



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Cabinet: Wednesday 21 April 2021
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 10
Subject	Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Michele Mead, Leader of the Council Email: michele.mead@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: 01993 861000; Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report sets out a recent proposal, which was agreed by the Growth Board on 22 March 2021, to establish an Environment Advisory Group, together with a set of Terms of Reference. Wider information is also provided concerning the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire, and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles.
Appendices	Appendix 1 - Committee on Climate Change Spheres of Local Authority Influence Appendix 2 - Environment Advisory Group Terms of Reference Appendix 3 - Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc
Recommendations	(a) That the establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory group be supported; (b) That the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles be endorsed, as set out at Appendix 3 , recognising that this statement of ambition applies to a diverse range of urban and rural communities, and that further evidentiary work will be required at a local level to understand their longer-term implications; and (c) That the development of an Arc Environment Strategy, which will provide for how the principles can be delivered, be supported.
Corporate priorities	The Growth Board brings together all of the Principal Councils in Oxfordshire, together with other key partners, to work cooperatively on strategic issues. As such it is relevant to all of the key priorities identified in the Council Plan.
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	The Growth Board carried out a review of the Growth Board with public consultation and one of the themes identified was the need for greater focus on the Environment. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles

	were developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders including relevant Council officers.
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Growth Board's review of its own operating arrangements in 2020¹ concluded that its work would benefit from a greater consideration of environmental issues by strengthening the Board's structure and networks through an environmental 'work stream.' Since then, the Chair of the Oxfordshire Environment Board now sits on the Growth Board's Executive Officer Group to offer advice in the developmental stages of Growth Board programmes.
- 1.2. Work has also been underway to establish a Local Nature Partnership to guide nature recovery in Oxfordshire and the Growth Board has also endorsed a revised Terms of Reference which raises the priority of environmental considerations within its work, reflecting the commitments made by the constituent local authorities and partners concerning the climate emergency. The Board has also recently engaged on a draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, which commits specifically to protecting and enhancing our natural environment, whilst pursuing a zero-carbon future. Finally, similar steps are also being taken at the Oxford to Cambridge Arc level, and a copy of the recently established Arc Environment Principles are included in this report for endorsement.
- 1.3. The Growth Board's Executive Officer Group has held a series of facilitated discussions to identify an approach and purpose for better integrating environment considerations into the Board's structure, whilst ensuring visibility and transparency in the work undertaken. Building on the improvements that have already been made in this area, the establishment of an Environment Advisory Group represents a natural and needed evolution of this work in order to support ambition and delivery in this space.
- 1.4. Through this process, it has been clear that the scale of ambition among the Growth Board's partners to address the ecological and climate emergencies (informed by the 6th carbon budget) is significant and could be leading in many respects. The draft Strategic Vision sets environmental aims that will need to be supported by an appropriate group which can advise on cross-sector strategy and delivery of this work. Whilst more informal officer and member working groups have existed for some time with respect to environmental planning, the growing expanse of local and national policy developments (over 30 different statutory instruments/legislation covering net zero, natural resources, planning and Environment and Agriculture Bills) in this area requires a more structured partnership arrangement to ensure the Growth Board is on the front foot in responding to emerging opportunities and challenges they present.

2. MAIN POINTS

An Environment Advisory Group

- 2.1. It is recognised that additional capacity is needed where partners wish to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies in a collective and partnership led way. Whilst a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) will substantially increase capacity for nature's recovery, it will not practicably be able to cover all issues and topics under the environmental umbrella. It is therefore considered that an Environment Advisory Group of the Growth Board offers a visible and transparent approach to meeting this challenge.

¹ See report to the Oxfordshire Growth Board, 28 January 2020.

- 2.2. Since the three existing Growth Board Advisory Sub groups (Housing, Infrastructure and Oxfordshire Plan 2050) were established in June 2018, positive feedback has consistently been given concerning their value in bringing together strategic cross-local authority conversations within their remit. Whilst these advisory groups have been tasked with overseeing detailed elements of the £215m Housing and Growth Deal, they also represent a useful space for wider discussions to help inform joint work. These groups are made up of executive councillors from each of the six councils of Oxfordshire, whilst the Infrastructure Sub group also has representation from the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum.
- 2.3. In the first instance, it is recommended that the Environment Advisory Group be set up to broadly mirror the well-established Terms of Reference and membership arrangements of the existing sub-groups, being constituted as a sub-group of the Growth Board, with membership of the lead executive members from each local authority with environmental responsibilities. Unlike the other sub groups however, its remit would extend beyond the Housing and Growth Deal to cover the Growth Board's wider remit and work plan in line with the emerging Strategic Vision (across sectors), given that the Housing and Growth Deal is time limited. A report was received by the Growth Board on 22 March and this endorsed the Terms of Reference for this group.

