

# Oxfam's first-ever Superstore: A Community Destination.



# Executive Summary

Oxfam's superstore is a first for the charity. At 18,500 square feet, it's Oxfam's largest store to date, with a supersized retail experience to match. Oxfam wanted to tap into the growth in ethical shopping with a store format to attract the next generation of shoppers, donors and volunteers - its three key audiences. Complete with cafe, marketplace, online hub, donation drive-through and community meeting space, the superstore is fulfilling its ambition to be a hub for the local community, as well as a shop where people can buy things they love to support a great cause.

Launched in September 2019, the store has performed extremely well against its business case, and is well on its way to meeting its year 3 forecasts in terms of sales and community engagement.

- Feedback shows that customers love the space, describing it as 'the ultimate charity store' and 'definitely the future of charity shops'. Of those visiting the store for an event or workshop, **100% said they would visit the superstore again.**
- Total sales since launch have already reached **two-thirds of its forecast for financial year 3 of trading** - that's despite only being open for 9 months due to Lockdown restrictions, and its location on a business park not known for retail. Weekly sales averages are tracking competitor and benchmark Oxfam stores, even though it only opens 4 days a week, with actual sales peaking at REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA over business plan in its opening week.
- Online Hub has generated REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA in online sales to date.
- The vibrant store experience is convincing people to spend more - **with average transaction value more than two and a half times that of benchmark stores**
- Drive-through facility is **literally driving the volume of donations upwards** - 86k bags have been donated since store launched
- The quality of the store experience is providing more and better volunteering opportunities, **attracting three times as many volunteers as a standard Oxfam shop**
- The store is facilitating a variety of successful community events, including Oxford's Future Skills Program, a scheme that has helped **over 29 local women take positive steps towards employment.**

All of which means a store that's not only an important source of revenue for Oxfam's life-saving projects, but one that has value beyond shopping, to its community. A result that Julie Neeve, project manager for New Store Formats at Oxfam, is delighted with:

**'Looking to the future, the superstore has fantastic potential to connect all our audiences - staff, volunteers, customers, donors - with the cause, through the shop design and events programme, and the opportunities for community engagement it facilitates. A combination that we think will have a radical impact. Based on its performance so far in a tough first year, the superstore is proving itself as a powerful source of income for Oxfam's projects.'**





# Project Context and Overview

## Outline of Project Brief

Oxfam is constantly looking for ways to activate its stores so they work harder to raise valuable funds and connect people with the charity's life-saving work. We created Oxfam's current store concept to do just this, which has now successfully rolled-out across many of its 600-plus stores. But Oxfam wanted to create something bigger and better - a new type of charity store to meet the changing needs and behaviour of the next generation of shoppers, donors and volunteers.

The charity saw a big opportunity to generate income by creating a destination for shoppers with its first-ever superstore. The idea was to open a much larger, out-of-town format that would deliver a more rewarding and convenient customer experience, whilst offering a wider range of products and services, such as a cafe, community hub and easier donation drop off.

At 12 times the size of a standard Oxfam store, the store design needed to do the following:

- [Build community engagement into the heart of the store - with space for meetings workshops, talks and local business activities](#)
- [Help promote Oxfam Online Shop and boost online sales of donated gear](#)
- [Deliver a quality retail experience to encourage dwell time, increase spend encourage people to volunteer](#)
- [Connect people's purchases to Oxfam's vital work to alleviate poverty](#)
- [Make it easier to donate preloved stuff](#)



## Market Overview, Business Challenges and Scope of Work



More and more people are shopping for a cause, choosing genuine ethical and sustainable brands that better reflect their own values. The rise of the preloved market also marks a turning point in people's attitudes to buying second-hand. Oxfam wanted to tap into this growth by launching a new type of experiential charity store, of the kind that hadn't been seen before in the UK. Other charities have large format stores, such as Cancer Research UK and Sue Ryder, but these are just bigger versions of their smaller stores and focus on the discount end of the market. Oxfam looked overseas for inspiration, to Sweden's Erikshjälpen, and worked with the charity to understand its superstore operating model.

