, to the recycling of temporary exhibition materials, the choice of suppliers and the sourcing of retail stock.
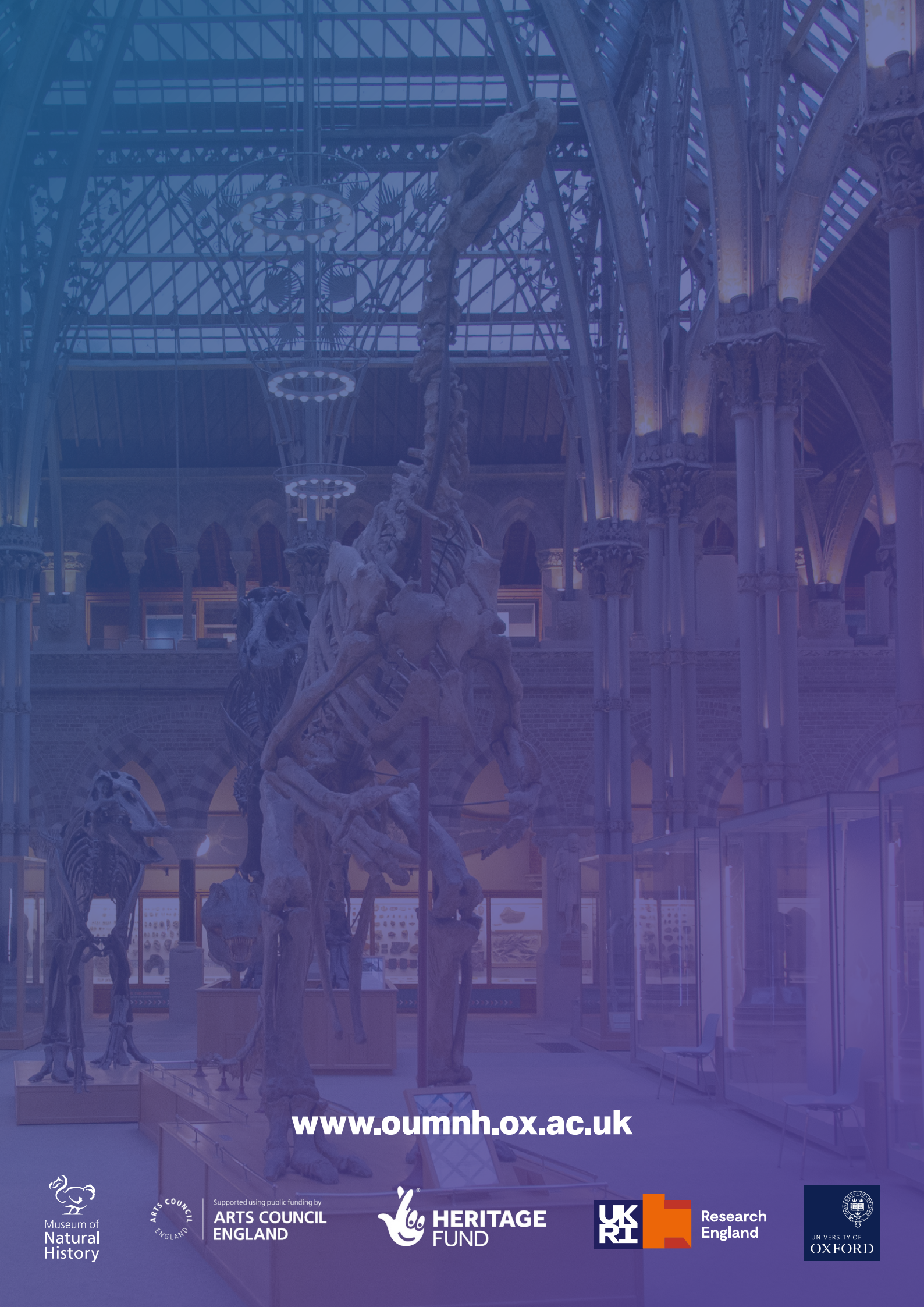
Infrastructure

Working within the context of a 160-year-old, Grade 1-listed architectural masterpiece, the internal systems will continue to be renovated and improved to create a building, and wider estate, fit for 21st century science and public engagement.

1 Complete the network cabling and lower gallery lighting upgrade, and implement the Chorus VOIP telephone system.

2 Further develop robust and effective audience data collection and management systems in order to maximise fundraising potential, including enhancement of the Galaxy system with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) capacity or an equivalent.

3 Address the growing need to accept a wider range of payment methods available to visitors, to increase access to our ticketing and online operations.

4 Seek to improve the environment in the main court for the benefit of both visitors and the collections.

Finance and Funding

In collaboration with GLAM institutions and the University of Oxford Development Office, the Museum will strive to make a smooth recovery from the financial impacts of Covid in the shortest possible time.

1 Rebuild the commercial base and explore new opportunities and ways of working, including links to Reuben College, the Pitt Rivers Museum and GLAM more broadly; hybrid physical/digital events; changing models and requirements for venue hire; and new commercial collaborations.

2 Expand and enhance the venue hire offer through the newly refurbished Westwood Room and equipping existing spaces for hybrid events.

3 Seek a new commercial partner for the café and maximise the return, with possible evening use for later night openings, and operating with a sustainability-led, environmental ethos.

4 Increase the retail offer by expanding the online store; develop a click-and-collect system; and collaborate with other GLAM departments in the roll-out of digital asset licencing.

5 Generate increased levels of philanthropic income for the Museum's strategic priorities while diversifying the sources of this funding. Focus on securing the matched funding to fulfil obligations to existing funders, such as the NLHF-funded *HOPE for the Future* project.

6 Develop the portfolio of individual major donors and establish a membership programme within the Museum. Nurture the relationships with current trusts and foundations to increase their future support.

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