

DECISION TITLE: CREATING A VISION FOR THE OXFORD CAMBRIDGE ARC’– PCC RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PAPER
Cllr Peter Hiller, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Commercial Strategy and Investment.
OCTOBER 2021
Deadline date: 12 OCTOBER 2021

Cabinet portfolio holder: Responsible Director:	Cllr Peter Hiller, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Commercial Strategy and Investment. Steve Cox, Executive Director Place & Economy, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Is this a Key Decision?	NO (note: this was originally listed as a Key Decision on the forward plan (Ref: KEY/30AUG21/03), but on reflection it has been determined as being a non-key decision.)
Is this decision eligible for call-in?	YES
Does this Public report have any annex that contains exempt information?	NO
Is this a project and if so has it been registered on Verto?	NO

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S
The Cabinet Member is recommended to:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Endorses the draft consultation response, as set out in Appendix B, in respect of the ‘Creating a vision for the Oxford Cambridge Arc’, and authorises its submission to Government prior to 12th October 2021 closing date. 2. Supports, in principle, the ‘Shared Regional Principles for Protecting, Restoring and Enhancing the Environment’ as set out in Appendix C

1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

1.1 This report is for Cabinet Member to consider exercising delegated authority under paragraph 3.4.3 of Part 3 of the constitution in accordance with the terms of their portfolio at paragraph (a).

2. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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3. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to agree the Council's response to the Government consultation paper entitled 'Creating a vision for the Oxford Cambridge Arc', available here and attached in Appendix A:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1003974/Creating_a_vision_for_the_Oxford-Cambridge_Arc.pdf:

- 3.2 Peterborough, along with the whole of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, sit within the Government defined 'Oxford to Cambridge Arc' (Ox-Cam Arc). Government is proposing to establish national policy for this area, and is consulting on proposals. In the words of Government:

This consultation is being undertaken to inform our approach to the future of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, which has been identified by the government as a key economic priority. We are seeking views to help us create a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework, and in doing so guide the future growth of the area to 2050. This is in line with the commitment we made at the launch of the Spatial Framework process in February 2021. The Spatial Framework will form national planning policy and transport policy for the Arc and local planning and local transport authorities must have regard to it when preparing local transport and local development plans and policies, and it will be capable of being a material consideration in relevant planning decisions in the area.

- 3.3 To put it into context, this Spatial Framework would essentially be the guiding (and statutory) document sitting above, for example, the Peterborough Local Plan, the Cambridgeshire-Peterborough Local Transport Plan and other wider strategies and plans (such as environmental based strategies). For those with a good memory, it is not too dissimilar, it appears, to the 'Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) / Regional Economic Strategy (RES)' statutory plans that were around at the turn of the century, but which were formally revoked and abandoned as a concept in 2010. In those cases, such RSSs/RESs for Peterborough were the 'East of England' RSS / RES. This new form of strategy (or 'spatial framework') covers a different geographical area, this time focussing on what Government perceives as being an area of huge economic potential – the Oxford to Cambridge Arc area. Another key difference between the Spatial Framework and the old RSSs/RESs, is that the Framework is being prepared by Government, and adopted by Government, without any independent examination stage; whereas the RSSs/RESs were prepared locally, independently examined, and then adopted by Government.

- 3.4 Undoubtedly, the next Peterborough Local Plan (and other local strategies) will be compelled to follow whatever this Arc Framework establishes. It is therefore of crucial importance that the final document contains policies and proposals which support and align to this Council's priorities and ambitions.

- 3.5 We are not yet at that final stage – indeed, this is round one of a promised three rounds of consultation. But nevertheless, it is important the council places on record its 'ask' for this document, to give it the best chance of securing that 'ask' in the final document.

The consultation proposals

- 3.6 The consultation document was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on Tuesday 20 July, the first of 3 planned public consultations

on the Spatial Framework. Alongside this, Government has published a [Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report](#). The consultation is supported by a new and innovative digital engagement platform designed to give a voice to the wider community, as well as traditional engagement methods such as workshops.

- 3.7 Feedback from this consultation will help, it is stated, to shape the vision for the Spatial Framework and ensure that it is built on the priorities and aspirations of the communities it will serve, thus creating the Spatial Framework's vision for the Arc to 2050. Using the vision as a foundation, the next document proposed by MHCLG 'Towards a Spatial Framework' is planned to be published for consultation in Spring 2022. Government then hopes to publish a draft Spatial Framework for consultation in Autumn 2022, with implementation of the final framework shortly after. Consultation will take place at each stage, and is open to all members of the public.
- 3.8 Government's local economic forecasts suggest that by 2050 we could see economic output in the Arc doubling to over £200bn, and it see the Arc's success as key to the UK's national prosperity, international competitiveness, and ability to meet wider challenges (including climate change and supporting nature recovery, technological change, fighting COVID-19 and preventing future pandemics).
- 3.9 The consultation document is split into eight chapters, providing an introduction to creating a vision for the OxCam Arc:
- Introduction: Creating a Vision;
 - The Environment;
 - The Economy;
 - Connectivity and Infrastructure;
 - Place-making;
 - Commitment to engaging communities;
 - Commitment to data, evidence and digital tools; and
 - How to Monitor and deliver the Framework.

As part of the consultation the Government is seeking to identify potential delivery mechanisms for the investment priorities within the Spatial Framework, which includes the potential to set up a new Arc Growth Body.