The new superstore would sell a wider variety of donated products than any of its other stores, from clothing, homewares, books and furniture to small electrical items. It would also include large white goods which have been refurbished and come with a 6-month warranty. The space also needed to accommodate the Sourced By Oxfam range of new products.

Oxfam's strategy is to invest in all the basic elements of retail - product offer, store design, customer experience and visual merchandising - to create a local destination for sustainable shopping that would be sector leading. Our challenge was to create a memorable, distinctive, modern experience whilst sticking to Oxfam's tight budget - an essential part of the brief. The design also needed to be flexible so that it could scale up and down for future superstore sites.

Influenced by Erikshjälpen's success trading from similar sites, the store was to be located on a business park - with lower rent costs - rather than a classic retail destination. Oxfam decided to follow its lead, and open for just 4 days a week, using the remaining non-trading days to re-merchandise and restock the store to keep the store experience fresh and interesting. Oxfam found a site in its home-town of Oxford, where the first Oxfam store opened in 1948, and gave us the task of converting this hanger-style space into a charity store for the 21st century.

Our starting point was Oxfam's core retail proposition: a shop first and foremost, where people could find things they love, but a shop for the local area that brings people together around a positive cause that's always on. We knew from the outset that this store must act as a vibrant part of its community. Oxfam hoped that the store would also be a destination for workers in the offices located on the same business park, as well as shoppers from further afield. Oxfam also wanted there to be dedicated meeting and event spaces for local groups and social enterprises to use, and a place for small businesses and makers to sell their wares. We needed to plan for the space to include a quality cafe as well as the provision of a dedicated 'online hub', to be housed on the mezzanine floor. Oxfam wanted to use the hub to promote and help drive sales through its online store.



## Design Solution

An in-depth customer experience workshop revealed many opportunities to better connect target customers with Oxfam's work and make donating easier. Acting on these, we took elements of our existing store concept and brought them bang up-to-date, evolving them so they have impact and work for the larger space.

The result is a store designed for shopping, but one that also offers so much more for today's belief-driven consumers. A streamlined, modern experience, the store is both easier to shop and for staff to manage, whilst constantly reminding visitors, at every touchpoint, the difference they can make by shopping, donating and volunteering at Oxfam.

Items that Oxfam uses in the field feature heavily, always linking the experience back to the cause. Water taps at the customer water filling station are the same ones used by Oxfam to get clean water to disaster areas. Tarpaulins form a backdrop to merchandised areas, packing cases display products. The cafe, situated by the entrance, is built into a water tower, used by Oxfam to relieve water shortages, a striking feature welcoming visitors and emphasising the store's community ethos. Vibrant rugs, baskets from the 'Sourced by Oxfam' range are used in the cafe, on seating and throughout the space, each with their own 'maker stories' to tell.

The design uses clean, simple and positive cause-related messaging throughout the store layered with bold, retail messages in black and white to clearly signpost product areas and meet the needs of different kinds of shoppers. A screen, mantra wall and eye-catching merchandising island that changes every week, also greet shoppers, setting out the store's reason for being. We opted for simple, low-tech and flexible ideas that are cost-effective but have maximum visual impact. Colour blocking glassware and ceramics sit on simple white shelving, clearly designating the area for homeware. Shoes are stacked in neat rows on upcycled ex-flower stands. Books are displayed on black shelves with trestle tables featuring must-read titles.

A mini-market hall runs through the middle of the store, with booths - built from actual stalls found in any street market and easy to assemble and disassemble - piled high with colourful blankets and baskets. The stalls emulate the traders' area that establishes itself in refugee camps. In the superstore, it's a marketplace open to local charities and community groups to sell their products, but also used by Oxfam to highlight donated products or tell a specific story around some of its 'Sourced by Oxfam' merchandise. The store relies heavily on the quality of donated products, and the design makes donating easier too, with a drive-through donation point and loads of free parking.