A cross cutting, integrated and partnership led approach

- 2.4. The role of the group would be *“to act in an advisory and consultative capacity to the Growth Board and provide strategic environmental oversight in the development and delivery of key projects and programmes within its remit”*. The Group would be expected to shape and prioritise its own work programme, and is encouraged to engage with partners and experts, and make use of co-option to strengthen its knowledge base and representation. Notes of each meeting would be published and reported to the Growth Board in the normal way. It is expected the Terms of Reference for this group ([Appendix 2](#)) might evolve over time to be more flexible to meet the needs of the Growth Board's work (e.g. membership, remit etc.), as with the other sub groups. Any changes in this respect would come back to the Board for consideration.
- 2.5. The cross cutting and broad remit of the group will necessitate operating in an inclusive, flexible and prioritised way, whilst ensuring that wider partners and experts are engaged with as required to inform the work. The Group will have an important role in taking a whole system approach and embedding critical environmental thinking across the Growth Board's programmes (e.g. healthy place shaping). It must link closely with the existing sub groups and wider partnerships (such as the Local Nature Partnership) to ensure work is integrated and complementary to theirs. It should provide advice in aligning strategic environmental policy across local partners to ensure that net zero and ecological ambitions are harmoniously optimised. In demonstrating the breadth of the issues that might be considered, some non-exhaustive examples are listed below:
- air quality management (atmosphere)
 - water quality management, supply and blue infrastructure (hydrosphere),
 - nature recovery, biodiversity, biodiversity/environment net gain
 - green space and green infrastructure
 - agriculture
 - forestry, woodlands and trees
 - waste management
 - energy production and supply
 - transport
 - buildings– net zero carbon and retrofit

- 2.6. The Committee on Climate Change recently identified where the greatest influence can be leveraged among local authorities to seek environmental improvements.² It identified six spheres of influence as follows: direct control, procurement, place shaping, showcasing, partnerships and communicating and engaging. It is expected that these areas for action will be a key part of the Group's focus in advising the Growth Board. The full diagram can be found at [Appendix I](#).

A Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire

- 2.7. Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) provide a joined up and strategic forum to help guide nature recovery in an integrated way to produce multiple benefits for local people, the economy and the environment. They are designed to promote a more formalised, systematic and collaborative approach to the management and enhancement of the natural environment and encompass a broad range of local organisations and people who are committed to this aim.
- 2.8. The Growth Board has previously provided its support for establishing a LNP for Oxfordshire to guide work on nature recovery and link in with wider regional discussions concerning the natural environment. Oxfordshire is one of the few areas not to have an LNP, and the only area not to have an LNP within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Following a stakeholder engagement process, an initial workshop of interested parties took place in December 2020 and this confirmed strong support for an Oxfordshire LNP from a wide range of stakeholders. A small working group then got together to develop proposals further, and the outcomes of this work were reported to a second stakeholder workshop on the 11th March where again there was strong support. The details of LNP Board membership are under development and the current aim is to establish the LNP Board in time for a first meeting in September 2021.

Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles

- 2.9. In 2020 the Arc Leadership Group Environment Working Group agreed to produce a set of Arc-wide Environment Principles. The principles are attached at [Appendix 3](#). They are the result of a collaborative piece of work led by a range of partners and stakeholders including:
- Environmental NGOs (who drafted the first document)
 - Local Nature Partnerships
 - Local Government environment and planning policy representatives (we received responses from c. 20 local authorities, with representation from across the Arc)
 - DEFRA
 - Natural England
 - Environment Agency
 - MHCLG (planning policy lead)
 - University representative from the Universities' Environment Group
 - A LEP representative
 - Anglian Water
 - An Energy Hub representative
- 2.10. The document at [Appendix 3](#) has been endorsed by the Arc Leadership Group Plenary on 09 March 2021. It is hoped by having developed consensus and support for these principles, including direct engagement with HM Government, that these will be used to support emerging environmental policies within the emerging Arc Spatial Framework. The agreed principles will be strengthened further after being publicly considered by every

² Committee on Climate Change, 2020. Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget. Available at: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Local-Authorities-and-the-Sixth-Carbon-Budget.pdf>

partner organisation. This information will be shared as part of a standard report to be used by all councils or LEPs in seeking local endorsement.

Status of Principles

- 2.11. The principles are not formal policy but rather a shared statement of ambition for the Arc. They are intended to:
- support our position with respect to the environment policies emerging from the Arc Spatial Framework
 - allow use of the Arc as a place for DEFRA to test and apply its 25-year plan and funding through pilots and projects
 - support Local Planning Authorities with a frame of reference to further develop the principles through Local and Strategic Plans at a local and sub-regional level.
- 2.12. The Arc Leadership Group will next be developing an Arc Environment Strategy which will provide the route map to delivering against these ambitions, including trajectories for meeting ambitious future performance targets. There are five overarching principles:
- To target net zero carbon at a pan-Arc level by 2040;
 - To protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets, including nationally and locally designated wildlife sites and priority habitats through the implementation of the spatial planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, mitigate, compensate and gain;
 - To be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government's 25-year plan. This will incorporate a systems-based and integrated assessment and implementation approach. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development;
 - To ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc;
 - To use natural resources wisely.
- 2.13. Each theme has several sub-principles which describe further the outcomes we aspire to. Some of the sub-principles will evolve further as we develop our thinking (for example, a waste/circular waste principle).

