

Oxford Botanic Garden  
& Arboretum

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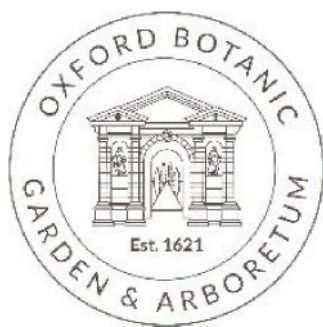
**Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum (OBGA)**

**Harcourt Arboretum Visitor and Learning Centre – A Gateway to Nature**

**NL-21-00033**

**National Lottery Heritage Fund Stage 2 Application**

**August 2022**



## Interpretation Consultant Brief

### Introduction

Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum (OBGA) is part of Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) Division.

Harcourt Arboretum comprises 130 acres of Grade One listed heritage landscape and contains threatened trees from across the globe as well as threatened, local wildflower meadows and native woodland. We have a unique opportunity to increase access to this unique heritage and natural capital. But currently, most visitors are local, Friends of the gardens and arboretum, families, or adults with specific interests in trees. Our 'gateway to nature' project will transform our site and diversify our audiences.

The Arboretum holds a living collection of trees set within a unique mosaic of woodlands, coppices, meadows and ponds. This historic, *Picturesque* landscape contains the best collection of trees in Oxfordshire. Visitors can wander among galleries of trees, the unique Serpentine Ride, and threatened Oxfordshire and UK wildflower meadows. These habitats provide a home not only for trees and wild flowers but also for a wide range of animals and insects: deer, badgers, bats, dragonflies, owls, and woodland birds. Together these habitats support an amazing range of biodiversity at risk across the UK. We exist in a state of climate emergency: there has never been a more important time to engage people with the importance of trees and wildlife. The Arboretum has significant untapped potential to foster a care and appreciation of nature. However, to achieve this we must improve our offer. At the centre of this transformational project is a new Visitor and Learning Centre (VLC). We currently have limited facilities to deliver impactful, educational work at the core of our mission and values. The new VLC will enable us to:

- Diversify our visitor profile by providing facilities such as educational, exhibition, café and retail to help us engage local communities. We will develop our offer through partnership working, enhanced by the new facilities;
- Become a family friendly site. Members of staff will use local networks and children centres to introduce the Arboretum as a fun, engaging place to visit. The VLC will be an essential space to welcome groups and families;
- Improve wellbeing for those with mental health issues. We will develop nature-based activities in partnership with the University of Oxford's Department of Psychiatry. Participants for these activities will come from the local Oxfordshire social prescribing partnership, including patients from Warneford hospital and mental health charity Restore. This will become a sector leading example and template for social prescribing – dialling up access to nature to improve health and wellbeing;
- Provide an all-weather visitor and educational experience. The VLC will provide space for educational activity and exhibitions, come rain or shine;
- Improve our commercial revenue with a café and gift shop. By supporting local suppliers and craft makers, the shop and café will be a key opportunity to raise income sustainably, to continue our preservation and conservation activity;
- Increase the understanding of the heritage landscape with activity focusing on biodiversity and the importance of plants. Exciting and innovative interpretation and displays will inspire a generations of environmentally conscious citizens.

## **The brief**

OBGA's Mission Statement is to share the scientific wonder and importance of plants with the world. A priority within OBGA's Strategic Plan (2018-2022) is to embrace the University of Oxford's commitment to engagement. This is embedded within the Core Strategy of *Education and Engagement*, in which OBGA enhances learning about plants and plant science through inspirational education, public engagement, and engagement with natural capital.

We know from our current visitor data that we need to diversify our audience at the Arboretum. The majority of visitors 'visit with family and friends' and for 'rest and relaxation'. Many of our non-users however, were 'not sure' or 'didn't know' who the Arboretum was for. We need interpretation that works for all audiences that is innovative, exciting, creative and informative. We will achieve this through creating opportunities for engagement with the Arboretum's living collections, heritage and landscape, and research from the University of Oxford. The interpretation will be developed in collaboration with our curators and scientists, to ensure accuracy and relevance.

The interpretation will be transformative – it will evoke curiosity, interest and excitement, and deliver powerful and meaningful messages. It will seek active participation where possible, placing the visitor at the centre of content development. We will draw on our understanding of visitors' needs and barriers, and engage them in a dialogue, intentionally.

Interpretation will take different forms around the site, from panels with QR codes, and interactive displays in an exhibition space, to seats made within living trees. Importantly, co-curation alongside our new audiences and communities, will ensure the interpretation is accessible to all.

## **Key messages**

The interpretation will centre around the four themes explained below. It will connect all the programmes of activity across the site including community engagement, wellbeing research conservation work, and rare woodland crafts. It will also feed into the new exhibition space, allowing for a truly multi-sensory experience.

1. Mental health and wellbeing: how can we guide people's mindfulness, help them to stop and see trees in a different way? This could be in the form of a bench on which a visitor might lie down and see the canopy from beneath.
2. The importance of trees: how can we inspire people with the importance of trees in a changing world? We will explain the threats trees face and how the Arboretum works to conserve them; issues of contemporary relevance including climate change.
3. Biodiversity: Oxford is an international centre of excellence for research into biodiversity. How can we make this accessible for everyone, and call people to action?
4. Legacy: how can we explore challenging messages about our past – colonialism, how plants arrived? How does OBGA work with international partners today – what has changed?