**'A bright, open space, beautifully curated and full of great deals. So much more stuff to choose from!  
The staff are lovely and had a nice cup of coffee from the cafe inside a water tank (wow!)  
- definitely the future of charity shops!' Customer Review, Facebook.**

**Key Facts: Launch Date: 7th September 2019, Design Fees: £REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA**





# Results

The superstore's launch was enormously successful and Oxfam is very happy with its continued performance through a rocky year of disruption due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. As the charity's first-ever Superstore, it's opening was extremely well received. It was met by considerable press interest and quickly gained many 4 and 5 star online reviews from visitors:

'The ultimate charity shop' and 'Vibrant, energised Oxfam shop where you can find a bargain but also help fund lifesaving and life affirming projects that change lives forever'.

'Spacious, always changing. Great new space, lots to choose from and new stock always coming in. Look forward to my weekly Saturday visits'

'Great store with a cafe. It has a size-able section for every donated department as well as lots of Oxfam's own fair trade products. The Water Tank Cafe has a nice seating area in the front corner of the store. It is a bit out of town but definitely worth it if you can get there'

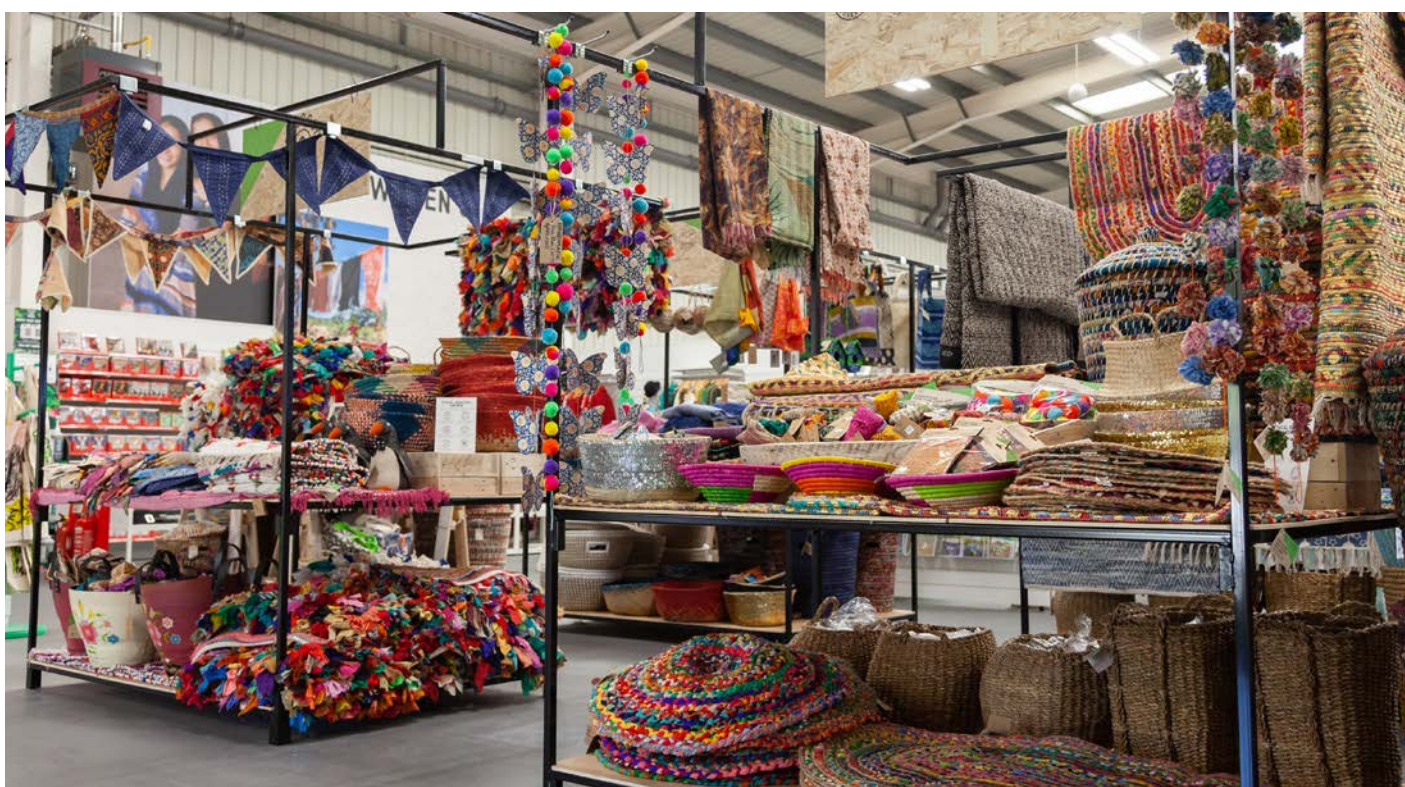
'Brilliant store, beautifully arranged. From pre-loved clothes, homeware and a million other things to treasures from all over the world - the selection is excellent. Oh and I can recommend the flapjacks'

