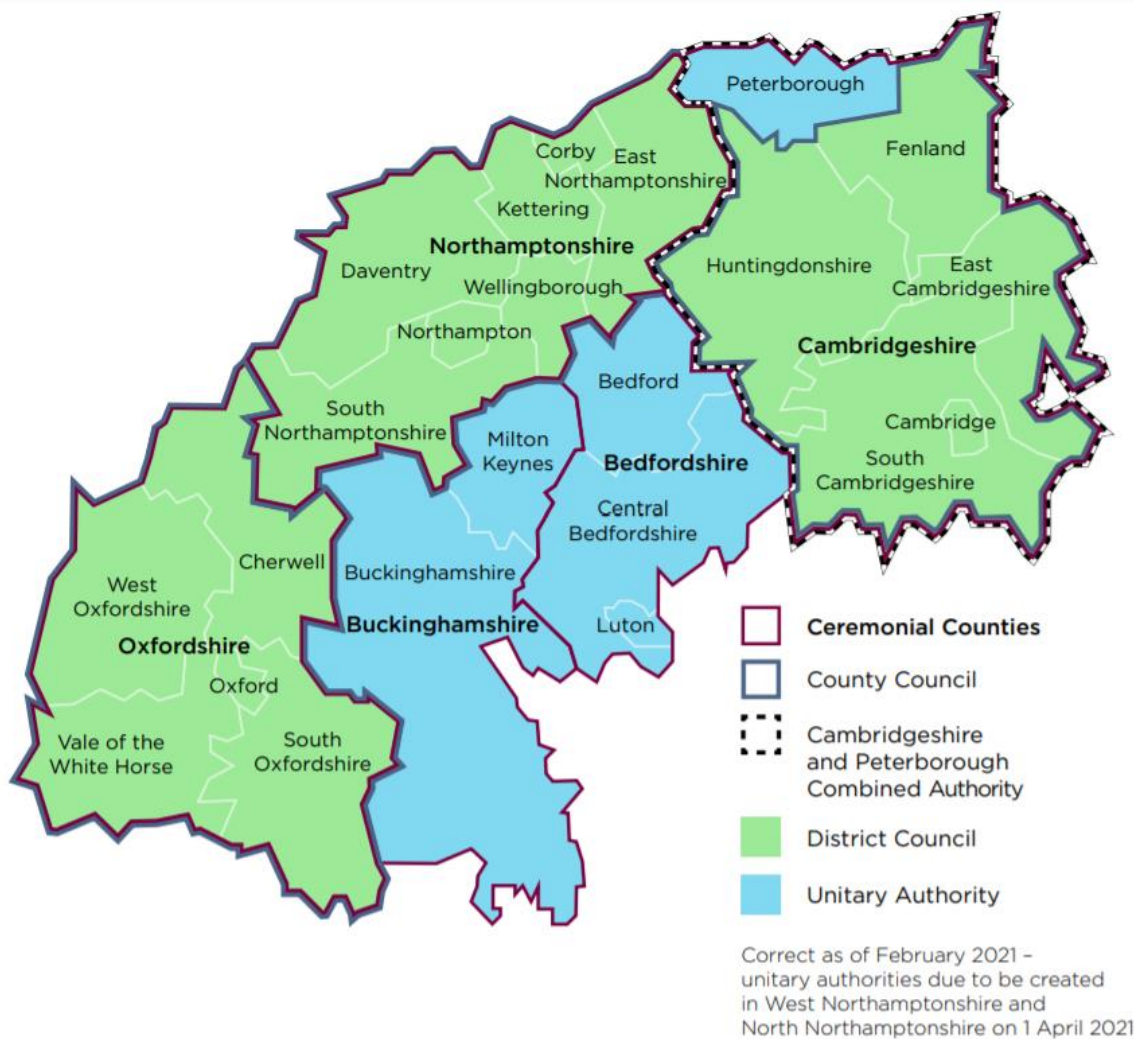


Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Evidence Paper [EOC]

Part 1: Introduction

1. The Oxford-Cambridge Growth Arc is an arching sweep of land between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge which is the focus of a long-term Government initiative to realise the potential of the area in order for it to become an economic asset of international standing. The area incorporates the county areas of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire and is described as forming a strategic belt referred to as 'the Arc'. The links beyond the Arc – for example with the M4 corridor, Heathrow and the Greater South East are also recognised as being important.
2. The area included within the Arc is home to approximately four million people and two million jobs which together generate over £111bn of economic output each year. The Arc contains 31 Local authorities, including all of the area covered by the Buckinghamshire unitary authority. It also covers 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships (including Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP), 10 universities and a considerable amount of heritage assets. The area is shown on the map below.



