

To: Council
Date: 27 January 2020
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive
Title of Report: Outside Organisation Report: The Oxford to Cambridge Arc

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide an update partnership working between Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships on the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member with responsibility:	Councillor Brown, Leader
Corporate Priority:	A vibrant and sustainable economy.
Policy Framework:	None.
Recommendation(s):That the Committee resolves to:	
1. Note the update report on partnership working between Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships in relation to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	List of Local Authorities participating in ARC wide leaders group.

Summary

1. Government have identified the area known as the Oxford to Cambridge Arc as an economic priority and committed to consider interventions and investment to deliver the economic potential of the Arc to the benefit of the UK. They have invited local partners to work with them in developing the proposals. Local Authorities across the Arc have recognised the need for collaboration and engagement in developing propositions for the Arc to ensure that they reflect local priorities and deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to existing communities. This paper provides an update on areas of joint working and the propositions emerging from the work.

Introduction and background

2. The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) report "[Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc](#)" (November 2017) recognised the area within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc as having the potential to be "the UK's Silicon Valley –a world-renowned centre for science, technology and innovation". The report recommended further funding for East-West transport links, as well as investment in its wider road and rail network and stressed the importance of a joined-up plan for housing, jobs and infrastructure.
3. The Government published its [response to the NIC report](#) alongside the October 2018 budget confirming support for the NIC's finding that there is significant opportunity for transformational growth within the Arc area and designated the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a key economic priority. The response stated that the government was exploring "*the best way to set out how jobs, homes and infrastructure across the corridor will be planned together to benefit existing and new residents, while balancing economic growth with the protection and enforcement of the areas historic and environmental assets*". It also set out the Government's intention to work with local partners to develop a corridor-wide vision statement for the Arc to 2050.
4. This was followed in March 2019 by a [statement of Government ambition and joint declaration between Government and local partners](#) which was published alongside the Spring Statement. The joint declaration recognised that meeting the ambitions for the Arc will require a long-term view and for partners to work collaboratively across geographical, political and thematic boundaries. Whilst it highlighted the importance of retaining the integrity of local plans and joint plans, it agreed that local partners would consider what planning approaches and flexibilities might be appropriate within and across the Arc to support meeting the overall ambitions – including consideration of a spatial vision or strategy for the Arc as a whole and suitable delivery vehicles for specific developments.
5. Most recently, the Conservative Party Manifesto included reference to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc in relation to a Devolution White Paper: *Through bodies like the Northern Powerhouse, Western Gateway and Midlands Engine we will drive greater levels of foreign investment into the UK, promoting our towns, cities and counties around the world. As part of our plans for full devolution we will also invite proposals from local areas for similar growth bodies across the rest of England, such as the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.*

Local Authority Partnership Working

6. In recognition of the priority that government has attached to the Arc and their stated intention to develop an integrated approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure, homes and business growth, Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have been working together to ensure that proposals for the Arc are developed from the bottom up, take account of local priorities and deliver benefits for local communities.
7. This includes meetings of the Local Authority Leaders from across the Arc, supported by meetings of the Local Authority and LEP Chief Executives. The Arc Leaders Group does not have any decision making or formal board

governance structures. It is a collation of local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and universities willing to work collaboratively and coordinate engagement and discussion with Government in relation to the Arc. The Leaders Group has established four key thematic workstrands on connectivity, productivity, place and environment. The working groups include representation from local authorities from each of the four Growth Board areas across the Arc, LEPs and the Universities.

8. The Oxfordshire wide Leaders group is chaired by Cllr Barry Wood, Leader of Cherwell District Council. All of the Oxfordshire Leaders or their nominated representatives attend the Arc Leaders Group (a list of the participating Local Authorities is provided at Appendix 1). The City Council has been represented at the meetings by Cllr Susan Brown and other Cabinet Members Cllr Chapman, Cllr Hollingsworth and Cllr Upton. There is a proposal that an executive committee made of leaders from each of the four Growth Boards should be formed to assist convening of the group. The Oxfordshire Growth Board has agreed that Cllr James Mills, leader of West Oxfordshire District Council will represent the Growth Board on this group, however the group has not yet met.
9. The Oxfordshire authorities are represented on the officer working groups as follows:
 - Chief Executives Group: All Oxfordshire Chief Executives or their representatives attend. Caroline Green Assistant Chief Executive attends as a sub for Gordon Mitchell
 - Director of Oxford to Cambridge Arc Leaders and Chief Executives Group – Bev Hindle Oxfordshire Growth Board Director
 - Arc Proposition Task and Finish Group – Caroline Green, Oxford City Council
 - Place – Adrian Arnold, Oxford City Council, Giles Hughes, West Oxfordshire District Council
 - Productivity – Caroline Green, Oxfordshire City Council
 - Connectivity – Sue Halliwell, Oxfordshire County Council
 - Environment – Andrew Down, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils.
10. The Oxfordshire Growth Board's Executive Officers Group provides a forum for feedback and input in to the working groups via the officer representatives.