Next steps

- 2.14. Having been endorsed by the Plenary, the Arc Environment Principles will be shared amongst a wider audience including the development community to gain support and buy-in. It is intended that each partner organisation will now proceed to take these through local decision-making processes to provide even more support for the shared principles. The next piece of work for the Arc Environment Working Group is to develop an Environment Strategy which will set out a comprehensive plan for how the principles will be delivered in the Arc. It is likely that the strategy will take 12-18 months to complete.
- 2.15. Concerning the Growth Board's Environment Advisory Group, subject to endorsement of the proposed Terms of Reference at [Appendix 2](#), the next step would be to return to the Growth Board at its next meeting in June to confirm the final membership, chairing and resourcing arrangements for the Group. The Executive Officer Group will ensure that all the necessary preparatory arrangements are made to allow the Advisory Group's work to launch formally soon after.

Conclusion

- 2.16. This report summarises some of the many changes that are taking place among Growth Board partners to drive forward positive change with regards to the climate and ecological

emergencies. A specific action requests Cabinet endorsement of the Arc Environment Principles set out at [Appendix 3](#).

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The financial and resourcing implications of establishing both a Local Nature Partnership and an Environment Advisory Group will need to be considered by each local authority at the appropriate level.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. None.

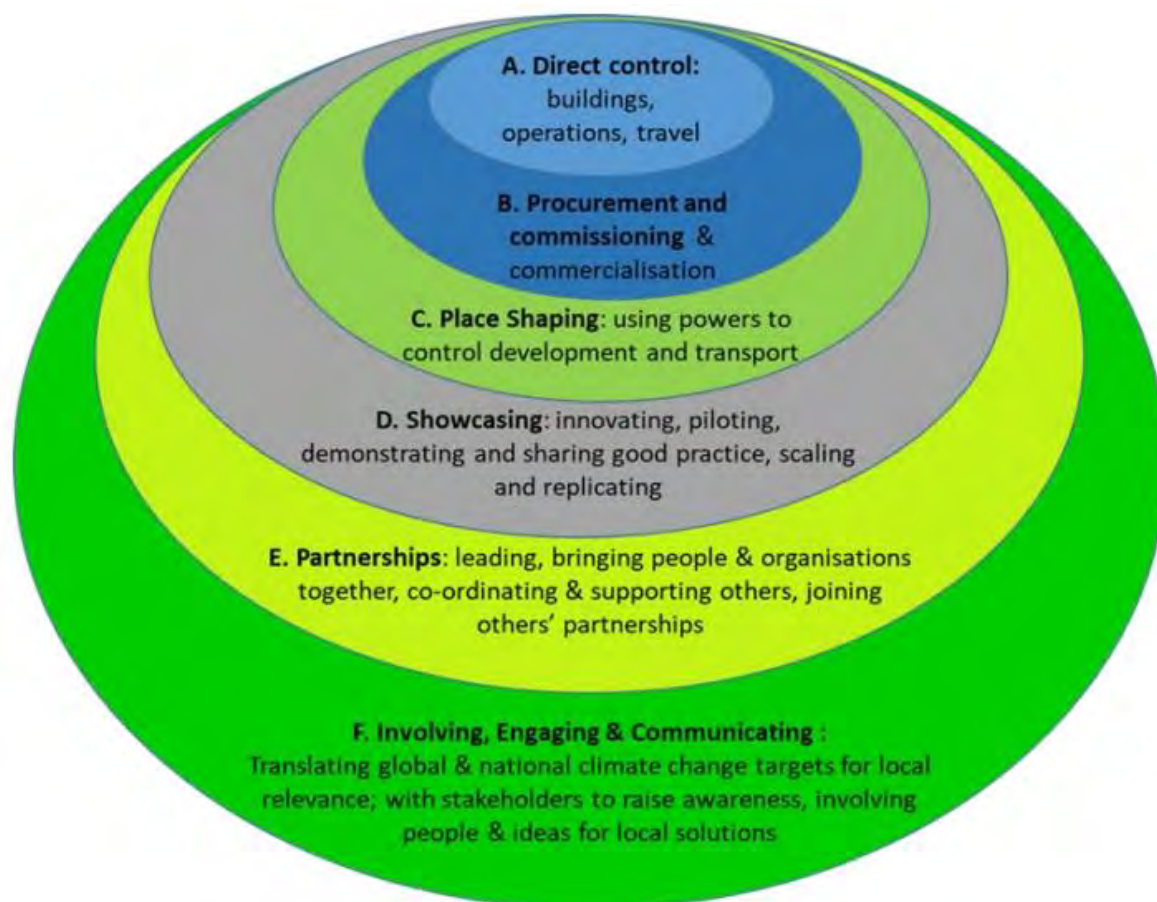
5. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

- 5.1. Cabinet could chose not to support the establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory group, and not to endorse the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

- 6.1. The establishment of a Growth Board Environment Advisory group and the endorsement of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles will support the actions being taken in West Oxfordshire on climate change and biodiversity.