Part 2: Facts

History

3. In 2016, the Government commissioned the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to increase understanding of the Arc's potential. The brief was to consider how to maximise the potential of the Arc as a single knowledge intensive cluster that competes on a global stage, protecting the areas' high-quality environment and securing the homes and jobs the area needs.

This resulted in the 2017 publication of the NIC's report 'Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc', which set out that whilst the Arc is home to some of the UK's most productive and fast-growing cities and has significant potential for transformative growth, this is hindered by poor east-west infrastructure and a lack of suitable housing that fetters the ongoing success of the area. The NIC set out that to realise the full economic potential of the Arc, an integrated approach to infrastructure, place-making and business growth is needed, offering nine recommendations.

In response to this report, the Government designated the Oxford-Cambridge Arc a key economic priority, confirmed an ambition for up to one million high-quality new homes across the Arc by 2050, committed to completing East West Rail and the Expressway and committed to achieving growth in the Arc while improving the environment for future generations.

A policy paper from the Government published in 2019 provided an update on the Arc¹. This included a joint statement of ambition between Government and the Arc. This set out that the work relevant to the Arc was being organised across four thematic areas, reflecting the ambitions:

- Productivity – ensuring that we support businesses to maximise the Arc’s economic prosperity, including through the skills needed to enable communities to benefit from the jobs created.
- Place-making – creating places valued by local communities, including through the delivery of sufficient, affordable, and high-quality homes, to increase affordability and support growth in the Arc, as well as wider services including health and education.
- Connectivity – delivering the infrastructure communities need, including transport and digital connectivity, as well as utilities.
- Environment – ensuring we meet our ambitions for growth while leaving the environment in a better state for future generations.

A consultation exercise around these themes was held during summer 2019.

A number of initiatives have been taking place under the four policy pillars. These have included:

- Providing Local Growth Funding to deliver projects.
- Progressing the accelerated development of key sites through the Enterprise Zone programme, including in Aylesbury Vale.
- Developing Local Industrial Strategies including one which outlines how local partners plan to mobilise the economic assets of Buckinghamshire in the space, creative, digital, and advanced engineering sectors.
- The Garden Communities initiative which invited bids for new garden communities.
- Developing the Oxford Housing and Growth deal.
- Progressing East West Rail.
- Planning for local natural capital

Analysis prepared for the National Infrastructure Commission has suggested that transformational growth is possible in the Arc. If the Arc’s housing needs are better met and the proposed east-west road and rail links succeed in bringing distinct sub-regional economies closer together, the area could support a further 700,000 jobs by 2050, increasing gross value added (GVA) by £163 bn. The Arc is also important in positioning the UK on an international stage for world-leading production clusters in high-skilled sectors including life sciences, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, transport, energy, creative and digital.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-oxford-cambridge-arc-government-ambition-and-joint-declaration-between-government-and-local-partners>

Current Position

4. Buckinghamshire Council withdrew from the Oxford to Cambridge Arc scheme in November 2020, together with the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the University of Buckinghamshire. This was due to the Council's wish to

“be in control of its own future economic development and housing decisions, rather than potentially have these imposed upon it....”.

The Council statement also labelled the area a “false geography”.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published a policy paper about the Arc in February 2021. This takes the form of proposals for a regional spatial framework and sets out 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**.

The aim is to progress this by focusing on the strategic opportunities for growth and environmental improvement that cross local administrative boundaries and require more joined-up thinking across the area.

The strategy is now focused around ten core principles as follows:

- Collaborative – the Spatial Framework will be developed with local partners, including communities, local councils, businesses, and universities.
- Adaptable – a framework will be created that provides certainty for communities, local councils, and investors about where growth will happen, and the infrastructure that will support it. But it will also need to be flexible and adaptive to change as it happens.
- Long-term – The Plan will cover the period to 2050 and beyond to create the foundation for long-term sustainable growth.
- Integrated – the Framework will be based on an integrated approach to planning which spans the economy, housing, environment, and transport.
- Inclusive – the Framework will aim to bring benefits for existing communities and all places in the Arc – not just the highest growth centres.
- Digital-first – digital tools will be used to support better, more collaborative long-term policymaking.
- Evidence-based – the Framework will be based on a robust and comprehensive evidence base, which will be made publicly available.
- Sustainable – the Framework must strengthen the ability to meet the government's commitment to combat climate change, support sustainable patterns of development, and support lasting improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment.
- Quality – high expectations will be set for the quality of new development and infrastructure, to ensure the creation of the heritage areas of the future and enhance quality of life in all parts of the Arc.
- Add value – local or national policies and plans will not be duplicated but will be taken into consideration in developing the Framework. The Framework is intended to be genuinely strategic and focus on cross-boundary issues, policies, and opportunities.

