

PLANNING POLICY EXECUTIVE ADVISORY PANEL 23 September 2021

Report Title	Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc	
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Creating a Vision for the Oxford–Cambridge Arc – July 2021

Appendix B – North Northamptonshire Council draft planning policy response to the Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc consultation

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. For the Planning Policy Executive Advisory Panel (PPEAP) to provide feedback on the proposed planning policy draft response to the 'Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' consultation, to inform North Northamptonshire Council's response.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Oxford-Cambridge Arc has been identified by the Government as a key economic priority. In this consultation, the Government is seeking views on what the vision for the future growth of the Arc should be to 2050, to be delivered through the Arc Spatial Framework (ASF). The consultation document is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.2 The ASF will form national planning policy and transport policy for the Arc area, and local planning and local transport authorities must have regard to it when preparing local transport and local development plans and policies. It will be capable of being a material consideration in relevant planning decisions in the area. The North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (NNSP) will inform and be influenced by the development of the ASF.
- 2.3 It is considered essential that North Northamptonshire Council is actively involved in the development of the ASF at officer and Member levels to maximise opportunities and benefits for North Northamptonshire. Key

implications for North Northamptonshire are identified in this report and a draft planning policy response to the consultation set out at Appendix B. Feedback from this Panel is sought to inform the North Northamptonshire Council response, which will be submitted with the agreement of the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Executive Director for Place and Economy.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Planning Policy Executive Advisory Panel provide feedback on the draft planning policy response in Appendix B, which will inform the North Northamptonshire Council response, to be submitted with the agreement of the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Director for Place and Economy.

Reason for Recommendation:

- 3.2 To ensure that North Northamptonshire is actively involved in the development of the ASF to maximise the opportunities and benefits for North Northamptonshire and the communities within it and that key issues that affect North Northamptonshire are addressed in the development of the ASF.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Government wants to support sustainable economic growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, so is developing the Arc Spatial Framework (ASF) to plan for that growth to 2050 and beyond. The ASF will be a long-term strategic plan for the area, developed by the Government, and informed by engagement with local communities and stakeholders. Para 1.6 of the document sets out that it will have sustainability at its core and guide planning decisions and investment under four policy 'pillars':
- the environment;
 - the economy
 - connectivity and infrastructure; and
 - place-making
- 4.2 The ASF 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. The North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (NNSP) will inform and be influenced by the development of the ASF. The Arc area is set out in Figure 1.1 of the consultation document as below:

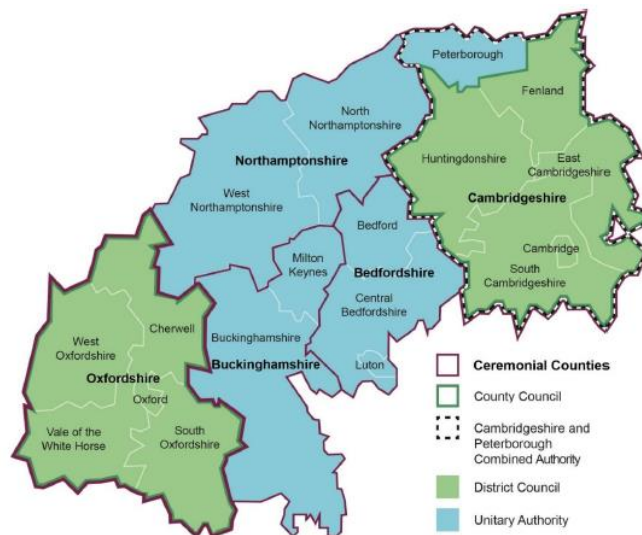


Figure 1.1 – The Oxford-Cambridge Arc

- 4.3 In February 2021, the Government published a [policy paper](#) that set out how it intended to develop a Spatial Framework to help realise its ambition to support sustainable economic growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. The high-level implications for North Northamptonshire were reported to the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee on 2nd March 2021.
- 4.4 In this latest [consultation](#), the Government is seeking views on what the vision for the future growth of the Arc should be to 2050 to be delivered through the Arc Spatial Framework (ASF). As it is developed the ASF will be accompanied by a fully integrated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) which will be informed by other statutory assessments and regimes such as the habitats regulations assessment pursuant to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. As part of the consultation, views are also sought on the initial work that has been done to set the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 4.5 The consultation runs from 20th July 2021 to 12th October 2021 and is the first of three planned consultations on the ASF. Para 1.10 of the document sets out that the Government is particularly keen to hear from people who normally do not engage in planning consultations and decisions. This is part of its commitment to developing the ASF in a way that is open, collaborative, inclusive, digital and evidence-based. The engagement undertaken to date and how it has influenced the approach is explained at paras 1.15-1.22 of the consultation document.
- 4.6 The Government will consider all comments received to this consultation, which, alongside other considerations, will help create the Spatial Framework's vision for the Arc to 2050 and inform the development of the Sustainability Appraisal. In spring 2022, Government expects to publish the vision as well as a public consultation on options for the policies in the ASF. This will form part of two further public consultations that will support the development of the ASF.

- **Towards a Spatial Framework** – using the vision as a foundation, we will develop options for delivering its objectives. The options will be based on feedback from engagement, initial evidence gathering and analysis. We hope to publish this, including a Sustainable Appraisal 'Issues and Options' Report, for public consultation in spring 2022 to give everyone a chance to have their say; and
- **Draft Spatial Framework** – to finalise the Spatial Framework, we will consider responses to the previous consultation, and undertake further spatial analysis, option testing, impact assessments and engagement. We hope to publish the draft Spatial Framework with its Sustainability Appraisal Environmental Report, for consultation in autumn 2022, with implementation of the final framework shortly after.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 Previous reports (15th March 2018 (Item 4), 25th April 2019 (Item 4), 25th July 2019 (Item 6)) updated the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee on the background and current position regarding the preparation of the ASF and the implications for North Northamptonshire, most recently on [2nd March 2021](#) (Item 7). This is discussed in more detail later in section 5.
- 5.2 Para 1.19 of the consultation document explains the measures Government have taken to communicate best with a wider audience. It sets out that Government has kept the language and content as simple and short as possible. The aim is to reach as wide and diverse an audience as possible through this consultation, in particular those people who do not normally engage in planning. A digital consultation hub has been provided for people to view information and provide feedback.
- 5.3 As set out above, the style and content of the questions are tailored to seek wider engagement. The document sets out a number of consultation questions on different themes to obtain feedback. This includes seeking views on the importance of issues and asking for further details on key issues. Given that the response to the multiple-choice questions would be very important/important to all, a response to these questions has not been proposed, but they are included in Appendix B for completeness. MHCLG have advised officers that they would prefer those responding to use the web-based platform (which has a 500 character limit) if possible because this is the most straightforward way for them to process and analyse responses. Where this isn't possible – more likely where organisations such as North Northamptonshire Council are responding – then submitting a response by email remains an option, but MHCLG would encourage sign-posting to the relevant section of the consultation pro forma. Due to the character limit, it is considered that to provide the necessary detail in the Councils response a response should be prepared to be submitted by email which clearly sign-posts to the relevant questions.
- 5.4 This section provides a high-level overview of the key elements of the document and summary of headlines of the draft proposed planning policy response which is set out in more detail in Appendix B. The implications for North

Northamptonshire are considered to be largely as reported to the 2nd March 2021 Joint Planning Committee. These implications are reflected in the proposed response at Appendix B. This response has been informed by relevant consultation responses from the Joint Planning Committee and former North Northamptonshire authorities, notably to the Planning for the Future White Paper, including the response of the North Northamptonshire Shadow Executive to this consultation.

- 5.5 This draft response will be used to gain feedback from Members of this Executive Advisory Panel and other areas within the Council. As the consultation runs until 12th October, the final North Northamptonshire Council response will be developed based on Member input, feedback from other Service Areas and Directorates within the Council, key stakeholder responses and discussions at relevant officer and Member groups, before it is submitted with the agreement of the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration.
- 5.6 It is considered essential that North Northamptonshire Council is actively involved in the development of the ASF at officer and Member levels, to maximise opportunities and benefits for North Northamptonshire and ensure that key issues that affect North Northamptonshire are addressed in the development of the ASF. The proposed response recognises the opportunities provided by the Arc and ASF but sets out the conditions required to achieve maximum benefits for North Northamptonshire.