Committee on Climate Change Spheres of Local Authority Influence Diagram¹



¹ Committee on Climate Change, 2020. Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget. Available at: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Local-Authorities-and-the-Sixth-Carbon-Budget.pdf>

Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group Terms of Reference

1. Purpose and Objectives

- 1.1 The purpose of the Environment Advisory Group is to act in an advisory and consultative capacity to the Growth Board and provide strategic oversight in the development and delivery of key projects and programmes within its remit.
- 1.2 The Advisory Group will work on the principle of consensus in advising the Growth Board, whilst at the same time each member will act as the individual lead and conduit, both to and from the authority and sectors they represent.
- 1.3 The Advisory Group will operate within the remit set by the Growth Board. Their role is to:
 - 1.3.1 Broaden engagement and involvement of the constituent councils in key areas of the Growth Board's work and ownership of each constituent council's part in the delivery of Growth Board programmes.
 - 1.3.2 Provide strategic oversight and advice in the development and delivery of the Growth Board's programmes, helping to align cross cutting activities and priorities across.
 - 1.3.3 Provide a councillor forum in which to examine and discuss strategic environmental issues in more detail and develop understanding and knowledge, drawing on opportunities to co-opt and engage with wider partners and sector experts to inform Growth Board programmes.
 - 1.3.4 Horizon scan across the breadth of environmental issues, enabling the identification of gaps in the Growth Board's approach to its climate and ecological ambitions, and to advise in addressing those gaps.
 - 1.3.5 To develop areas for joint work across the Growth Board partnership to address key growth challenges and inform policy development.
- 1.4 As an advisory body, the group does not have decision making powers but will advise and make recommendations to the Growth Board on the areas outlined

2. Membership and appointments

- 2.1 The Advisory Group will comprise of at least one executive member from each of the partner authorities which has relevant responsibilities, plus a chair appointed by the Growth Board. The partner authorities are as follows:
 - Cherwell District Council
 - Oxfordshire County Council
 - Oxford City Council
 - South Oxfordshire District Council
 - Vale of White Horse District Council
 - West Oxfordshire District Council

- 2.2 The Chair of the Advisory Group will be drawn from the voting membership of the Growth Board.
- 2.3 Each partner authority shall appoint one executive substitute member for each Advisory Group, who can substitute for their member as required. The substitute member shall have the same rights as the member for whom the substitution is made.
- 2.4 Given the breadth of issues under the environment umbrella, it is expected that the group will engage, and operate in partnership with, wider partners and experts as required.
- 2.5 Co-opted non-voting members may be appointed for specific items or a period of up to a year by the Advisory Group with the agreement of the voting membership of the Growth Board.
- 2.6 Where the Chair is unable to attend a meeting, but still wishes for it to progress, the Group may elect a Chair for that meeting only.

3. Role of the Chair

- 3.1 The Chair must act in an independent and facilitative capacity to organise the Group's activities in support of the objectives of the Growth Board. At all times, the Chair must use their discretion to act in the interests of Oxfordshire and the Growth Board, and not of their own political group or local authority area.
- 3.2 The Chair will manage meetings in accordance with the Group's terms of reference, and provide leadership and direction to the Group in an open and transparent manner.
- 3.3 The Chair will report directly into the Growth Board on the work of their Group as agreed. In reporting to the Growth Board, the Chair will present the views of the Group, and not necessarily their own views.
- 3.4 The Advisory Group is not a decision making body, and the Chair should aim to reach a consensus on matters under discussion. Where a consensus cannot be reached, the Chair shall present the split views of the group to the Growth Board.
- 3.5 The Advisory Group should be mindful of the work of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel and any other Advisory Groups to avoid any duplication of work. The Group should also be mindful of any work it may require of officers, and the impact this may have on existing priorities.

4 Role of Members

- 4.1 In addition to contributing to the overall role of the Advisory Group, members will be a proactive conduit between the work of the Group and their respective council. This might include, for example, providing regular updates to their own council on the work of the Group.

5 Meeting Arrangements

- 5.1 The Advisory Group will meet in accordance with a schedule of meetings that satisfies the requirements of the relevant programmes of work. The notes of a meeting will be drafted and included in the agenda for the next available Growth Board meeting.
- 5.2 Meetings may be rearranged, cancelled or additional meetings scheduled with the agreement of the Chair of the Advisory Group.
- 5.3 The quorum for a meeting shall be three members. Non-attendance of partner authorities shall not affect the legitimacy of an Advisory Group's conclusions. However, where the effect of a particular consideration would give rise to contractual or financial implications for a partner authority that is not in attendance, or if their views cannot be obtained, then this fact will be reported to the Growth Board.

