



Report to:	Council	22 February 2022
Lead Cabinet Member:	Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader of the Council	
Lead Officer:	Liz Watts, Chief Executive	

Oxford-Cambridge Arc - Update

Executive Summary

1. This is the regular update on the work of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Recommendations

2. That Council notes the report.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. Councillors requested an update on the Arc at every Council meeting.

Details

4. Following the creation of the 'Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) in September 2021, and the appointment of the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP as the new DLUHC Secretary of State, there has been a significant change in the government's approach to the Ox Cam Arc. Following a period of uncertainty over the ensuing months, it became clear that the government does not wish to see the Ox Cam Arc as a project driven by central government.
5. There was no mention of the Ox Cam Arc in the Levelling Up White Paper published on 2 February, and discussions with DLUCH officials have indicated that ministers believe that while they support the continuation of the project, it should be locally led, focusing on things that local leaders believe are priorities. This chimes with much of the local leadership narrative in the Levelling Up White Paper.
6. While the government had officially stated that it had dropped the 1 million housing target for the Arc, in a ministerial statement by the previous Housing Minister, Chris Pincher MP (speaking in a Westminster Hall debate in July 2021), many communities continued to be cynical about this position. Now that the government will not be taking the project forward centrally, it will be up to local

leaders to identify the priorities they wish to support across the Arc (if it does indeed continue as a locally led project).

7. At the Ox Cam Arc Leaders' meeting on 28 January 2022, leaders expressed concern about the level of commitment that government may or may not make to the Arc in terms of future funding. While revenue funding has been made available to continue the ongoing operations of the Arc (ie., funding the small team of officers) there is no long term commitment to this funding, and no commitment at all to capital funding.
8. Leaders agreed that this level of uncertainty was frustrating, but that there were a number of key opportunities for collaboration which have been developed under the auspices of the Arc (including work on the environment, infrastructure and economy, as well as significant collaboration across the ten universities in the Arc), and that there was benefit in reassessing whether this collaboration had value if it were to be taken forward at a local level. Leaders have always been unanimous that the 1m housing target was absolutely unacceptable locally.
9. It was therefore agreed at the Leaders' meeting on 28 January (which was before the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper) to continue in 'transition' for six months, whilst all options are thoroughly considered.
10. We are still awaiting updates on East West rail and the Spatial Framework.

Options

11. To note the report.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

12. The Arc could contribute to up to three of the Council's priority areas, through growing the local economy, providing increased affordable housing, and ensuring that the Arc is a Green Arc and meets the aspirational environmental standards set out in the Environment Principles.

Background Papers

none

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