

PLANNING POLICY EXECUTIVE ADVISORY PANEL 29 June 2021

Report Title	Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environmental Principles	
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford – Cambridge Arc

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek endorsement of the shared environmental principles for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In 2020 the Arc Environment Working Group agreed to produce a set of Arc-wide Environment Principles. The recommended principles are attached as Appendix A. They are the result of a collaborative piece of work led by a range of partners and stakeholders.
- 2.2 The document was endorsed by the Arc Leadership Group Plenary on 9 March 2021. It is hoped by having developed consensus and support for these principles, including direct engagement with Government, that these will be used to support emerging environmental policies within the emerging Arc Spatial Framework. The intention is to seek endorsement of the principles from all councils and Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) across the Arc.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Advisory Panel recommend that the Executive:
- a) Endorses the shared environmental principles set out in Appendix A; and
 - b) Supports the development of an Arc Environment Strategy which will provide further guidance on how the principles can be delivered.

3.2 *Reason for Recommendations* –

The principles are not formal policy but rather a shared statement of ambition for the Arc. They are intended to:

- support the environment policies emerging from the Arc Spatial Framework
- allow use of the Arc as a place for DEFRA to test and apply its 25-year plan and funding through pilots and projects
- support Local Planning Authorities with a frame of reference to further develop the principles through Local and Strategic Plans at a local and sub-regional level

4. Report Background

4.1 Arc-wide Environment Principles have been prepared by the OxCam Arc Environment Working Group and are attached as Appendix A. They are the result of a collaborative piece of work led by a range of partners and stakeholders from the group including:

- Environmental Non-Government Organisations (who drafted the first document)
- Local Nature Partnerships
- Local Government environment and planning policy representatives (responses were received from c. 20 local authorities, with representation from across the Arc)
- DEFRA
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- MHCLG (planning policy lead)
- University representative from the Universities' Environment Group
- A LEP representative
- Anglian Water
- An Energy Hub representative

4.2 The document was endorsed by the Arc Leadership Group Plenary on 9 March 2021. It is hoped that by having developed consensus and support for these principles, including direct engagement with Government, that these will be used to support emerging environmental policies within the emerging Arc Spatial Framework.

4.3 The Spatial Framework for the Arc is being developed by Government following a commitment in the 2020 budget. A policy paper on the Spatial Framework was published in February 2021 and the high-level implications for North Northamptonshire were reported to the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee on 2 March 2021. It is anticipated that consultation will take place on a vision over the summer of 2021 with a draft framework being consulted on in 2022. The Spatial Framework is intended to have the status of national planning and transport policy, providing a strategic framework for local planning.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford – Cambridge Arc are set out in Appendix A. There are five overarching principles:
- To work 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, including nationally and locally designated wildlife sites and priority habitats and links between them through the implementation of the spatial planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, mitigate, compensate and gain;
 - To be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government's 25-year plan. This will incorporate a systems-based and integrated assessment and implementation approach. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development;
 - To ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc;
 - To use natural resources wisely.
- 5.2 Each theme has several sub-principles which describe further the outcomes aspired to. Some of the sub-principles will evolve further as knowledge and understanding develops.
- 5.3 Having been endorsed by the Plenary, the Arc Environment Principles are being shared amongst a wider audience including the development community to gain support and buy-in. It is intended that each partner organisation will now proceed to take these through local decision-making processes to provide even more support for the shared principles.
- 5.4 The next piece of work for the Arc Environment Working Group is to develop an Environment Strategy which will set out a comprehensive plan for how the principles will be delivered in the Arc. It is likely that the strategy will take 12-18 months to complete.
- 5.5 The work of the Arc Environment Working Group has been to put forward a set of principles that are ambitious and aspirational for the Arc. The aim is to have a 'Green Arc' as an internationally significant exemplar for the very best of sustainable living and working. It sets targets above what is intended to be mandated by Government through the Environment Bill. The Environment Strategy will set out the practical ways to deliver this aspiration including 'doubling nature', a 20% biodiversity net gain and identifying innovative solutions to energy and water shortages and stimulating the green economy.
- 5.6 Given the ambitious and challenging nature of the principles they will require the collective effort of all partners in the Arc if they are to be delivered. They seek to address some of the biggest challenges of our time including achieving net zero carbon, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain, environmental net gain and ensuring renewable natural capital remains available for future generations. These ambitions will not come without significant challenges. There will be practical delivery challenges particularly to ensure development

remains viable in all areas across the Arc. It is however considered important to endorse these principles so that they can seek to influence the development of the Spatial Framework for the Arc. This will show the council's strong commitment to the environment. It will also provide the opportunity for real environmental improvements for the local area as a benefit of delivering growth.

- 5.7 The Spatial Framework will have a significant influence on the development of local plans within the council's area, notably the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan. National planning policy status means it will sit alongside the National Planning Policy Framework and guide plan production and decision making. In the interim the environmental principles can help to guide and influence the direction of the North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan as it is prepared, together with other planning policy documents.
- 5.8 Officers and members already sit on a number of Arc Boards and Working Groups and it is considered important that they continue to engage with these groups to influence the Spatial Framework for the benefit of residents, businesses and the environment in North Northamptonshire. Endorsement of the Environmental Principles will show a clear commitment to the environment, but engagement on the practical delivery of these ambitions alongside ensuring the resources exist to implement these will be critical.
- 5.9 North Northamptonshire is well placed to be an exemplar of sustainable living and working. The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy already includes a vision to be '*a showpiece for modern green living and well managed sustainable development: a resilient area where local choices have increased the ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to global economic changes.*' There are considerable opportunities to engage with the desire to double nature and increase biodiversity gain through projects including within the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA and the Rockingham Forest. It is hoped that the Arc will become a place where funding will become available to test and develop projects to deliver these environmental benefits and North Northamptonshire will be well placed to take advantage of these opportunities.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 Preparation of the environmental principles included collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders.

6.5 **Consideration by Scrutiny**

6.5.1 None.

6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 The principles are specifically seeking to address achieving net zero carbon and climate resilience.

6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 The principles are seeking to ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc including through maximising the health and wellbeing benefits of nature.

7. **Background Papers**

7.1 [Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: An introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework](#), HM Government, February 2021

7.2 [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#), HM Government, 2018

7.3 [North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031](#), adopted July 2016

7.4 [North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee Report of 2 March 2021](#) regarding the Policy Paper on the Spatial Framework (Report Item 7, paragraphs 3.6 – 3.27)