6 Access to information

- 6.1 It is expected that the Advisory Group will have the right to see the same information as that of the Growth Board when advising on any given issue, in order that an informed view can be made.
- 6.2 The Advisory Group will meet in private and the meetings will not be subject to the provisions of s100 of the Local Government Act (LGA) 1972 as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. However, the conclusions of the Advisory Group shall be conveyed in public to the Growth Board at each of its meetings, except in circumstances where the matter under consideration contains exempt or confidential information, as set out in the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).
- 6.3 The Advisory Group's agendas and associated written reports will be circulated to the members of the Advisory Group, and the designated officer of the respective partner authorities, at least three clear working days before the meeting. Non adherence to this principal however will not invalidate a meeting.
- 6.4 The work of the Advisory Group will not be subject to scrutiny by the Joint Scrutiny Panel, although their notes will be available to Scrutiny to comment on as published reports to the Growth Board.

7 Work Plan

- 7.1 The Advisory Group will establish a forward Work Plan of matters to consider, which will be reviewed at each meeting. The development and management of the Work Plan will be led by the Chair, having regard to the requirements of the Growth Board, the advice of the Housing and Growth Deal Programme Board and Executive Officer Group, and the wishes of the Advisory Group.
- 7.2 The Work Plan will set out the matters to be considered, and the date at which they are to be considered. Through its work plan, the Advisory Group will have a specific role in:
 - a) Horizon scanning, seeking to identifying opportunities for collaboration on joint projects and programmes which support the delivery of the Board's Vision, and specifically its environmental ambitions.

- b) Providing advice concerning the delivery of the Oxfordshire Growth Board's programmes.
- c) Provide advice on strategy and vision, and how this translates into the delivery of the Growth Board's work
- d) Acting as a conduit for new innovative thinking, sharing best practice and catalysing partnership working.
- e) Advising on and involving external environmental contributions to the Growth Board's work
- f) Acting as a sounding board in the development of Executive Officer Group proposals for the Growth Board
- g) Providing advice to the Growth Board concerning forthcoming issues, acting in support of the objectives of the Growth Board, and considering any additional matters that the Growth Board requires of them.

7.3 In prioritising its work plan, the group should consider the full breadth of environmental issues. This includes, but is not limited to, for example: air quality, water, woodlands and trees, agriculture, nature recovery, waste, transport, green space, carbon reduction, energy, retrofitting buildings and biodiversity.

8 General principles

- 8.1 Each partner authority agrees to support the purposes of the Group by ensuring that in their own decision making, they collaborate and cooperate with one another in an open and accountable manner in the interests of the whole of Oxfordshire, whilst acting in good faith. The Group will be formally constituted as a sub-group of the Growth Board.
- 8.2 The joint management of the Advisory Sub Groups will be conducted in such a way that no authority's capacity to deliver day to day services is disadvantaged more so than another through their commitment to the Advisory Sub Groups.
- 8.3 The normal rules as to declarations of interest will be applied to local authority members in accordance with the respective Council's Code of Conduct.
- 8.4 The Growth Board may amend these Terms of Reference or discontinue the work of the Advisory Sub Group at any time.

Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the **Oxford-Cambridge Arc**





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Foreword

The days when we could take our environment for granted are long gone. We must now seek out every opportunity we can to protect and enhance what we have left and ensure that we do everything we can to ensure that the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is a place where we can all work and live truly sustainably.

Both the Arc Leadership Group’s OxCam Arc Economic Prospectus and the Government’s publication, planning for sustainable growth: introduction to the Arc Spatial Framework has given top billing jointly to the economy and the environment. It is now our job to ensure that the environment is at the centre of everything we do and every decision we take.

The work of the OxCam Arc Environment Working Group has been focused on putting forward this set of principles that will allow us to be outstandingly ambitious and aspirational for the OxCam Arc. If we can get this right then the world will look to our ‘Green Arc’ as an internationally significant exemplar for the very best in sustainable living and working, for practical ways to doubling nature, and innovative solutions to energy and water shortages as well as stimulating a green economy.

These principles will form the basis for the creation of an OxCam- wide Environmental Strategy that will embrace everything from green spaces, to housing standards, to sustainable transport, energy generation and transmission and water management and conservation.

It is vital, as we and government move forward with the OxCam Arc, that we take the people already living here with us. We can do this by committing to greener transport, by doubling the number of trees and acreage of accessible managed green spaces, by protecting our chalk streams and supporting local green energy production to name but a few.

If we are to double economic growth along the OxCam Arc then as a minimum we must be doubling nature and ensuring that the Arc leads the way in the zero carbon living and working of the future.