Arc Priority Work Update

11. The Arc Chief Executives and Leaders Groups agreed in November 2019 to prepare and promote priority areas of work to inform future Government policy, fiscal events and announcements with respect to the Arc.
12. These are:

- A collaborative proposition to Government on what Local Government, LEPs and the universities through their joint working would like to see moved forward in an Arc context;
- A brief which outlines how a spatial framework could be developed for the Arc; and
- Development of a narrative as to why we would work together in the new geography and what we would be seeking to achieve that adds value over what would happen without such collaboration.

Arc Proposition

13. The developing Arc proposition includes several components:

- Productivity – this will build on the common Arc element of the Local Industrial Strategies and includes the business cases being developed arising from the original grand challenges set in the National Industrial Strategy. This work is quite well advanced and detailed business cases are being developed
- Connectivity – this will be informed by the emerging Outline Transport Strategy which England's Economic Heartland consulted on in autumn 2019. The City Council submitted a response to the Outline Transport Strategy consultation and also input to an Oxfordshire wide response. The Connectivity group will promote strategic transport investments needed to support existing infrastructure needs within the Arc.
- Place – work has been focused on developing an agreed brief for an Arc Spatial Framework. Good progress is being made on a brief which is expected to be discussed by the Arc Leaders Group by the end of January 2020.
- Environment – this will seek to establish the Arc as a leader in environmentally sustainable economic growth and place-making, encouraging strategic planning and decision making that takes into account the full value the environment can bring to the Arc's ambitions. The intention is to develop a 25 Year Environment Plan across the Arc, including delivering biodiversity net gain, environmental net gain and tackling climate change. There are also discussions about developing a Natural Capital Strategy for the Arc. This reflects an opportunity to take forward the request from the Council endorsed in a motion on 22 July 2019¹ that the chief executive undertakes discussions with neighbouring authorities about how best to coordinate action on natural capital at a regional level and build on discussions between the Oxfordshire authorities about establishing a Local Nature Partnership.
- Sub-regional Investment – there has been an ongoing dialogue with government officials on further devolved funding to sub-regional Growth Boards. Progress on this was slow before the UK Parliamentary General

¹ Motion: Natural Capital Census (22 July 2019)

election but this is likely to be an area of focus in the proposals, and in discussion with government about the expected Devolution White Paper.

- Universities Investment Programme – the 10 universities across the Arc are developing a series of investable propositions for Government to consider – some working closely with the LEPs linked to industrial strategies and others linked to the priority workstreams.

Arc Spatial Framework

14. Work has been underway to develop a brief for a co-produced spatial framework which sets a strategic growth ambition against the necessity of achieving sustainable development. A number of workshops have been held firstly with Leaders and subsequently with officers across the sub-regions and the thematic workstreams to look at scope, structure, outcomes and process necessary to develop a non-statutory spatial framework for the Arc. A draft brief is in production following the workshops and is very much focusing on delivering sustainable development, moving the emphasis away from being either a housing or jobs led output focused strategy to one which ensures that whilst recognising the global significance of this region, it can only succeed if we ensure our economy, communities and environment is supported, enhanced and delivers net gain for existing and future residents.
15. To ensure this work is technically sound, properly engages with the public and also can helpfully co-exist with existing, emerging and future Local Plans, the brief is exploring establishing a co-production model with Government. The proposal is looking for the framework to be co-developed with funding from government for additional capacity and capability.

Arc Narrative

16. The proposition is aiming to bring together a clear narrative that sets out what local partners are aiming to achieve for the Arc and that collaboration and joined up thinking will deliver an added value through partnership working, by ensuring the environment, economy and social benefits are delivered from investment in the Arc.
17. The emerging narrative is seeking to emphasise the relationship between strategic ambition and local community quality of life. There is a very strong sense emerging from the discussions that the aim should be to achieve high levels of sustainable development and improve the environment and well-being. The unique opportunity of the Arc is that it has the capability, the capacity and the will to develop, test and deliver solutions to our most significant challenges (climate change, health and well-being, inclusive economy).

Next Steps

18. It is expected that the draft proposals emerging from the Arc priority areas of work will be shared with the Arc Leaders Group for discussion at their meeting at the end of January. Following that they will be submitted to government as a basis for discussion in advance of the budget and any further government

announcements on the Arc and will also be available for councils to debate and discuss. The Growth Board receives regular updates on progress with the Arc and an update on the discussions with Government would be expected at the March Growth Board meeting.

Financial implications

19. Oxford City Council, along with all other Local Authorities across the Arc contributes £5,000 per year to support the work of the Local Authorities. The proposition on the development of the Arc wide framework would include that it should be funded by government.

Legal issues

20. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Level of risk

21. The risk of not being engaged in discussions about the Arc is that the Council would not have the ability to influence proposals or Government policy affecting Oxford and Oxfordshire as part of the Arc and that these will be imposed.

Equalities impact

22. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not applicable to this report, though any projects emerging from the work, such as a Spatial Framework would need to include an appropriate assessment.

Report author	Caroline Green
Job title	Assistant Chief Executive
Service area or department	Assistant Chief Executive
Telephone	07483 007109
e-mail	cgreen@oxford.gov.uk