- 3.10 Separately, but not forming part of Government's consultation proposals, it is worth noting a recently published document entitled *The Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc* produced by the OxCam Arc Environment Working Group, available at Appendix C and via this link: (https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=2306). These 'principles' have been set to effectively create a 'Green Arc' as an internationally significant exemplar for the very best in sustainable living and working, for practical ways to doubling nature, and innovative solutions to energy and water shortages as well as stimulating a green economy.
- 3.11 The 5 principles are:
- working towards a target of net zero carbon at an Arc level by 2040;
 - to protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets;
 - to be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development in line with the ambitions set out in the Government's 25 year plan;
 - to ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the arc; and
 - using natural resources wisely.

These principles have been created to form the basis for the creation of an OxCam-wide Environmental Strategy that will embrace everything from green spaces, to housing standards, to sustainable transport, energy generation and transmission and water management and conservation. These principles are not government proposals (or at least not yet), but it is recommended that the Council supports them, in principle, as has already been the case by the Arc Leadership Group, Arc Universities Environment Group, Arc LEPs and many local authorities within the Arc area.

PCC Response to the consultation

- 3.12 Engagement has taken place with: officers across the Council; Opportunity Peterborough; and the aforementioned Scrutiny Committee. Consequently, a proposed response to the consultation is attached at Appendix B.
- 3.13 The Cabinet Member is asked to consider the proposed response, and authorise it to be submitted to Government prior to the 12 October 2021 deadline.
- 3.14 The set questions in the consultation document are arguably not a particularly helpful framework to provide a Council response to Government. The questions are almost entirely in the form of a statement, and requesting the responder to grade the statement from 'Not Important' to 'Very Important'. However, reading such statements, it's hard not consider every single one of them as 'Very Important'. To label any of them with anything other than 'Very Important' would imply the Council doesn't particularly 'care' about that the theme of that statement, when in practice it does. Officers are recommending, therefore, that all such statements be graded as 'Very Important', but it is not clear what Government will learn from the consultation if all consultees respond likewise, which seems likely.
- 3.15 Other consultations are phrased somewhat unusually and, arguably, overly informal, such as Q2 ("we would love you to tell us more") and Q3 ("How do you feel overall about the future of the Arc? What are your hopes and fears?").
- 3.16 Notwithstanding the limitations of answering the majority of questions set, there are a number of other questions along the lines of "Anything else to add..." in respect of a particular topic or theme. Officers are recommending these are the questions where a more specific 'Peterborough ask' can be given. That said, such responses under these questions are limited to 500 characters (not words), which is perhaps less than this paragraph. Government is clearly not seeking lengthy submissions at this stage.
- 3.17 It should be made clear at this stage that this first round consultation document is very much a starting point, and not in any way a 'draft final plan'. It simply sets out high level evidence and broad statements of ambitions. There is very little spatially specific content, so there is very little 'Peterborough' specific content to comment on. Indeed, other than Peterborough being identified on the maps within the document, the word 'Peterborough' is not used a single time in the entire consultation document.
- 3.18 In terms of what the 'Peterborough ask' is, the proposed response focusses on:
- Infrastructure investment
 - Environmental ambitions
 - Support for Education / skills
 - Natural environment commitments (including a request for a 'John Clare Countryside' landscape opportunity area designation)
- 3.18 The relevant Scrutiny Committee considered the consultation documents on 8 September 2021, and a wide-ranging discussion took place. The minutes of the meeting are yet to be published and agreed, but in summary some of the key points made by individual Councillors of the Committee included:

- The consultation document begs more questions than it answers.
- Concern over speed of preparation of the document, and concern over lack of transparency (for example, no independent examination)
- Concern whether Peterborough would be on periphery.
- The Arc Framework is both a risk and an opportunity
- The Council and Government should endorse the separate *The Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc*.
- Important that the Council helps communicate the Arc proposals as they continue to progress, and encourage people to comment.
- Peterborough should be designated as a green economic hub.
- Target floors on health inequality, life expectancy, earnings etc should be set.

Overall, the discussion helped in the formulation of the proposed response attached.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 This is a Government led consultation event, with the Council a consultee. The Council is not a decision maker, in terms of the final content of the Framework. Two further rounds of consultation are promised, likely in 2022.

5. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 5.1 It is anticipated that the Cabinet Member will consider the consultation proposals, and agree a final response to Government.

6. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 To ensure the Council's formal response to the consultation paper is made known to Government, and in doing so give the Council the best opportunity to take advantage of the opportunities which could arise from the Arc Framework.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 To not respond to the Consultation document. This was rejected, because the long term implications of this Government proposals could be significant for Peterborough, therefore it is important that the Council responds to the proposals.

8. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 8.1 Nil

Legal Implications

- 8.2 None directly, but once the Framework is adopted by Government it will form part of national policy with the same degree and influence as the National Planning Policy Framework. As such, as a minimum, all planning decisions determined by the council will be legally obliged to take into account the framework (once finalised by Government) in reaching that decision.

Equalities Implications

- 8.3 The Equalities Implications are a matter for Government to determine, as it develops its proposals.

Carbon Impact Assessment

- 8.5 The Council is not preparing or adopting the document, and therefore is not in a position to suggest whether the proposal has (or will have) any implications on carbon emissions.

The final document, as adopted by Government, has the potential for significant negative (eg construction) and positive (eg higher energy efficiency standards, carbon capture) carbon implications, depending on what policies it proposes. However, no view on this can be taken at this stage, as no specific proposals on these matters are set out.

9. DECLARATIONS / CONFLICTS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS GRANTED

- 9.1 None.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

- 10.1 [Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 *Appendix A – Consultation Paper ‘Creating a vision for the Oxford Cambridge Arc’*

Appendix B – Proposed Response to the Consultation Paper

Appendix C - The ‘Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc’ document.