

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board
Title of Report: Update on Oxford-Cambridge Arc
Date: 22 March 2021
Report of: Andrew Down, Chair of Executive Officer Group
Status: Open

Executive Summary and Purpose:

To update members of the Growth Board on recent developments in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Recommendation:

That the Growth Board notes this update.

Introduction

1. The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is a region which has been identified by national government as a priority area for economic growth. Geographically, the Arc spans the five ceremonial counties of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.
2. The importance of the Arc to national government has been emphasised in the Treasury's "Build Back Better" document, published alongside the budget on 3 March 2021, which identifies as one of four "Project Speed Pathfinders":
 - "The Oxford-Cambridge Arc, led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government"
3. The document goes on to say that the "UK Government's commitment to ensuring infrastructure investment delivers regional economic growth means we will be investing in [inter alia] the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, where a Spatial Framework, developed with community engagement at its core, will set the long-term, holistic strategy for infrastructure investment to support jobs, unlock clean growth, and achieve net zero alongside environmental sustainability; cultivating the Arc's potential to become a global innovation powerhouse. Earlier this year the government confirmed funding for the next stage of East West Rail, which will connect communities and create jobs."
4. Recognising this national government priority as it has emerged over recent years, leaders from councils, local enterprise partnerships and universities in the Arc have formed a collaboration forum – the Arc Leadership Group.

Environment principles

5. In November 2020 the Arc Leadership Group published its Economic Prospectus which can be found at:

https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Oxford-CambridgeArcProspectus_Approved_1.pdf

6. This document sets out the “vision for the Arc to be a global hub for innovation, and home to exemplary models of green development that will inspire communities around the world.”
7. As a part of this commitment to a “Green Arc”, the Arc Leadership Group has now developed a set of environment principles – the subject of a separate report to this meeting of the Growth Board – which are expected to inform and influence spatial planning in the Arc.

Arc Spatial Framework

8. On 18 February 2021, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published its policy document introducing the spatial framework for the Arc. The document can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework>

9. The plan is described as “an opportunity for us to work with communities and local partners to develop a plan that will:
 - support long-run sustainable economic growth across the area
 - help to make the area a brilliant place to live, work and travel in – for existing residents and future communities alike
 - support lasting improvements to the environment, green infrastructure and biodiversity.”
10. Although this project is clearly owned and led by MHCLG, the desire for collaboration is welcome, and representatives from the Oxfordshire councils are actively engaged with MHCLG officials to help shape the programme.
11. The Spatial Framework will be implemented as spatially specific national planning policy. This means that local planning authorities preparing local plans will have to have regard to the Spatial Framework, as they do with other national policies and guidance.
12. MHCLG sets out three phases in its development of the Spatial Framework:
 - Phase 1 will see wide public engagement to shape a vision for the area, through a consultation in summer 2021.

- Phase 2 will see options developed for turning the vision into policy, the options being published for consultation in spring 2022.
- Phase 3 will see a draft Spatial Framework published for consultation in autumn 2022, with the final version being implemented shortly afterwards.

13. This two year (approximately) timetable aligns well with the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which is scheduled for completion in 2023.

Growth body

14. Government has also announced its intention to establish a growth body for the Arc. No detail is available at this stage but Government has made clear its intention to “work with local partners to ensure that the Growth Body is tailored to the region’s unique opportunities.”

15. As with the Spatial Framework, representatives from Oxfordshire expect to have an opportunity to take part in the dialogue regarding the formation of the growth body.

Conclusion

16. Recent developments indicate that activity in the Arc is gathering pace. The Oxfordshire councils and LEP are well placed to make a positive contribution to the future of the Arc, and will continue to play their part in the programme.

17. The Growth Board is asked to note the contents of this report.

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