Councillor Bridget Smith,
Leader South Cambridgeshire District Council,
Chair Arc Environment Working Group

Left
Paragliding off the
Dunstable Downs Chiltern
Hills in Bedfordshire

In March 2019, Government and local partners set out their ambition for the Arc in a joint declaration¹:

“We want better places to live, which are beautiful and inspiring, to benefit the Arc’s residents today as well as tomorrow. The Government has already set out its intention for the Arc to embody England’s 25 Year Environment Plan, which we will work together to deliver, including through planning for local natural capital. We want new developments to use intelligent and sensitive design to create or enhance habitats and improve habitat connectivity, in situ and in the surrounding area. We also want to improve access to the environment for existing and new communities in order to improve health and wellbeing.”

“Conserving and enhancing the natural environment is at the heart of Government’s ambitions for the Arc. The 25 Year Environment Plan also sets out our comprehensive approach to improving landscapes and habitats, and

the aspiration to move to a policy of net environmental gain. We expect the policy for the wider Oxford-Cambridge corridor to embody this approach.”

An Environment Working Group (EWG) has been established to take forward the environmental pillar outlined within the joint declaration. The EWG will work with partners in the Arc, including those responsible for the other pillars, to ensure that the protection and enhancement of the environment is at the heart of decision-making and any actions are based on a clear and agreed evidence base.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799993/OxCam_Arc_Ambition.pdf

In October 2020 an economic prospectus for the Arc was published jointly by local authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnerships within the Arc. It outlines the following vision:

“By 2050, the Arc will be a world leading place for high-value growth, innovation and productivity. A global hub where ideas and companies are generated and thrive, home to exemplary models of 21st century development, with a high-quality environment and outstanding quality of life, and with a strong economic focus that drives inclusive clean growth.”

The environmental principles supporting this vision are set out in this document. They are ambitious and will require the collective effort of all partners in the Arc if they are to be delivered.

Above
Sunrise at Willen Lake in Milton Keynes.

Right
Elmsbrook eco-town - Bicester.





The regional principles have been written and agreed by the Arc’s local partners and stakeholders. They are informed by Government policy. They are a clear statement of regional intent that will help to clarify the commitment to adopting an approach that results in environmentally sustainable economic growth. This includes the protection, restoration and enhancement of the environment (air, water, land, soil, biodiversity), net biodiversity and net environmental gain, net zero carbon, the sustainable use of resources.

Above
Cotswolds Hills Countryside in the area of outstanding natural beauty.

Right
Autumn view of the river Nene Valley, near Castor village, Cambridgeshire.

The principles align with the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan² and the commitment in the joint declaration to embody the 25 year plans goals and ambitions.

We will also take account of other appropriate government strategies, plans and guidance. Our aim is for the principles to inform and become an integral part of developing plans and statements in relation to the Arc, local plans, local council activities and the plans and activities of activities and delivery programs for all bodies operating in the Arc. It is also our ambition to see universities, private sector developers and third sector organisations adopt these principles.

The principles address how we will tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time: achieving net zero carbon, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain, environmental net gain, doubling the area of land actively managed for nature, restoring, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and ensuring renewable natural capital (resources derived from living things that if properly managed can be replenished) remains available for future generations.

The principles



²A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environmentfile/799993/OxCam_Arc_Ambition.pdf

The Arc partners will seek to:

1.

Work towards a target of net zero carbon at an Arc level by 2040. This will include:

- a. Ensuring all **decisions about development and new infrastructure support this goal.**
- b. Working with Government to **enhance building regulations and planning policy to actively reduce the carbon footprint of, and energy consumption in, new buildings.**
- c. Pursuing a **major programme of transformation** in existing settlements and infrastructure to reduce energy intensity and carbon emissions.
- d. Construction, operational and transport activities.

2.

Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets, including nationally and locally designated wildlife sites and priority habitats, and links between them. We will implement the spatial planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, minimise, remediate, compensate and gain. This will include:

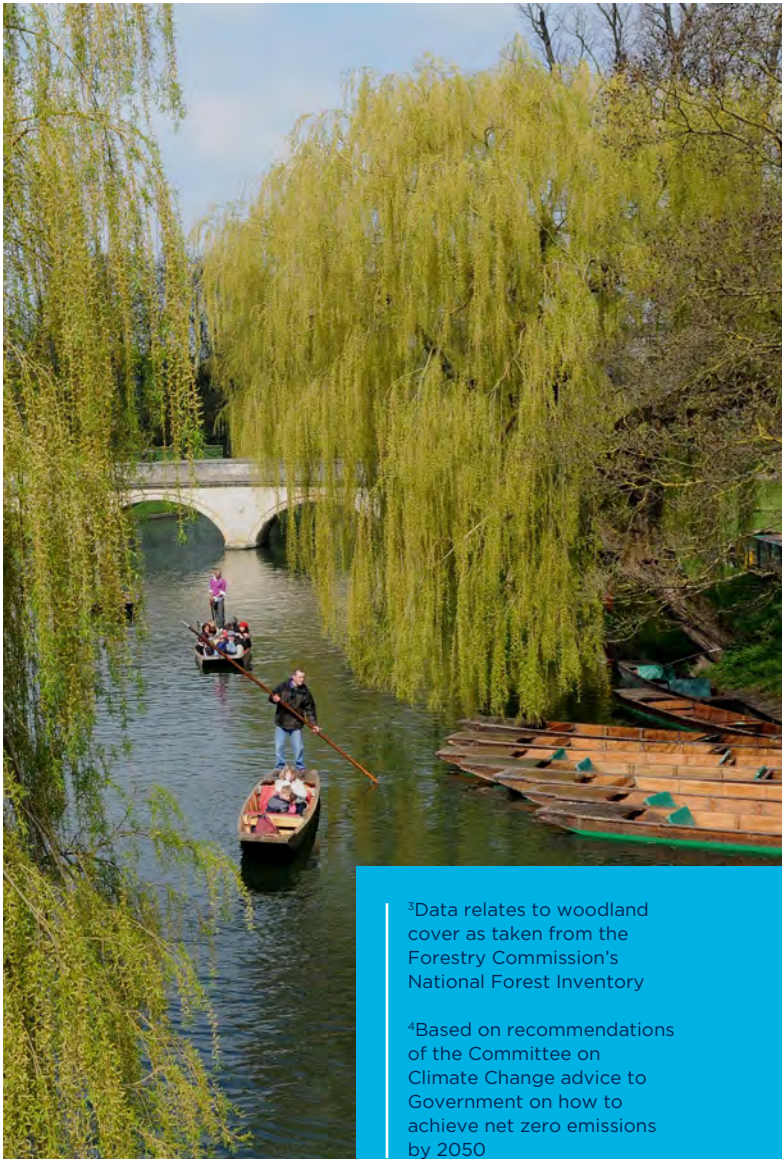
- a. Doubling the area of land managed primarily for nature in the Arc (**‘Doubling Nature’**). To contribute to Government’s commitment to protecting 30% of land for nature conservation by 2030. We will seek to maximise public, private and third sector funding opportunities **to protect, restore and enhance the natural environment** and maintain existing, and increase investment in, natural capital assets, working with partners including major landowners and our important agriculture sector across the Arc.



Above
Heron Valley, Rushmere
Country Park, Leighton
Buzzard.

Right
Punting on the River
Nene, Peterborough.

- b. Coordinating work on local nature recovery strategies and the Arc’s contribution to **the Nature Recovery Network for England** by creating more, bigger, better-connected places, in the required condition, for nature including landscape scale interventions.
- c. Delivering **biodiversity net gain for Town & Country Planning Act developments of 20%.** This is above the 10% Government mandated minimum to reflect the Arc’s world leading environmental ambitions.
- d. Delivering **biodiversity net gain for all developments of 20% with a minimum requirement of 10%** including Nationally Significant Infrastructure and projects brought forward outside of the Town & Country Planning Act. This is to reflect the Arc’s world leading environmental ambitions.
- e. **Working with Government to develop a suitable net environment gain metric that** incorporates biodiversity net gain and, once available, to set an ambitious target to reflect the Arc’s world leading environmental ambitions.
- f. Establishing **human and nature mobility corridors** across the Arc – using existing or new transport corridors for maximum environmental benefit/gain.
- g. **Increasing tree and woodland cover across the Arc from 7.4%³ to 19%⁴.** This is in recognition of the ability of trees and woodlands to deliver a wide range of environmental, health, social and economic benefits. We will ensure the right trees are planted in the right places.
- h. Protecting and enhancing protected landscapes. Enhancing landscape character areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the wider countryside.



³Data relates to woodland cover as taken from the Forestry Commission’s National Forest Inventory

⁴Based on recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change advice to Government on how to achieve net zero emissions by 2050

3.

Be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government's 25 year plan. This will incorporate a systems-based and integrated assessment and implementation approach and will fully recognise the associated health and wellbeing benefits. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development. This will include:

- a. **All new settlements, urban extensions and infrastructure contributing to the achievement of delivering net biodiversity gain, net environmental gain, and net zero carbon** both in site and route selection and in the design of settlements and transport corridors. In addition, areas of tranquillity will be protected and measures taken to avoid light pollution and protect dark sky areas. Making cycling and walking more attractive ways to travel and investing in zero emission public transport of the future.
- b. **Understanding the impact of development on the natural environment**, including cumulative and indirect impacts (taking into account associated housing and other forms of development), so that these can be addressed in line with the mitigation hierarchy, and carrying out environmental and strategic assessments as appropriate for the type and scale of development programmes including options and proper community consultation.
- c. Understanding the Arc's environmental capacity to accommodate different levels of growth and development in different locations and **ensuring that planned growth and development remains well within environmental capacity limits.**
- d. Working with Government to **enhance the building regulations and the role of planning policy so that they align with sustainability principles, and actively reduce the carbon footprint, water and energy consumption** in new and existing buildings. We will encourage Arc local partners to exceed the minimum standards required by building regulations.
- e. Promoting the switch to renewable and other sustainable energy supplies, improving travel choices, and supporting changing working practices. This will enable **improvements to the design and development of sustainable communities and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.**

Right
People walking in open
spaces.



