

# Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Developing a Spatial Framework

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On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021, the Government published its long awaited policy paper for developing a long-term Spatial Framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

## Why the Oxford-Cambridge Arc?

In the Budget 2020, the Government committed to developing, with local partners, the *Spatial Framework* for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and to develop 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, and,**
- **Support lasting improvements to the environment, green infrastructure, and biodiversity.**

The Arc is made up of the five counties of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, which are seen collectively as a desirable place to live, visit, work, and invest, in part due to the quality of the local environment, the rich and diverse character of its landscapes, and the resultant high value of the area's natural capital.

However, alongside this, it was also identified that the Arc is an area constrained by inadequate infrastructure, with a stressed and fragmented natural environment, escalating housing costs and complex local governance. As a result, the purpose of the *Spatial Framework* is to address these constraints to realise the full economic and environmental potential of the area.

A key priority of the Government is to focus on levelling up growth and opportunities across the Arc and in particular, the inequalities that exist within the regions. As a result, they highlight three key areas of concern:

1. **The natural environment and climate change**
2. **Connectivity and infrastructure**
3. **The availability of homes where they are most needed.**

The policy paper identifies that addressing these issues requires a coordinated approach across the Arc, but this is difficult due to the Arc comprising 23 local planning

authorities; a mayoral combined authority; eight transport planning authorities; several Local Enterprise Partnerships and England's Economic Heartland.

## What will the Spatial Framework do?

To achieve a collaborative approach, it is the intention that the Government will develop a long-term *Spatial Framework* that will support better spatial planning, provide a blueprint for better-targeted public investment, give investors and businesses greater longer-term certainty, and allow communities to shape the long-term future of places across the region.

The *Spatial Framework* will be based on 10 core principles: *Collaborative, adaptable, long-term, integrated, inclusive, digital-first, evidence-based, sustainable, quality and add value.*

The first step is to develop an 'Arc-wide Economic Strategy' with the *Spatial Framework* seen as the delivery mechanism for the strategy providing:

- **An assessment of existing employment land planned growth and anticipated future need.**
- **Policies to support local planning authorities in allocating Strategic Business Zones or Strategic Industrial Locations, and**
- **Policies to support different land uses for different sectors and sizes of business.**

The Framework is proposed to also identify *Environmental Opportunity Areas*, including water services infrastructure, biodiversity net gain and carbon sinks as well as identifying and mapping the existing provision of health, education, accessible green spaces, social and community infrastructure, utilities, green and blue infrastructure, and other infrastructure requirements, setting strategic policies for local transport authorities and local planning authorities.

In respect of housing, the Spatial Framework will outline policy priorities and approaches to enable sustainable, transport-led development, and will include policies to enable:

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- New settlements to come forward at the scale and speed needed.
- New development to support habitat recovery, delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and provision of good-quality green space within schemes.
- Brownfield redevelopment and densification and expansion of existing settlements, in sustainable locations or locations that can be made more sustainable by enhanced access to sustainable transport modes.
- Housing needs to be met in full, including delivery of much-needed affordable housing.

### How will the Spatial Framework be developed?

Over the next 2 and a half years, the Government will work with communities and local partners to develop the *Spatial Framework*, with a view to implementing it as a spatially specific national planning policy. This will require Local Planning Authorities, in preparing local development documents (including local plans) to have regard to the *Spatial Framework*, as part of the national policy framework.

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

1. **Developing a vision for the future**
2. **Towards a Spatial Framework**
3. **Draft Spatial Framework**

The proposed next step is to engage with local partners and the public on the Vision for the Spatial Framework, to be published for consultation in Summer 2021. It is recognised that this extensive consultation and engagement process will be complex and challenging.

It is then expected that the draft Spatial Framework will be published in Autumn 2022 with a view to adoption late 2022/early 2023.

If you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact DLP Planning Ltd. Details are available at:

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