

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET**

**19 September 2023**

## **Pan Regional Partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge Area: Principles and Objectives**

### **Report by the Chief Executive**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
  - a) **Confirm** that the County Council will be a participant in the pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area

#### **Executive Summary**

In February 2023, it was reported to Cabinet that a new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area was being proposed by local authorities and other regional partners, with support from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Cabinet agreed to participate in the partnership subject to receipt of a further report, addressing governance arrangements and the Council's objectives for participating in the partnership.

This report brings back this additional information and recommends that Cabinet confirm the County Council's participation.

#### **Background and Key Information**

2. As set out in the February report, government policy supports the development of regional partnerships where there is strong interest in collaboration in pursuit of shared economic, infrastructure and environmental aims. While generally non-statutory, sub-regional partnerships can support more efficient and coherent communication with national Government, coordinate local infrastructure programmes into a more effective overall strategy, increase regional 'voice' and influence, improve the use of economic data and evidence in decision making, foster innovation, and promote international trade and investment.
3. From 2016, an Oxford-Cambridge Arc partnership has championed regional collaboration across a similar geography. This has included agreeing shared regional principles for protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment. In

2020, government announced its intention to develop a spatial framework for Oxford-Cambridge and a consultation process was undertaken by government. The conclusions of the consultation have not been published but it is anticipated that a regional spatial framework as originally envisaged will not be taken forward. Funding was withdrawn from the previous Arc partnership and the supporting arrangements and governance structures were dissolved.

4. Following this change in national direction, local participants have developed proposals for a more locally led alternative approach to regional co-operation in the pursuit of delivering sustainable economic growth and a higher quality natural environment. The intention of this proposal was that a new partnership would link with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the other member Growth Boards across the region. It is intended to involve partners in Oxfordshire, the Central Growth Board area (Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire), Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.
5. A shadow board was convened to develop the approach under the Chair of Cllr Barry Wood who is Leader of Cherwell District Council. A proposal describing the purpose and form of the revised partnership was submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in October 2022. The Secretary of State replied to the chair of the shadow partnership board on 18 January 2023, confirming his support for the partnership and agreed funding of £2.5 million over the remainder of this Spending Review period, subject to annual business cases.
6. In February 2023 Cabinet received a report on the emerging partnership and requested further information on the principles of the partnership, governance and the Council's objectives for participating.
7. Subsequently the shadow-board has developed a 'working mission' and outline areas of work. It has also developed a constitution due for adoption at the first formal board meeting in September 2023, and has recruited an independent chair, managing director and non-executive directors. Detail on these areas is set out below and a summary presentation is included as Annex 1.

## **Mission, principles and priorities**

8. The shadow board has incorporated into the draft constitution the following working core mission:

*"[Our mission is] to secure a future in which our communities prosper from the best in environmentally sustainable ways of living and working. We collaborate to accelerate economic opportunities created through the region's innovation strengths, to achieve significant environmental enhancements and to unlock investment for inclusive, high-quality sustainable development."*

9. Alongside the evidence base, the mission will be used to develop additional clarity on purpose and added value through the development of a strategy for the partnership.
10. To deliver the mission, the draft constitution adopts the following principles for how the partnership will operate:
  - Commitment: All partners will commit to their role within the Partnership and share ownership of a project or focus area on which the Partnership will deliver.
  - Additionality: The Partnership will focus on commonalities of the partners, areas that require pan-regional alignment where the Partnership can add value.
  - Amplification: The Partnership will promote the area as a whole and advance its purpose regionally, nationally and globally.
  - Collaboration: A fair and collaborative culture of the Partnership will be integral to its success, based on trust and cooperation and with mutual respect.
  - Transparency: The Partnership will act at all times in the spirit of openness and be open to challenge and the views of others.
  - Equity and Diversity: In all aspects of the Partnership, equity and diversity will be evident in representation, allocation of resources, communications and engagement.
11. The Partnership's strategic priorities are environment and economy, considered jointly and not as separate, competing demands. The mission document (see *Additional Papers*) states that: *"We will view growth as an enabler to wider economic prosperity, to accelerate our path to a low carbon future; provide greater resilience and pursue the restoration, protection and improvement of the environment; to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes for communities; and provide greater equality of opportunity."*
12. Initial activity in these priority areas includes:

### ***Environment***

- Capacity to assist nature recovery support, will develop recommendations for regional coordination to help efficient local delivery.
- Developing regional and joint approaches to embed best practice in minerals planning, delivery, restoration and management – delivering significant biodiversity gains.
- Scoping regional water and energy strategy – looking at best practice approaches, standards and tools.

## ***Economy***

- Scoping - international investment opportunities to create an investment prospectus and atlas to profile on global stage.
- Developing a business case for a Data Observatory to support local decision-making – by enhancing analysis, synthesis and translation of data and knowledge exchange.
- Stakeholder mapping, bringing together innovation networks and clusters to create an innovation and data hub.