4.

Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc including through:

- a. **Maximising the health and wellbeing benefits of nature** by providing sector-leading areas of accessible nature-rich greenspace in, and accessible to, new settlements, urban extensions and commercial zones and increasing and enhancing greenspace, and access to it, for existing settlements in the Arc.
- b. **Promoting and increasing equality of sustainable access to nature and its benefits** by investing in, increasing and enhancing nature-rich greenspace in the places and communities where it is most lacking. We will improve access to greenspace and nature, ensuring Natural England's Access to Natural Greenspace standards, and (once available) Green Infrastructure Standards, are maximised for existing housing and delivered for future developments.

5.

Use natural resources wisely by:

- a. Working to address existing **water resource, water quality and flood management** issues and through an integrated approach across the water agenda ensure future issues and risks are managed, including in the context of climate change, with a focus on nature-based interventions.
- b. Ensuring that soil quality is properly protected and improved including within development, infrastructure and agricultural activities.
- c. Making **more efficient use and management of waste and resources**, working towards a circular economy with no net waste and promoting the use of sustainable building materials and construction guidelines.
- d. Working with local authorities to share best practice and coordinate action being taken on local **air quality management plans** including addressing emissions from agriculture and from installations regulated by the Environment Agency.
- e. Supporting the development of interventions that reduce the **impact of agriculture on the environment** and support productivity.
- f. Helping to build collaboration between farmers to generate catchment and landscape scale environmental improvement under the **Environmental Land Management Scheme**.
- g. Ensuring that the required mineral resources for the Arc are sourced in an environmentally sensitive manner and that mineral sites are restored in a coordinated manner to after-uses that benefit nature and people, as well as helping to provide ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water management.

We will continue to work with the other Arc pillars to develop appropriate environmental principles for incorporation within these workstreams.

We will review and update the environmental principles in the light of developing policies, practices, evidence, experience, knowledge and governance arrangements.



Resourcing our ambitions

To achieve delivery of these principles we will need to work collaboratively across the public, private and third sectors. Some resources are already in place and there are many more that we will need. As a starting point we will:

- Build on the work of the Arc Local Natural Capital Plan and the associated work in the 5 counties to **make publicly available, agreed baseline maps for natural capital and ecosystem services across the Arc**. Resources will be required to maintain the data and make it accessible.
- Work with the statutory agencies and with local councils to ensure ready **access to the wide range of environmental data** currently collected by them.
- **Work with government to agree methodologies** for both net biodiversity gain and net environment gain for use within the Arc. We will establish a technical group(s) to assess net gain propositions on behalf of local planning authorities and provide planning committees with independent advice.
- **Support and promote a 5 yearly environmental census** across the Arc including promoting public engagement through citizen science approaches.
- Use **evidence on health, deprivation and ecosystem services demand** (e.g. for air quality improvement) to inform planning for greenspace, habitats and **natural capital assets**.
- Work with all those that fund nature improvement work across the Arc including the Defra Group, water companies, environmental Non-Governmental Organisations, local councils, catchment partnerships, housing and commercial property developers and infrastructure providers, together with those allocating Environment Land Management System funding, and private investors to **take a more efficient and effective systems based approach to natural capital and ecosystem systems based interventions**. We will seek to ensure that funding is used strategically and not in a piecemeal way.
- **Invest in projects that deliver natural capital and environmental benefits**, such as carbon sequestration, pollinator habitats, soil improvement, flood alleviation and water resource resilience, and establish Arc-wide and more local Natural Capital Investment Plans to inform and support the emerging Arc Spatial Framework.

Right
Sunlight shines through
beech trees in the bluebell
woods of Oxfordshire.

Monitoring

We will pursue our commitment as outlined within these principles and will work with government and local partners on the development of associated metrics and targets in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan, carbon reduction commitments and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Engagement

We will engage and consult with communities, residents and people working in the Arc, as well as businesses, other organisations and NGOs, on the vision and ambitions for sustainable environmental growth in the Arc.

This document is supported by the Arc Leadership Group, Arc Universities Environment Group, Arc Local Enterprise Partnerships, England’s Economic Heartland, and has been drafted with input from the Arc Local Nature Partnerships whose members include representatives from environment NGOs, local councils, LEPs, developers, businesses, business representation bodies, the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the Forestry Commission and important contributions from central government departments, other environment NGOs and businesses.





Below
Sunrise panorama at
the Campbell park in
Milton Keynes.

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