

**To:** Oxfordshire Growth Board  
**Title of Report:** Oxford to Cambridge Arc – Update  
**Date:** 28 July 2020  
**Report of** Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director  
**Status:** Open

**Executive Summary and Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to update the Growth Board on the current work being undertaken relating to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Shortly following several Arc-related announcements in the Spring budget, COVID-19 lockdown restrictions came into effect and the Government's Arc team reallocated to work on priority response programmes. With lockdown easing, and a real push to support economic recovery, the Government is once again focussing on areas that can help lead the recovery with the Arc still be considered an area of national economic importance.

The efforts of the Arc Leaders Group, while acknowledging the economic priority that is the Arc, have been in developing a place-based focus for the Arc with emphasis on delivering clean, green and inclusive growth to support our existing and future communities. This is even more relevant now as we plan for post-COVID-19 recovery. The workplan and priorities of the Arc Leadership Groups is now focussed on this recovery story.

**Recommendation:**

That the Growth Board notes the report for information.

**The Arc**

1. Members will be aware that the Oxfordshire Growth Board is one of four which covers the area known as the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (The Arc). The other three Growth Board areas generally align with the Local Enterprise Partnership boundaries: Buckinghamshire Growth Board; Central Area Growth Board covering Northamptonshire, former Bedfordshire authorities and Milton Keynes; and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Growth Board.
2. The Arc has been identified by Government as a region of economic priority. While it has no formal central administration or status, the Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and universities located in the Arc have all come together under the Arc Leadership Group. The Government has also set up an Arc Unit within MHCLG, which involves officers from several departments across Whitehall. There is also a minister who leads on Arc-related matters, Simon Clarke, who sits in MHCLG.
3. The Arc Leadership Group consists of the elected Leader or Mayor of each of the authorities, including the Cambridge & Peterborough Combined Authority, the Chairs of the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Chair of the Arc University Group. There

is an Executive for this Group which consists of three representatives from each Growth Board Area (six from the Central Area), one Chair representing the LEPs and one Chair representing the Arc universities. The representatives from Oxfordshire Growth Board are Cllr Emily Smith as Chair of the Growth Board, Cllr Ian Hudspeth as Leader of the County Council and, Cllr Barry Wood who is currently Chair of the Arc Leadership Group. Jeremy Long, Chair of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, also sits on the Executive as the Chair representing all Arc LEPs.

4. The Arc Leadership Group has initiated four inter-related workstreams: Environment; Place; Productivity; and Connectivity. While there is currently a small central part-time support resource (Bev Hindle as Director and Anna Rinaldi as Administrative support), the bulk of the resources for the Arc come from the collaborating partner organisations.

### **Workstreams and Priorities**

5. For most of 2019/20 the emphasis of the work being done was on:
  - Developing a shared and joint Arc Local Industrial Strategy position, developed by the LEPs under the Productivity workstream;
  - setting up a suitable governance structure for the Group;
  - developing an environment workstream from scratch, with focus on supporting the early work on Natural Capital planning;
  - developing an outline transport strategy for the EEH area of which the Arc sits;
  - developing a common narrative and engagement strategy for the Arc; and,
  - contributing to the Government's proposed initiative to complete an Arc Spatial Framework as a priority (reinforced as part of the commitments in the Spring 2020 Budget).
6. The Government also announced plans in the Spring for four Development Corporations along the central and eastern end of East-West Rail. These, however, are not the focus for the Arc Leadership Group as they will be addressed through the relevant Growth Boards.
7. The focus now over the last few months has shifted to recovery. We have been urged by Government to develop an Arc-wide Recovery Strategy which we see building on and adding value to our county-wide Recovery plans. The Arc Leadership Executive, which met for the first time on 02 July, strongly urged this work be completed at pace; in particular, that we develop a high level prospectus, similar to other regional pitches (e.g. West Midlands <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/32-billion-blueprint-unveiled-to-kickstart-the-west-midlands-economic-recovery/>), that we can submit to Government ahead of an anticipated Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn.
8. Given the Arc has been identified as an area of national economic significance, and that all emerging Recovery Strategies are heavily focussed on the economy, there is belief there may be significant opportunity to secure better recovery arrangements and funding through working collectively across the Arc.
9. While the Arc is not a Combined Authority in its own right, and there are no plans for such at any level of Government, its regional economic importance affords an opportunity to pitch for extraordinary funding as some other regions have done. Working collectively, it is also an opportunity to emphasise our key core messages about clean, green, inclusive and innovative growth being embedded in our recovery efforts - for Oxfordshire and the wider Arc area.

### **Looking Ahead**

10. At their meeting on 31 July, the full Arc Leadership Group will be considering the following items:

- Selection of a Chair for the Arc Leadership Group and Executive;
- an update on the progress we are making on developing an Arc-wide prospectus for recovery;
- an update from the Environment workstream on the Natural Capital Arc pilot project led by DEFRA and how we may apply this across the Arc;
- an update from the Government Arc team on their progress with the Arc Spatial Framework.

11. It is planned that a regular update item will be provided on future Growth Board agendas, bringing the Board up to date with current and projected work for the Arc.

### **Financial Implications**

12. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **Legal Implications**

13. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

### **Background Papers**

14. None.

Report Author:	Bev Hindle, Oxfordshire Growth Board Director
Contact information:	<a href="mailto:bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk">bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a>