'Well laid out, easy to find items, both old and new fair trade including refill station. Cafe is lovely too but dangerous as you can observe store and spot items missed'

'Fabulous shop, beautifully laid out and huge range of stock. Excellent place to start your Christmas shopping or refresh your wardrobe'.

Oxfam created a business case for its new store, with ambitions for it to be its best performing store in its 600-strong network by the end of its third year of trade, and a place genuinely valued by the community it serves. An analysis of sales data, customer feedback and community initiatives shows that the store is well on its way to achieving this in its first year of being open.

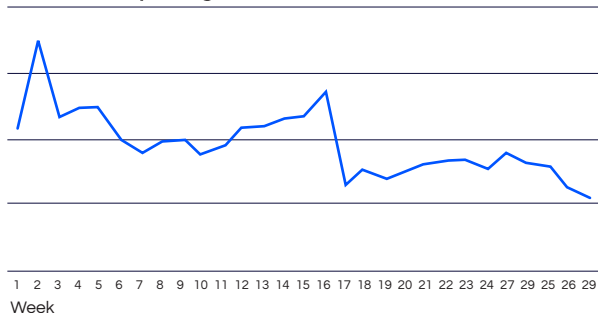
1- <https://www.idealhome.co.uk/news/oxfam-superstore-234833>, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-49650226>,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/sep/01/we-want-wow-factor-oxfam-to-open-first-charity-superstore>  
 2- Online Reviews from Superstore's Facebook page and Google Reviews



## Despite lockdowns, the store is well on its way to meeting its sales potential.

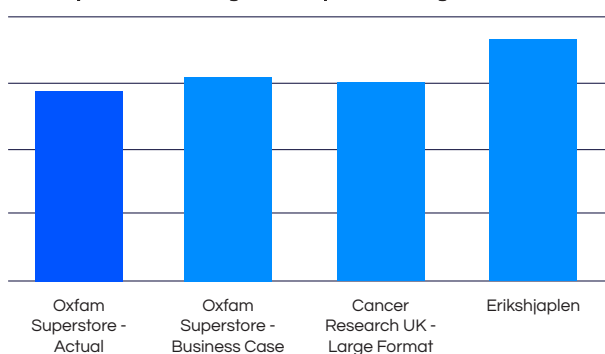
The business case for the superstore stated that total annual sales would be REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA in year three of trading (financial year 2021/22). Despite opening in September 2019, the superstore has only actually been open for less than a year - 49 weeks - because of the two lockdown periods. In that time, **actual store sales have already reached REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, that's over REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA% of its forecast sales for financial year three. Weekly sales averages show that the superstore's performance is on track, with sales keeping up with, or beating, its business plan.**

**Oxfam Superstore - actual weekly sales trend from store opening to first lockdown £k**



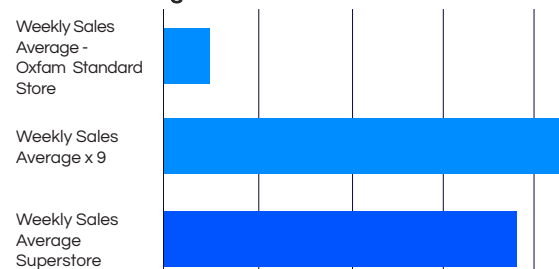
The superstore was expected to make a budgeted weekly sales average of REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA by year 3. In the first 29 week trading period before lockdown 1, average weekly sales were tracking this plan, at just over REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA - this includes the impact of a 4 week pre-lockdown period where visitor numbers declined because of virus concerns. Actual weekly sales peak, at an astonishing REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, in its first week - **2.5 times over expected weekly sales average**. In the 5-week run up to Christmas, average weekly sales were over REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, peaking at REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA. Even between lockdowns, average weekly sales were 80% of pre-lockdown levels.

