

## Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 21 October 2020

### Response to public questions

#### 1. Dr Peter Collins on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire

*The Scrutiny Panel agreed to request officers to provide further information in response to these questions, which are set out below:*

Would the Scrutiny Panel agree that there are critical lapses of democratic process in the production and promotion of the OxCam Economic Prospectus including:

- a) The OxCam Arc Leaders' Executive Group exempting itself from public scrutiny on the basis that it isn't a decision-making body, but then deciding to spend public money on producing this Prospectus;

*Response: The Oxford-Cambridge Arc (The Arc) has been identified as a region of economic significance by the Government in its response to work carried out by the National Infrastructure Commission. There are many positives from working in collaboration with our neighbouring areas which have been set out previously. Fundamentally, being proactive through collaboration to positively influence outcomes for Oxfordshire is at the heart of this work. The Arc Leadership Group is not a formal statutory committee. It is an alliance of the willing which discusses how best to respond to the Government's ambitions for the area. Therefore, it cannot take any statutory decisions, and the Arc Prospectus does not have any statutory status to affect local policy or decisions.*

- b) The failure, as far as we are aware (Scrutiny Panel members may be able to shed more light), to take the Prospectus through the constituent local authorities within the Growth Board, thus removing the opportunity for local councillors to have a say;

*Response: the Arc prospectus is a non-statutory document that reflects the position of most of the locally elected leaders who represent their councils and residents. Leaders will continue to represent the views of their local councils and residents in the normal way through their engagements with the Arc collaboration, as they do in other collaborative arrangements. Whilst the Prospectus has been submitted, the Scrutiny Panel recommended to the Growth Board that council leaders ensure councillors within their own authorities are given the opportunity to see the Draft Oxfordshire Strategic Vision and be able to comment on it a part of the engagement exercise. This recommendation was accepted, alongside others which championed widespread engagement in the Strategic Vision work.*

- c) The lack of acknowledgement that critical partners in the project, namely Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the University of Buckingham, have all withdrawn their support;

*Buckinghamshire's decision not to engage with the Arc Leadership Group does not mean that Buckinghamshire is no longer part of the Arc's geography. In their letter to the Arc Leadership Group, Buckinghamshire Council cited it could not accept the decision-making of the Group on a spatial framework for the Arc; however, Buckinghamshire Council was incorrect in suggesting that decision-making for the Framework rested with the Arc leadership Group. The Arc Spatial Framework is being developed, funded and delivered by Government not the Leadership Group. Any individual organisation can leave this group as it is not a statutory or formal committee with such decision-making powers. However, it is a forum where members choose to work collaboratively to positively influence the national decision-maker, exercising its democratic accountability, for this part of the country. In that same letter, Buckinghamshire Council also felt that it needed to refocus on its own Devolution Deal with Government. The Scrutiny Panel too asked questions in this respect and raised it in their remarks to the Growth Board.*

- d) The presentation of the Prospectus to the Growth Board for endorsement only after the document has already been submitted to Government?

*Response: The Arc Leadership Group itself has not requested that endorsement be sought from the Growth Board. The Growth Board's consideration of the Prospectus has been brought forward by the Growth Board Director to bring greater public visibility and transparency to the work, whilst also enabling the Board to demonstrate its ongoing endorsement of the work being undertaken. This process is in addition, and separate to, the process for submitting the prospectus.*

If so, will the Scrutiny Panel please recommend to the Growth Board that the Prospectus should not be endorsed, at least and until it has gone through thorough public engagement and local authority scrutiny?'

*Response: The Scrutiny Panel did not make this recommendation.*