



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 7
Subject	Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Jeff Haine Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Email: <a href="mailto:Jeff.Haine@westoxon.gov.uk">Jeff.Haine@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
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Summary/Purpose	To agree the District Council's formal response to the current MHCLG public consultation 'Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' which is running for 12-weeks from 20 July 2021 – 12 October 2021.
Annex	<a href="#">Annex A</a> – Suggested draft response
Recommendations	a) That the report be noted; and b) That the suggested draft response attached at <a href="#">Annex A</a> be submitted as the Council's formal response to this consultation.
Corporate priorities	<p>The consultation is the first of three proposed steps in the development of a new Spatial Framework Plan for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc, the area which spans the five counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>Ultimately, the Arc Spatial Framework Plan will have the same status as the Government's National Planning Policy Framework and will have direct implications for various aspects of the Council Plan (2021 – 2024).</p> <p>The current consultation focuses on four key policy pillars including economy, place-making, connectivity and infrastructure and environment.</p>
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	There has been no previous public consultation. This initial consultation on the development of a vision for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc is the first of three core steps to producing the final Arc Spatial Framework.

## I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. In 2016, the Government asked the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to look at how infrastructure development in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc can maximise the potential of the area.
- I.2. The Commission's final report ([Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc](#)) was published on 17 November 2017 and recommended that the arc must be a national priority with its world-class research, innovation and technology able to help the UK prosper in a changing global economy.
- I.3. The report also identified the need for urgent action including the need to address a chronic undersupply of new homes which could jeopardise growth, limit access to labour and put prosperity at risk.
- I.4. One of the key recommendations of the report was the need for a long-term vision for the arc and its sub-regions with a strong, strategic planning framework integrating opportunities for jobs, homes and infrastructure and robust collective decision-making.
- I.5. In its [response to the NIC report](#) in October 2018, the Government confirmed its support for the ambition to build up to one million high-quality homes by 2050 to maximise the economic growth of the Arc, requiring a step change in housing delivery, including engagement on how this can be accommodated through vibrant new and expanded settlements.
- I.6. The government further supported the Commission's finding that in order to deliver the full economic potential of the Arc, there needs to be an integrated approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure, homes and business growth.
- I.7. To achieve this, the government designated the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a key economic priority and in March 2019 signed a [joint declaration of ambition](#) with local authorities across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Arc's four local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), and England's Economic Heartland.
- I.8. Importantly, the joint declaration recognised the potential development of a spatial vision or strategy for the Arc as a whole and subsequently, in February 2021, the government announced the development of a new Spatial Framework plan to help coordinate the infrastructure, environment and new developments within the Arc.
- I.9. The government stated that the framework would be based on the following 10 core principles:
  - *Collaborative – we will develop the Spatial Framework with local partners, including communities, local councils, businesses and universities.*
  - *Adaptable – we will create a framework that provides certainty for communities, local councils and investors about where growth will happen, and the infrastructure that will support it. But it will also need to be flexible and adaptive to change as it happens.*
  - *Long-term – we will plan to 2050 and beyond so that we create the foundation for long-term sustainable growth.*
  - *Integrated – the Framework will be based on an integrated approach to planning which spans the economy, housing, environment and transport.*
  - *Inclusive – the Framework will aim to bring benefits for existing communities and all places in the Arc – not just the highest growth centres.*
  - *Digital-first – we will make better use of digital tools to support better, more collaborative long-term policy-making.*

- *Evidence-based – the Framework will be based on a robust and comprehensive evidence base, which we will make publicly available.*
  - *Sustainable – the Framework must strengthen our ability to meet the government’s commitment to combat climate change, support sustainable patterns of development, and support lasting improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment.*
  - *Quality – we intend to set high expectations for the quality of new development and infrastructure, so that we can create the heritage areas of the future and enhance quality of life in all parts of the Arc.*
  - *Add value – we will not duplicate local or national policies and plans, but we will take them into consideration in developing the Framework. Instead, the Framework will be genuinely strategic and focus on cross-boundary issues, policies and opportunities.*
- 1.10. The Arc Spatial Framework will have national planning policy status alongside the NPPF, thereby allowing it to have significant weight in the planning system for guiding local plan production and in decision making. It will indicate locations for growth but will not include site allocations, and it will not include detailed policies set elsewhere in national policy or local plans.
- 1.11. The timeline for developing the Arc Spatial Framework covers three core phases:
- Developing a vision for the future of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc – public engagement to shape a vision for the area, through consultation in summer 2021.
  - Towards a *Spatial* Framework – The development of options for turning the vision into policy, based on engagement and initial evidence gathering and analysis. To be published for consultation in spring 2022.
  - Draft Spatial Framework – draft Spatial Framework published for consultation in autumn 2022, with implementation of the final Framework shortly after.

## 2. CREATING A VISION FOR THE OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE ARC

- 2.1. As the first of the three core phases outlined above, Government is currently consulting on a document entitled '[Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#)'.
- 2.2. The consultation paper is 58 pages long and is accompanied by a separate [Sustainability Appraisal \(SA\) Scoping Report](#) the intention being to subject the Arc Spatial Framework to a process of sustainability appraisal to help ensure that sustainability is embedded into the development of the Spatial Framework.
- 2.3. Section 1 of the consultation paper provides an introduction to the Arc including the area covered, the reasons for preparing a Spatial Framework Plan, the key issues raised through engagement to date and the proposed next steps for developing the plan.
- 2.4. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the geographical extent of the area covered.