Consultation Paper and implications for North Northamptonshire

Section 1. Introduction: Creating a Vision for the Oxford Cambridge Arc (paras 1.1-1.26)

- 5.7 This section explains the background to the ASF and the purpose of the consultation as explained in the sections above.

Headlines of proposed response

- *The vision for the Arc should be that all areas and the communities within it, benefit from being within it, with no area left behind.*
- *North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) recognises the opportunities provided by the Arc. Support from the government will be necessary to realise and deliver these ambitions.*
- *Given the lack of spatial detail in the current consultation, including on elements such as housing and employment growth, the specific implications or expectations for North Northamptonshire are unclear.*
- *Investment in key infrastructure, including an enhanced environment, will be critical to realising North Northamptonshire's contribution to the Arc by unlocking key sites for development and facilitating conditions for growth.*

Section 2. The Environment (paras 2.1-2.13)

- 5.8 This section sets out how the Government considers that the ASF offers a unique opportunity to preserve and enhance a green Arc and support nature recovery, improve air quality, reduce flood risk and improve access to nature and green space across the area (para 2.5). This will be achieved by developing policy to take a more coordinated approach to the environment by means of

making sure the environment is at the centre of planning decisions and ensuring natural capital forms a key part of planning and decision making. Policy should be set to support, amongst other things, the retention of and investment in, key existing and potential new habitats as well as set high standards for new development including on carbon emissions and active travel. Para 2.6 goes on to state that Environmental Opportunity Areas will be identified in the Arc where the most benefits for environmental sustainability can be realised. Rockingham Forest into John Clare Country, Nene Valley and Sywell Wood are identified as strategic-scale environmental opportunity zones.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *The environment must be central to all activity within the Arc. The ASF represents a real opportunity to ensure this by taking a coordinated approach.*
- *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 Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Rockingham Forest.*
- *North Northamptonshire Council will be particularly interested in the development of the Habitats Regulation's Assessment (HRA), as the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA could potentially have a significant impact on development in the area. The HRA for the ASF is also likely to influence the HRAs of local plans. The impact on SPAs needs to be strategically addressed. It is considered that the document could be more specific as to the Arc's Net Zero ambitions as it seems the key reference at para 4.5 seems non-committal.*

Section 3. The Economy (paras 3.1-3.10)

- 5.9 This section sets out how the Arc will develop an Economic Strategy, supported by strong economic evidence, to identify the policies, locations and investment needed to deliver the Arc's potential for sustainable and green economic growth. Policies will be set to make sure growth is felt by all communities and that will help local planning authorities plan for new business and employment space to meet the needs of different sectors and businesses (para 3.4).

Headlines of proposed response:

- *Given the continued growth aspirations of North Northamptonshire, it is imperative the Arc Vision recognises the local deficit in Higher Education provision and prioritises rectifying this in order to help the area level up and increase social mobility for its residents, to the benefit of the wider Arc area.*
- *If the Arc is to achieve its full potential, areas on its geographic periphery, such as North Northamptonshire, must be prioritised for investment including Education (see previous answer) and interventions to support economic growth.*

Section 4. Connectivity and Infrastructure (paras 4.1-4.10)

- 5.10 This section, through para 4.5, sets out how the Arc is committed to identifying the long term need for new infrastructure and investment across the Arc to 2050 and using this work to create an infrastructure plan to support future growth and place-making such as: delivering sustainable and public transport, protecting and enhancing the environment and giving communities access to the public services they need. Para 4.5 continues by setting out how the Arc has also

committed to setting strategic policies for local transport authorities and local planning authorities, building on the England's Economic Heartland transport strategy and evidence base, including the four key principles for transport connectivity in the area:

- aiming for net zero carbon emissions from transport by 2040, but no later than 2050
- improving quality of life and wellbeing through a safe and inclusive transport system for all
- connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities
- making sure people and goods can move efficiently through the area and to/from international gateways.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *Development needs to be accompanied by all of the necessary infrastructure to support it, and it must be of high quality, sustainable design, meeting local needs and supporting the local economy, alongside maximising environmental net gain and mitigation to climate change.*
- *North Northamptonshire is already making an important contribution to achieving wider growth objectives associated with its strategic location within a nationally important growth area. Connectivity and investment in infrastructure are key to delivery of sustainable growth.*
- *Changing working habits such as increased remote working are likely to lead to reduced demand for journeys to work, particularly as result of homeworking becoming the norm for many people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The impacts of this will need to be considered in the development of the ASF.*
- *North Northamptonshire has previously raised concerns through the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee in respect of both the Arc and to England's Economic Heartland that as the area is on the geographic periphery of the Arc/ England's Economic Heartland (EEH) area it was at risk of being marginalised in terms of its role within it. We welcome the work being undertaken by EEH in relation to this, including the development of connectivity studies and welcome recognition in para 4.5 that the ASF will set strategic policies which build on the EEH transport strategy.*

Section 5. Place-making (paras 5.1-5.13)

5.11 The document states at para 5.6 that the Government wants to support Local and Neighbourhood Plans in planning for a better future for their areas by identifying the most sustainable locations for new homes, the infrastructure needed to support sustainable growth in these locations (e.g. education and health facilities) and locations to protect and improve the environment. The document also sets out in para 5.7 that the Government will also seek to set policies to enable new development to come forward at the scale and speed needed as well as new development to support the recovery of nature and new green space that can be accessed by all. Policies will also need to be set to enable new development to support resilience to climate change and the protection of highly valued existing green space. In addition to this, new policies will be set to ensure housing needs are met in full, including 'much needed' affordable housing.

5.12 Para 5.8 of the document sets out that in parallel to the development of the Spatial Framework, the Government is also exploring options to speed up new

housing and infrastructure development in the Arc to help meet its ambitions, where evidence supports it. This includes examining (and where appropriate, developing) the case for new and/or expanded settlements in the Arc, including options informed by possible East West Rail stations between Bedford and Cambridge and growth options at Cambridge itself. The Government will undertake additional Arc consultations on any specific proposals for such options as appropriate. The Spatial Framework will guide the future growth of the Arc to 2050, including on the question of new housing and infrastructure and will, as part of its development, take into consideration any significant new housing and infrastructure coming forward to meet the Arc's ambition.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *Growth should be located at the most sustainable locations and facilitate the conditions for settlements to be more sustainable. Environmental constraints and opportunities must be fully considered in determining the locations of growth.*
- *Residents share similar concerns to the Council regarding the need for high-quality development that meets local needs and is supported by the necessary infrastructure investment.*
- *While house prices in North Northamptonshire are relatively affordable in a wider context, median household incomes are also relatively low and have not kept pace with house price inflation. Alongside access to bespoke affordable housing products, opportunities for higher paid employment (as sought by the JCS focus on higher skilled jobs) will be the most effective ways of improving the affordability of market housing for the existing community.*
- *It is welcomed that the document recognises that the essential ingredients of successful placemaking, and that design quality is not simply about housing delivery. Great places go beyond aesthetics and visual appearance, encompassing other important principles such as social opportunity/integration, community, health/wellbeing, and local economy.*
- *Significant resources will be required (in both public and private sectors) to implement these measures through local design policy. Additional resources will be needed given capacity issues and the pressure already on the design service in North Northamptonshire.*

Section 6. Our commitment to engaging communities (paras 6.1-6.7)

5.13 This section states at para 6.2 that Government aims to conduct wide and meaningful engagement throughout the process of the development of the ASF, to give as many people as possible opportunity to influence it. Para 6.3 goes on to say that the ASF wants to deliver an exemplary programme of engagement throughout the two-year preparation process and Government will do this in a way that is collaborative, adaptable, integrated and inclusive and will be conducted via a digital first approach to support better, more accessible policy engagement.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *There is no one size fits all for properly engaging with all parts of the community on all aspects of planning.*
- *The commitments in the document regarding consultation and engagement are supported, as are the measures to ensure sustainability is at the heart of the ASF. It is critical that these matters underpin the preparation of the ASF.*

- *The timetable for the ASF is challenging and will require significant input from North Northamptonshire Council and other stakeholders (including an anticipated three consultations in 18 months). It is important that this time pressure does not undermine engagement and robust testing of the ASF and the evidence base that underpins it. It is noted that the current timetable does not include for an independent examination of the proposals or an end date for the ASF to be finalised as national policy.*