**Weekly Sales Average for Superstore Against Plan - £k**



Source: Oxfam Sales Data and Business Case

**Superstore's performance benchmarked against Oxfam's Average**



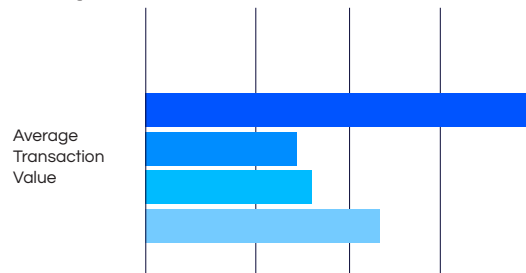
This is in line with expectations set by competitor stores of a similar size, such as Cancer Research UK (which is open more than 4 days a week) and store experience benchmark, Sweden's Erikshjaplen. The superstore's weekly sales average also compares well to plan against another key benchmark - the overall average for all of Oxfam's stores. The superstore is around 12 times bigger than a standard store, and to be the top performer, sales need to be 9 times the size of an average Oxfam store, by year 3.

## With an experience that's persuading shoppers to spend more - raising vital funds for Oxfam

A comparison of average transaction size and number of weekly transactions shows that the vibrant design of the store is converting shoppers, when benchmarked against comparable town-centre Oxfam stores (referred to here as Store A and Store B, to keep identities confidential). Store A is the largest store in Oxfam's network, apart from the Superstore. Store B is also a large store and sells electricals and furniture, which not many of Oxfam's stores do. They are two of Oxfam's best performing stores. **Superstore's average transaction value is more than twice that of both these stores, peaking at £REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, post-lockdown period. It's also nearly double that stated in the Superstore's business case.** With the superstore also generating more transactions per week than either of its benchmark stores, it's clear the design is pulling in visitors and convincing them to spend more.

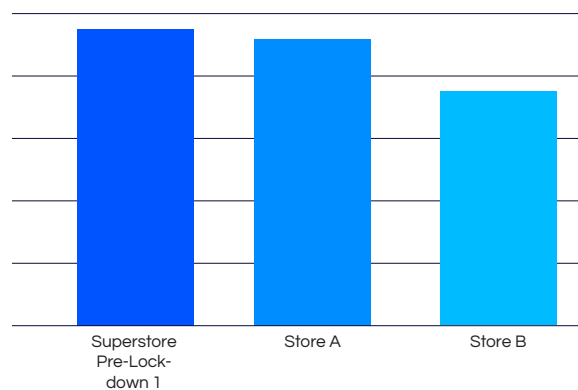


Average Transaction - £



Source: Oxfam Sales Data and Business Case

Number of Transactions Per Week



## The Online Hub is helping to grow sales online, a saviour during lockdown

The Online Hub is dedicated to generating online sales from stock on the shop floor. Hand-picked vintage or designer pieces of clothing, books or homewares are taken and photographed, then posted on Oxfam's Online Shop. The physical proximity of the online hub to the shop floor was an important consideration of the store design, as it helps online and physical channels work together to sell donated stock. The online hub didn't really start operating properly until the start of lockdown 1. **Between March 2020 to date, the online hub has generated over** REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA in sales - **adding a much-needed source of income when the superstore was unable to trade.**

## While donations flood in due to Drive-Through Drop-Off.

The store's success relies heavily on the quality and quantity of donations to the store. Based on findings from the customer experience workshop, we knew we had to make donations hassle-free. The donation drive-through has resulted in thousands of bags of donated products and is now known throughout the local area - as the tailback of cars queuing to unload when lockdown ended shows.