5. Over the next two and a half years, a specialist team in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will work with communities and local partners to develop a robust, evidence-based Spatial Framework.

The timeline for developing the Spatial Framework covers three core phases:

- a. Developing a vision for the future of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc – undertake wide public engagement to shape a vision for the area, through a consultation in summer 2021.
- b. Towards a Spatial Framework – develop options for turning the vision into policy, based on engagement and initial evidence gathering and analysis. These options will be published for consultation in spring 2022.
- c. Draft Spatial Framework – To finalise the Spatial Framework, the responses to the consultation will be analysed alongside spatial analysis, option testing, impact assessments and stakeholder engagement.

A draft Spatial Framework will be published for consultation in autumn 2022, with implementation of the final Framework shortly after. The Spatial Framework will have the status of national planning and transport policy, providing a strategic framework for local planning.

Aylesbury Vale Local Plan (the emerging VALP)

6. Regardless of the statement late last year by Buckinghamshire Council, the unitary authority area lies within the Arc and this status has affected the development of the strategy of the emerging VALP. The Council will have to take the Spatial Framework policy into account in the preparation of its future planning policies.

Aylesbury was identified as a Garden Town both due to its role as the county town for Buckinghamshire and its central location within the Arc, meaning that it has been assessed as one of the key areas for economic development and growth in the UK.

The proposed links – the East-West Rail and Oxford-Cambridge Expressway are set to pass through the north of Aylesbury Vale District.

East-West rail will link Milton Keynes to London Marylebone via Aylesbury, positioning the town to capture the economic growth enabled by this infrastructure. The proposed delivery of East-West Rail is recognised in the VALP as something that could improve connectivity but would require mitigation.

The Council (at that time Aylesbury Vale District Council) voted to object to the Expressway in September 2019 on the grounds that the new road would have significant adverse impacts on Aylesbury Vale. Depending on the eventual route, the expressway could destroy farmland and habitats, including an SSSI. Construction projects should result in biodiversity net gains. However, the “gained” biodiversity may not be the same as that which has been lost. Some, such as ancient woodland is irreplaceable. The Council did not support the construction of another motorway such as the expressway at a time of climate emergency. The Expressway project is currently described as ‘paused’ on the Highways England website while they undertake further work on other potential road projects that could support the Government’s ambition for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Aylesbury Garden Town is described in the Economic Vision for the Arc as a location for a 'Living Lab' which will test the development of digital health, mobility, and social care solutions to provide a framework for healthy new towns and communities across the Arc.

Part 3: Analysis and Conclusions

Implications for the Neighbourhood Plan

7. The Neighbourhood Plan will be heavily influenced by the strategic 'Garden Town' allocations of AGT 1 and AGT 2, with one of the key aims of the Neighbourhood Plan being to assimilate these growth areas into Stoke Mandeville Parish and ensure appropriate linkages between existing and new communities. These allocations were made partly due to the location of Aylesbury Vale within the Arc region.

There is now more certainty about the future of the Arc region, with a Spatial Framework for the area due next year (2022). The ten core principles are helpful, if rather generic and accord with existing principles of the planning system. The emerging Neighbourhood Plan is in alignment with these principles in terms of seeking benefits for existing communities, with a strong emphasis on sustainable development including biodiversity improvements and a commitment to combatting climate change.

Recommendations

8. The Neighbourhood Plan needs to include policies which reflect Stoke Mandeville's location within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and within the wider Aylesbury Garden Town, and which put into practice the ten core principles set out in the regional spatial framework. In particular, the Neighbourhood Plan policies should:
 - Create opportunities for sustainable business development to ensure Stoke Mandeville not only remains a leading local centre of employment and enterprise but can develop into a high-quality business and innovation hub within the wider Garden Town and the Arc, creating high quality local jobs for local residents, and potentially taking advantage of the internationally known link between Stoke Mandeville and the Paralympics.
 - Ensure that the growing Stoke Mandeville is an exemplar for combating climate change and delivers improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment within the Parish and wider Garden Town.
 - Set high standards for the quality of new development and infrastructure.
 - Ensure that the future Parish has the right public and community facilities to enhance the quality of life of all residents.
 - Protect the heritage of the Parish and create heritage areas of the future.