## **Constitution and governance**

13. The Core Membership of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) is as follows:

- Arc Universities Group
- Bedford Borough Council
- Cambridge City Council
- Cambridge and Peterborough Business Board
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cambridgeshire/Peterborough Combined Authority
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Cherwell District Council
- England's Economic Heartland
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Luton Borough Council
- Milton Keynes City Council
- North Northamptonshire Council
- Oxford City Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- OxLEP
- Peterborough City Council
- SEMLEP
- South Cambridgeshire Council
- West Oxfordshire District Council
- West Northamptonshire Council

14. The Partnership will publish a constitution consisting of a governance and assurance framework to be agreed at its first formal board meeting in

September 2023. The Partnership board will comprise the following voting members:

- An Independent Chair as selected by the Board;
- Up to three Non-Executive Directors;
- The Chair from each of the Growth Boards or equivalent sub-regional group (including an additional Co-Chair from the Central Area Growth Board);
- The Chair of each Programme Sub-Group, who shall be from the OCP Core Membership and whose appointment shall be ratified by the Board;
- The Chair from each of the main constituent stakeholder groups: one on behalf of all Local Enterprise Partnerships, one on behalf of the Arc Universities Group, and one from England's Economic Heartland;
- Each Board member may nominate a named substitute, who may attend in their place and who will have full voting rights as substitute member. The named substitute must be from the same constituent group on the Board as the Board member they are substituting for.

15. The following non-voting observers may also attend Board meetings:

- Independent stakeholders as selected by the Board;
- Senior Government representatives (whilst the Board is in receipt of core Government funding).

16. The Board's primary function will be to oversee the delivery of the partnership's work programme, as agreed by the membership. While the partnership has support from government, the Board will not be a formal or legally constituted committee and as such it has no delegated authority for any formal or legal decisions to be taken on behalf of any or all partners. The Board will operate as a collaborative partnership to advance the strategic aims as determined by the Board. Any decisions that are required by individual constituent members of the Board will be made through their own organisation's decision-making processes.

17. A local authority will act as the accountable body to underpin finance and resource management. The accountable body is currently Cherwell District Council.

18. The partnership has now appointed:

- A Managing Director: Dr Richard Hutchins
- Independent Chair: Dipesh J. Shah OBE
- Non-executive directors: Dr Barbara Ghinelli and Professor Lynette Ryals OBE

19. A third non-executive director will be appointed to represent the environment brief.

## Objectives for participation

20. The County Council's principal objective in participating in the Partnership is to enhance its ability to deliver its vision of leading positive change to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. Working at the regional level, where additionality can be demonstrated (as per the partnership principles), has the potential to extend and accelerate delivery.
21. To help ensure that the activity of the Partnership delivers against its mission, activities will need to demonstrate how they deliver against identified objectives. These objectives are listed below, set out against the most relevant Greener, Fairer and Healthier priority.

<b>Greener, Fairer, Healthier Priority</b>	<b>Oxford to Cambridge Partnership Work Programme Objectives</b>
Putting action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring forward innovative solutions for the region's environmental and economic challenges and opportunities</li> </ul>
Tackle Inequalities in Oxfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver high quality outcomes for current and future generations</li> <li>• Grow the region's source of world class skills</li> </ul>
Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore, protect and improve the environment</li> </ul>
Working with local business and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support sustainable, inclusive, clean, innovation-led economic growth</li> <li>• Facilitate cross-sectoral and cross-boundary working within and beyond the Oxford-Cambridge region.</li> <li>• Facilitate joined-up delivery based on clear pathways for implementation</li> <li>• Accelerate learning and sharing of good practice</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a shared evidence base against which to measure progress and drive innovation</li> </ul>
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## Corporate Policies and Priorities

22. Working in partnership at regional level enhances the Council’s ability to deliver all of its priorities, as set out in the strategic plan 2023-2025.
23. In particular, it supports the priorities of:
- Putting action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work;
  - Tackle Inequalities in Oxfordshire;
  - Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces;
  - Working with local business and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

## Financial Implications

24. The County Council’s contribution to the core costs of the partnership in 2023/24 will be £10,000, funded from within current budgets.
25. There will also be local contributions of in-kind officer time on project oversight and delivery.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

## Legal Implications

26. There are no significant legal implications from involvement in the pan-regional partnership. The new partnership will not have the ability to impose its decisions on the Council and its Cabinet, and local decision making will be respected. Policy and major programmes arising from within the partnership would require independent decision by the Council.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance,  
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## Equality & Inclusion Implications

27. In itself, agreeing to participate in the pan-regional partnership has no direct implications for equality and inclusion. The County Council, the accountable body and all public sector partners will be bound by the public sector equality duty and future decisions and programmes of work will need to be supported by appropriate equality impact assessment.

## Sustainability Implications

28. The stated aims of the new partnership include enhancing the natural environment. As such, working in partnership at a regional level, with more effective engagement with partners and national government, will improve the Council's ability to deliver necessary development and infrastructure while maintaining and enhancing the natural environment, minimising carbon emissions and adapting to climate change. The County Council has already agreed to a set of shared regional principles for environmental protection, as set out in the February 2023 report to cabinet (see background papers).

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive

Annex 1:

Ox-Cambs PRP Summary Presentation

Background papers:

- *Pan Regional Partnership for the Oxford-Cambridge Area*, see agenda item 25/22: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 21 February 2023, 2.00 pm | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
- *Putting the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership's working draft Core Mission into action*, see agenda item 6b: [6481ef44a8ae29793069e0\\_Oxford.to.Cambridge.Partnership.Shadow.Boar.d.Meeting.15.6.23.AgendaandMeetingPapersCombined.pdf \(webflow.com\)](#)

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