- Since opening, the superstore has received over **86k bags of donations to date.**
- That's between **1300 and 2000 bags a week** before lockdown 1.
- Since reopening and up until lockdown 2, donations are at capacity in line with Covid restrictions, at between 200-300 bags a day, over 3 days.
- Sales of donated products have reached an REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA share of the Superstore's shop floor sales, in the period between lockdowns, on track to reaching business plan of REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA, by year 3.





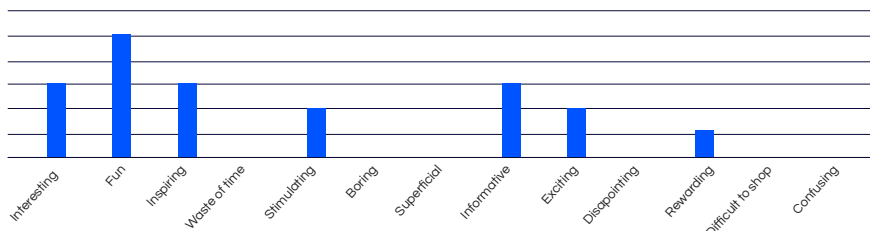
## The space has hosted a wide range of community activity, engaging people in the local area with Oxfam's work.

With a store layout configured to enable events and workshops, the superstore is providing a valuable service to the community, fulfilling its brief to be 'more than a store'. Oxfam has been able to successfully run the following activities and programmes through the store:

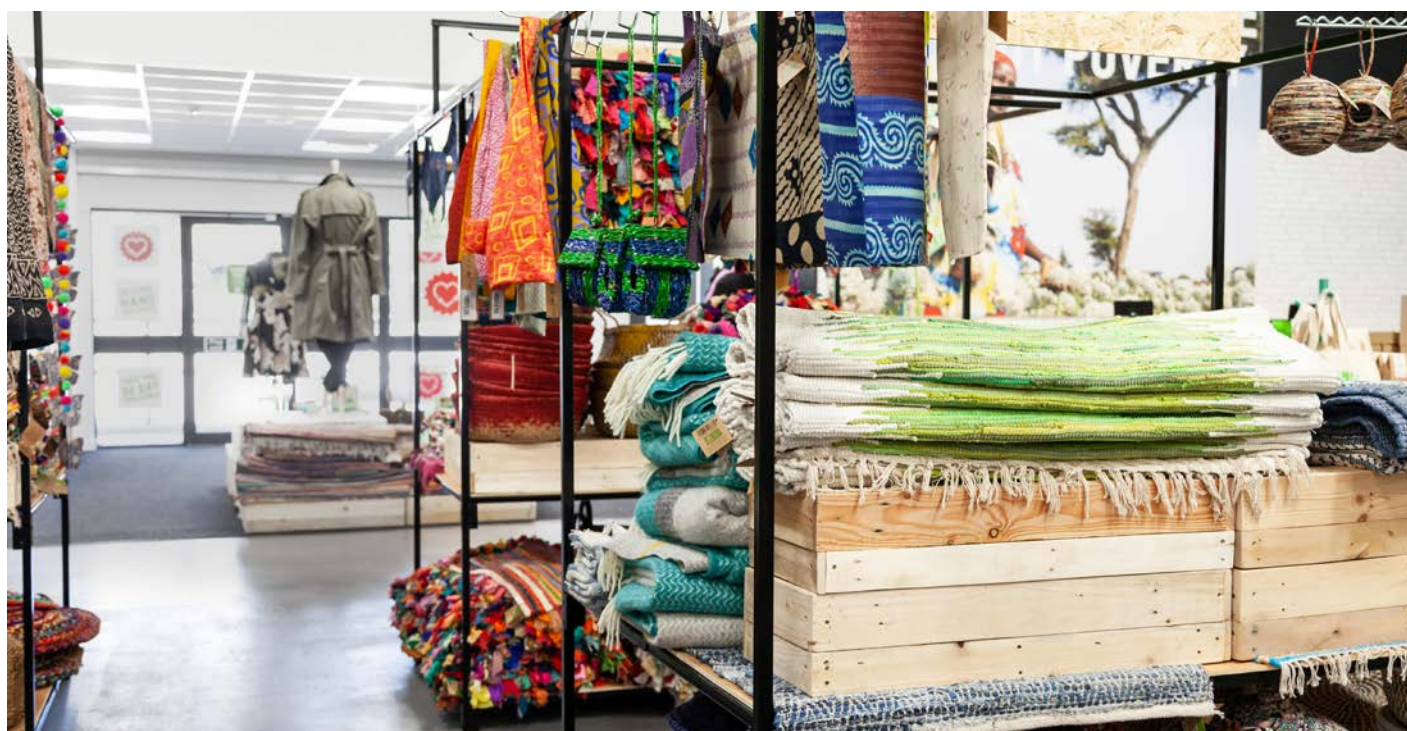
- Oxford Future Skills programme, aimed at empowering women who are facing barriers to the labour market through their own economic situation. Offering professional coaching, skills workshops and volunteer placements in the superstore, the programme hopes to engage women in their communities through the workplace. **The target was for 20 women to take part. In fact, 45 women participated and 29 graduated from the scheme.** The superstore was able to provide volunteer placements for all 45 participants - compared to a previous programme where placements were scattered around different stores.
- A wide variety of other events have taken place - some are chargeable and others free of charge. They include vegan cookery classes, craft workshops run by Etsy, a talk by a Divine chocolatier on Fair Trade, Beeswax company workshop on how to make food wraps, furniture upcycling, and a session from National Careers Service on the value of volunteering.

