

**Divisions Affected - ALL**

**CABINET - 16 MARCH 2021**

**STATEMENT OF INTENT  
A COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE AND  
RENEWAL**

**Report by Corporate Director, Communities**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

- i. Acknowledge the breadth of County Council partnership activity for climate action, environmental resilience and renewal in Oxfordshire.
- ii. Support the establishment of an Environment Advisory Group of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and its Terms of Reference as set out at Appendix 1, subject to the outcome of the meeting of the Growth Board on 22 March.
- iii. Endorse the shared principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, as set out at Appendix 2.
- iv. Support the development of an Arc Environment Strategy which will provide for how the principles can be delivered and delegate authority to the Corporate Director Environment and Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to take this forward.
- v. Note progress concerning the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The County Council has a good track record of partnership working and is well placed to support the proposed Environment Advisory Group of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire. Some examples of current partnership activity across three themes of climate action, namely action for **net zero** carbon emissions, **resilience** to climate change and **renewal** of the environment including biodiversity net gain are appended (Appendix 3).
- 1.2 As a strategic leader for climate action the County Council wishes to endorse the environment principles of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and participate in the development of an Environment Strategy, in order to

progress this shared ambition for climate action, environmental resilience and renewal across the Arc. This commitment firmly positions the County Council as a strategic leader for climate action, including environmental resilience and renewal within Oxfordshire and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. Oxfordshire County Council acknowledged a Climate Emergency in 2019 and launched the Climate Action Framework in October 2020 with a target of achieving net zero by 2030. Besides putting our own house in order, we have committed to work in partnership with a range of key stakeholders to achieve the fifth goal of the Climate Action Framework, to demonstrate leadership for enabling a net zero carbon Oxfordshire by 2050 in line with legal targets.
- 2.2. There are a number of drivers coming together currently to strengthen the potential for an Environment Advisory Group for Oxfordshire. These include:
  - Legislative drivers from central government, such as the DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan, which sets out a comprehensive approach to protect, restore and enhance landscapes and habitats, and create new nature areas and natural capital assets through a policy of net environmental gain.
  - The collective ambition of local authority Leaders to take forward partnership action for climate change, including organisational commitments towards a net zero ambition for Oxfordshire through the development of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision. The County Council supports the development of this Vision, particularly the Oxfordshire Growth Board principles for “good growth” and will be considering a final draft of the Vision at the next meeting of Cabinet in April.
  - The recent announcement for an Oxford to Cambridge Arc spatial plan and the proposal of environmental principles to underpin delivery of their environment working group, set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.3. Oxfordshire County Council adopted a Climate Action Framework in October 2020, which specifically recognises the need to review and develop our partnerships including strengthening support to the Community Action Groups, the universities to shape world class research and support to Living Oxford to leverage Living Labs data and insights. Now, six months into the Climate Action programme it is timely to consider the proposal of an Oxfordshire Environment Advisory Group of the Growth Board and how that might add value to the County Council’s leadership role on climate action.

## **3. Local Nature Partnership**

- 3.1. The Growth Board has previously indicated support for establishing a separate Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire to guide work on nature recovery in Oxfordshire and link in with wider regional discussions concerning

the natural environment. Oxfordshire is one of the few areas nationally not to have an LNP, and the only area within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

- 3.2 Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) provide a joined up and strategic forum to help manage the natural environment in an integrated way to produce multiple benefits for local people, the economy and the environment. They are designed to promote a more formalised, systematic and collaborative approach to the management and enhancement of the natural environment and encompass a broad range of local organisations and people who are committed to this aim.

## 4. Oxford-Cambridge Arc

- 4.1. The Oxford-Cambridge Arc (the Arc) is a globally significant area between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. It is formed of five ceremonial counties: Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire.
- 4.2. Central government (MHCLG) has recently announced an intention to develop a Spatial Framework for the Arc, a long-term strategic plan to help co-ordinate new developments in the area together with the required strategic infrastructure, including green infrastructure. A key objective of the Spatial Framework will be to ensure the environment is protected and enhanced.
- 4.3. In October 2020 an economic prospectus for the Arc was published jointly by local authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnerships within the Arc. It outlines the following vision:

*“By 2050, the Arc will be a world leading place for high-value growth, innovation and productivity. A global hub where ideas and companies are generated and thrive, home to exemplary models of 21st century development, with a high-quality environment and outstanding quality of life, and with a strong economic focus that drives inclusive clean growth.”*

## 5. Arc Environment Principles

- 5.1 In 2020 the Arc Leadership Group Environment Working Group agreed to produce a set of Arc-wide Environment Principles to underpin the vision, set out above, and align with the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan. The principles set out in Appendix 2 are not formal policy but rather a shared statement of ambition for the Arc. They are intended to:
  - support our position with respect to 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.