Section 7. Our commitment to data, evidence and digital tools (paras 7.1-7.7)

5.14 In this section the document states in para 7.6 that the Government is committed to developing a reliable and complete evidence base and use the latest digital technology and data analytics to develop it. Para 7.6 also sets out that the work will support development of an open source, digital platform for data and evidence to support collaboration between Government, businesses, local councils and communities in decision making. The ASF will be visual, interactive and map-based for effective public engagement.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *The commitment to developing a robust, accessible evidence base is strongly supported and should assist implementation of the ASF and support local plan development.*
- *It is critical that the ASF evidence base addresses and seeks to resolve key issues that could constrain sustainable growth within the Arc such as the impact of Special Protection Areas (SPAs), infrastructure constraints, etc. This will help support Local Plan development and implementation.*
- *The use of digital tools is welcomed and will help to ensure that key data and information can be shared to a wider audience and encourage active participation.*

Section 8. How we will monitor and deliver the framework (paras 8.6-8.11)

5.15 The document sets out in para 8.2 that a Spatial Framework delivery plan, an infrastructure delivery plan as well other strategies and action plans across the Spatial Framework's thematic pillars will be created to deliver the identified investment set out in the ASF. Para 8.10 goes on to state that setting up a robust monitoring and evaluation framework is important for assessing the effectiveness of the ASF and its policies. This will be crucial to keeping the ASF under review and identify areas where objectives aren't being met.

Headlines of proposed response:

- *The approach to assessing viability and identifying key infrastructure within the development of the ASF at para 8.5 is supported as the approach and policies in the ASF need to be deliverable.*
- *Alongside the provision of sufficient infrastructure funding, local authorities will require sufficient resources to implement the ASF locally.*
- *It is unclear who will undertake the monitoring and provide the data. If local authorities are to have a role they will need to be appropriately resourced. Clear definitions of indicators and methodologies will be needed to ensure consistency.*

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 There are no specific resources or financial implications arising from the proposals at this stage. Officer resources will be required to formulate the consultation response and maintain ongoing involvement in the development of the ASF. There may be opportunities through the development of the ASF to secure additional investment in North Northamptonshire.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 The ASF will form national planning policy and transport policy for the Arc area, and local planning and local transport authorities must have regard to it when preparing local transport and local development plans and policies. It will be capable of being a material consideration in relevant planning decisions in the area.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. There is, however, a risk that if North Northamptonshire Council did not respond to the consultation that relevant key issues that affect North Northamptonshire and concerns of the Council may not be addressed in the development of the ASF.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 The ASF document is out for consultation as explained in the report. The engagement undertaken in developing the approach is set out in the consultation document.

6.5 Consideration by Scrutiny

6.5.1 This draft response will be used to gain feedback from Members of this Executive Advisory Panel and other areas within the Council. As the consultation runs until 12th October, the final North Northamptonshire Council response will be developed based on Member input, feedback from other Service Areas and Directorates within the Council, key stakeholder responses and discussions at relevant officer and Member groups, before it is submitted with the agreement of the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration. There is considered to be no need for wider consideration by scrutiny.

6.6 Climate Impact

6.6.1 The ASF document sets out the proposed approach to climate change mitigation that will be taken in the ASF and its development. It is accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report that considers climate change and sets out opportunities for the Spatial Framework to address issues. The proposed response identifies how the approach could potentially be strengthened.

6.7 Community Impact

- 6.7.1 The ASF document seeks to ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc and feedback is sought to influence the Vision and approach. The proposed consultation response seeks to ensure that the benefits for North Northamptonshire and its communities are maximised.

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 [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)
- 7.3 [North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee Report of 25 July 2019 regarding the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Review](#) (Report Item 6, paragraphs 3.6-3.13)
- 7.4 [North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee Report of 25 April 2019 regarding Oxford-Cambridge Arc Update](#) (Report Item 4)
- 7.5 [North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee Report of 15 March 2018 regarding Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor](#) (Report Item 4)
- 7.6 [North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031](#), adopted July 2016
- 7.7 North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Committee responses to relevant consultations can be viewed at: <http://www.nnjpu.org.uk/consultations/>