## Customer feedback review was 100% positive, with all participants agreeing that they would visit the superstore again as a result of the event and book a workshop at the superstore again in the future.

Please circle 3 or 4 words that best describe your feelings about your visit to the Superstore?



Source: Oxfam Superstore Review - Customer Feedback



The Water Tower Cafe has also played its part as a place for the community. Its entrance location, eye-catching design and quality offer is enticing visitors in, acting as a social meeting place for the area. Nearly every single customer review mentions the cafe as a positive feature of the store. Its popularity has meant that by the start of the first Lockdown, the cafe had generated enough sales to break even, showing that it has huge potential to generate income for Oxfam's causes, as well as deliver value to the local community



## The premium retail experience combined with community programmes, are creating fantastic volunteering opportunities, and encouraging a steady stream of volunteers

- The superstore experience is providing increased opportunities for volunteers - the premium store environment is attracting younger volunteers and giving them a broader work-experience.
- Since opening, the store has welcomed a total of **230 volunteers, with 100 currently active**. The average Oxfam store has around 35 volunteers, **so the superstore is attracting 3 times as many as a standard shop**. 5 of these volunteers have been appointed to paid roles.
- Retention of volunteers is also high - REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA% of volunteers have returned since the superstore reopened in June, after the Lockdown, and **an additional 39 have been recruited**.





# Influencing Factors

## Launch Activity

The Superstore's launch received lots of media attention. In fact, the excitement around the store's launch was the first positive press coverage Oxfam got since the Haiti crisis. The BBC covered the launch, and visited the store for interviews. The store has sustained this interest throughout its first year, with visits from Oxfam staff and competitors, indicating that Oxfam have been successful in its aim to be sector leading. Early press coverage no doubt encouraged people to visit the store, but as the evidence above shows, the superstore's experience has built on this interest throughout the 14 months it's been open.

## Impact of Coronavirus.

The superstore was open for 28 weeks between launching and the first lockdown on 23rd March, when it closed for 13 weeks, reopening on 23rd June. It then stayed open for another 19 weeks, closing again on November 5th in line with restrictions for Lockdown 2. In the lead up to these two shut down periods, fewer people visited the store because of the concern around Coronavirus. For example, the trading period between the two lockdowns, visitor numbers were half of those expected according to plan. Importantly though, the store experience has persuaded those that have visited to make a purchase, with average transaction value continuing to climb right up until lockdown two and the store's closure.

Sources:  
Superstore Business Case Summary and Performance Review, Oxfam, November 2020  
Oxfam Superstore Sales Report, 23.3.20 and 9.11.20  
Future Skills Oxford Superstore Evaluation April 2020,  
Workshop Review, Superstore Evaluation 2019/20





One fine  
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