5.2 The regional principles are the result of a collaborative piece of work led by a range of partners and stakeholders and have been written and endorsed as a shared statement of ambition by the Arc's local partners and stakeholders including:

- Environmental NGOs (who drafted the first document)
- Local Nature Partnerships
- Local Government environment and planning policy representatives
- 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

5.3 There are five over-arching principles address which describe how the Arc will tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time:

- To work towards a target of net zero carbon at a pan-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 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.
- To ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc;
- To use natural resources wisely.

5.4 Each theme has several sub-principles which describe further the outcomes we aspire to. Some of the sub-principles may evolve further as thinking develops. 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.

5.5 The agreed principles will be strengthened further after being publicly considered by every partner organisation. The Arc Leadership Group will develop an Arc Environment Strategy to provide the route map to delivering

against these ambitions, including trajectories for meeting ambitious future performance targets.

## **6. Role of the County Council with this agenda**

- 6.1. Oxfordshire County Council has a commitment to deliver the Climate Action Framework, agreed at Cabinet in October 2020 and to work in partnership with other stakeholders to achieve a net zero ambition across Oxfordshire by 2050. This activity can be grouped under three pillars for climate action:
  - Net zero carbon - targets for our own estate by 2030 and to enable net zero Oxfordshire by 2050 we need to work in partnership.
  - Resilience - both in terms of responding to the impacts of climate change arising from extreme weather events as the Lead Local Flood Authority, for example mitigating flood risk through the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme and ensuring resilience in resource efficiency including security of energy supply and waste management, achieving 97% diversion of waste from landfill.
  - Renewal – renewing the natural capital and environmental assets of Oxfordshire for “good growth”, ensuring outcomes for environmental wellbeing are integrated into all decisions for social and economic wellbeing.
- 6.2. The County Council is already working in partnership with many stakeholders across a range of sectors and communities, some examples of current County Council activity across these three pillars are set out in Appendix 3.
- 6.3. Participation by the County Council in the Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group would strengthen the role of the County Council in partnership working for climate action, environmental resilience and renewal across Oxfordshire. Supporting the principles of the Arc Environment Working Group would strengthen the role of the County Council for climate action, environmental resilience and renewal within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

## **7. Timescales**

- 7.1. Oxfordshire Growth Board 22nd March to consider recommendations 2 and 3 above.
- 7.2. An Environment Strategy for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc is expected to take 12-18 months to complete.

- 7.3. Cabinet will consider the Growth Board's recommendations for the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, including the Oxfordshire principles for "good growth" at its next meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> April.

## **8. Next Steps**

- 8.1. Pending the Growth Board decision on 22<sup>nd</sup> March more detail on the Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment Advisory Group is expected following the elections, possibly in June 2021.
- 8.2. Having been endorsed by the ARC Leaders Plenary, the Arc Environment Principles will be 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.
- 8.3. 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.
- 8.4. The County Council will continue to work in partnership across a wide range of sectors and stakeholders in order to take forward its commitment to the Arc Environment Principles and climate action ambitions for net zero, environmental resilience and renewal.

## **9. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications.

Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner

## **10. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications.

Comments checked by: Christian Smith, Principal Solicitor

## **11. Staff Implications**

There are no additional staffing implications arising from this report.

## **12. Equality & Inclusion Implications**

The recommendations support equality and inclusion.

### **13. Sustainability Implications**

The proposals positively support objectives set out within the Climate Action Framework and promote inclusion and diversity in decision-making.

### **14. Risk Management**

There are no specific risks to the Council resulting from this report.

JASON RUSSELL  
Corporate Director Communities

Appendices: Appendix 1: Oxfordshire Growth Board Environment  
Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Appendix 2: Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment  
Principles

Appendix 3: Examples of County Council partnership  
activity for Climate Action

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Rachel Wileman, Assistant Director, Strategic  
Infrastructure & Planning  
07554 103491 rachel.wileman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

March 2021