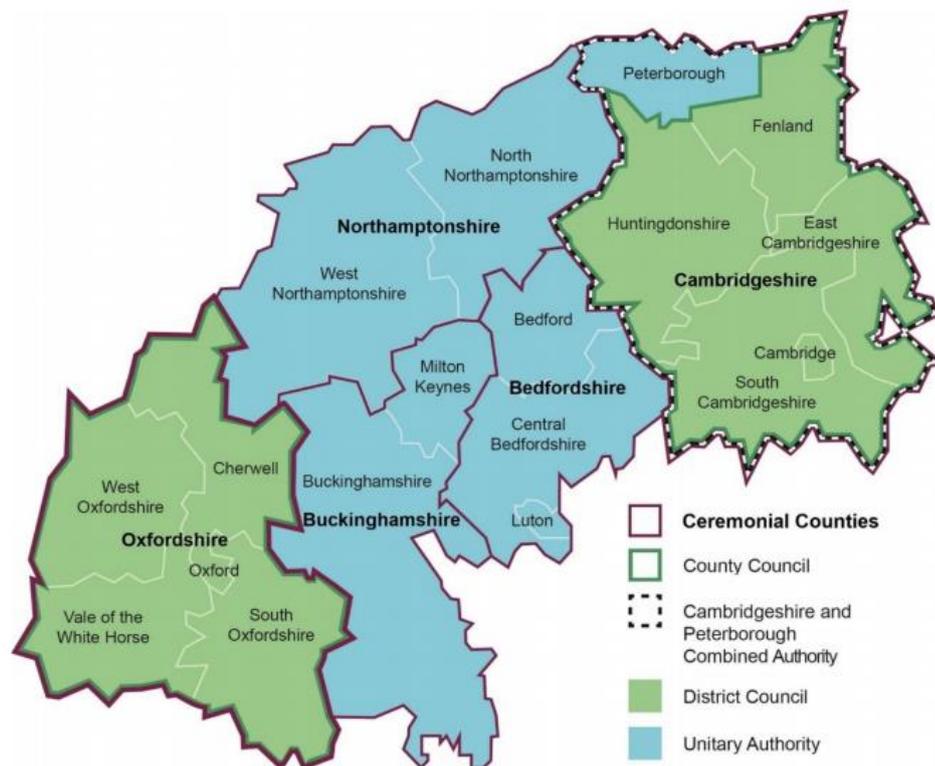


Figure 1.1 – The Oxford-Cambridge Arc

- 2.5. Section I of the consultation paper includes a number of open questions regarding the sort of place the Arc could be, the threats and opportunities that exist and the most important issues that the Spatial Framework plan needs to tackle. The District Council’s suggested response to these questions is attached at [Annex A](#).
- 2.6. The majority of the consultation paper is then focused around four main ‘policy pillars’ including the environment, the economy, connectivity and infrastructure and place-making.
- 2.7. For ease of reference, the overall ‘ambition’ for each theme is reproduced below.

#### The Environment

**‘The government wants to support growth in the Arc in a way that is sustainable – by improving the natural environment and making sure it is protected, and can recover from harm. This will help us to meet our commitment to combat and build resilience to climate change. We think there is an opportunity for the Arc to become a world-leader for environmental sustainability over the coming decades’.**

#### The Economy

**‘The government’s priority for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is sustainable economic growth. We are putting sustainable economic growth first because we think that the Arc can be one of the most productive places in the world by creating new jobs, improving the standard of living and the quality of life for local communities. We want to support economic growth that is sustainable – economically, socially and environmentally. Taking this step will also help national prosperity as we build back better from the impacts of COVID-19’.**

#### Connectivity and Infrastructure

**‘We want the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to be a great place to live and work – now and in the future. That means it will need to be better connected – by making it easier for walking, cycling, and public transport to become first choice for everyone in the Arc. It will also mean making places that reduce the need to travel in the first place. And it**

means improving communities' access to the services they need – like a good quality, sustainable water supply and broadband, schools, cycle lanes and healthcare, as part of a great approach to place-making'.

### Place-Making

**'Place-making is the process of designing and creating great places to live, work, play and learn in. We think there is an opportunity for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to be a world-leader in sustainable place-making and community living. We know that, as the Arc grows, new homes and places will be needed. Our ambition is to help ensure those new homes and places are great places to live by being more sustainable, beautiful and green, and have better access to the services and infrastructure they need. And we want to improve existing places and learn from those that are most valued by local communities as we think about the places of the future'**

- 2.8. Within each theme, the consultation paper provides some relevant contextual information, identifies how the Spatial Framework could potentially help, summarises the key issues raised through engagement to date and then asks a number of 'semi-open' questions regarding the importance of various issues which the Spatial Framework might address, for example in relation to the environment; net zero carbon, nature recovery, flood risk and air quality.
- 2.9. The Council's suggested response to the consultation questions is attached at [Annex A](#).

## **3. NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1. The current consultation will close on 12 October 2021. All comments received will be taken into account in developing the Spatial Framework's vision for the Arc to 2050. In spring 2022, the vision will be published as well as a public consultation on options for the policies in the Spatial Framework. This will subsequently feed into consultation on the draft Spatial Framework itself in autumn 2022.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. The report raises no specific financial implications.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The report raises no specific legal implications.

## **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1. The report raises no specific risks.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1. The following documents are of relevance to this report:
  - [Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford Arc](#) (November 2017)
  - [Government response to 'Partnering for Prosperity: a new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes–Oxford Arc'](#) (October 2018)
  - [The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: government ambition and joint declaration between government and local partners](#) (March 2019)
  - [Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford Cambridge Arc: An introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework](#) (February 2021)
  - [Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#) (July 2021)