## Scope of Work

OBGA is appointing an Interpretation Consultant to support the delivery of the project for the development phase. The successful consultant will produce a detailed Interpretation Plan for submission with a Delivery Phase application to the NLHF.

The plan must comply with current NLHF guidelines. The Interpretation Plan must focus on OBGA's priority audiences (set out in the full application, and with further detail in our Audience Development Strategy). Before starting, the consultant must ensure that he/she is fully aware of the latest requirements of the NLHF (Strategic Funding Framework for 2019–2024) and be well-versed in the guidelines for this work.

The Development Phase will focus on audience consultation, interaction, prototyping and evaluation. As co-curation with target groups is a vital aspect of our interpretation, the Interpretation Consultant must be willing to work in a co-production model that includes voices from the local community. The successful applicant will work alongside the Project Board, Project Steering Group and existing staff to deliver outcomes as follows:

- A project identity, a tone of voice, that connects the various strands of activity across the Arboretum through powerful interpretation;
- Scoping exercise on high quality and scientifically accurate content that can be used in the exhibition space and around the site. The Interpretation Consultant will work with architects to integrate the interpretation of the building design both internally and externally;
- Audience consultation, including testing, piloting and evaluation, to inform the interpretation. A core aim of the project is to diversify our audiences, so interpretation needs to consider motivations to visit and different audiences' needs;
- The Interpretation Consultant will work with the NLHF Outreach Officers to ensure interpretation includes target groups and new audiences at all the stages of the design. This will be documented throughout;
- A plan to deliver inspiring interpretation in a range of formats across the site. People learn in different ways and multiple methods of engagement will be used (e.g. living seats in trees, benches, mindfulness-related/interactive living displays);
- A plan to deliver a content-rich, unique and interactive interpretation in the exhibition space. This is an opportunity to inform the fit-out of the exhibition space, such as light levels, power, internet connectivity, seating etc. (e.g. graphic panels, computer-based technology, botanical illustration, sculpture, herbarium specimens, multisensory experiences, mobile devices);
- Costing all required elements, to ensure value for money, including installation and maintenance, and a project timetable;
- Wellbeing is a unique feature of this project and the Interpretation Plan will need to reflect this and work towards the goal of becoming a leader in the field of wellbeing in outdoor space.
- Defined learning outcomes for the Interpretation Plan that will measure success;

## Evaluation

The successful consultant will be required to assist OBGA in developing an effective and achievable Evaluation Plan and feedback facilities that can be used to monitor audience responses to interpretation, ongoing activities and sustain an awareness of audiences' expectations of, and responses to the overall project.

### **Reporting**

The successful consultant will report to the Project Group, submitting regular reports and attending Steering Groups and the NLHF meetings as required.

### **Project Timescales**

The work will be carried out between October 2022 and January, with a final plan submitted for approval by OBGA by June 2023 in time for the anticipated NLHF meeting in July 2023.

### **Available budget**

£7,500

### **Tender Requirements**

OBGA requires all those invited to quote to submit a proposal to carry out this project that covers the following:

- Project methodology and programme – short, succinct and practical in nature;
- Outline of the project team (including CVs);
- Fixed price project fee, plus estimate of reasonable expenses;
- Two references.

The tenderer should be able to demonstrate:

- Previous experience of preparing and delivering successful interpretation plans;
- Methodology for delivering an effective interpretation plan within the time frame of the Round 2 application to the NLHF. This must include an adequate consultation programme;
- Demonstrable understanding of the NLHF process;
- Experience of working with local groups and communities;
- Proven skills in consultation and education;
- Proven experience of working with large groups of volunteers.

The tender should be provided in both electronic and paper format.

### **Tender Evaluation**

The criteria for the recruitment of a consultant is as follows:

<b>Selection criteria</b>	<b>Weighting</b>
Quality and experience	40%
Methodology and approach to commission	30%

Tender Price	15%
Interview	10%
Location of supplier	5%
TOTAL	100%

The award of the contract will be based on the most economically advantageous tender in terms of the stated criteria.

### **Contact Details**

Please email any questions regarding this brief to: Chris Thorogood  
[chris.thorogood@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:chris.thorogood@obg.ox.ac.uk)

### **Submission of Tender**

Quotations must be received by November 2022

Quotations may be submitted either electronically or via post. If sent via post, envelopes must be marked on the front with the phrase 'Activity Plan Tender'. There should be no other identifying marks or company details on the envelope.

Any quotations received after the deadline will be disqualified from the process.

All proposals should be a maximum of 20 pages in length (preferably shorter), excluding appendices.

Short-listed candidates will be invited to attend a presentation and interview process.

Please note that the applicant may also apply for the Activity Plan Consultant or the Evaluation Consultant roles.

Please ensure that a fixed price is included with all quotations and send completed tenders to:

Heidi El-Megrissi, Oxford Botanic Garden, Rose Lane, Oxford, OX1 4AZ. [heidi.el-megrissi \(at\) obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:heidi.el-megrissi@obg.ox.ac.uk)

