

UNLEASHING THE ARC – SPATIAL FRAMEWORK LAUNCH WEBINAR

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS NOT ANSWERED DURING SESSION

Q to Kris: *Outside my flat they are demolishing and rebuilding concrete office blocks that are only 30 years old. Given that, barring an unlikely breakthrough, we won't be able to replace offices with concrete ones again in 2050, what regulations will be enforced to ensure buildings are sustainable for the long term?*

A: The future of building standards will be key to achieving our ambitions in the Spatial Framework. We are keen to do all we can to meet our environmental commitments and one measure could involve whole life carbon assessments of new development, amongst others. We will be exploring how best to meet our environmental commitments through the process.

Q to Bev: *Given its intended status, is there a risk that local authorities within the Arc will slow their plan production to wait for the Spatial Framework to complete?*

A: I don't believe there will be any purposeful slow-down of Local Plans as LAs usually have their own motivation to get plans in place – more likely is Local Plan programmes will need to take clear cognisance of how they best dovetail with the emerging stages, evidence and ultimate weight of the Framework. In some cases, this could have a consequential impact on Local Plan timetables, and we are working with the Government's Arc Team to understand the detail of the programme and to minimise this impact. We also take comfort the team have thought about this by the reference they will work with LPAs to provide appropriate transition arrangements to minimise impact of the Framework.

Q to Kris: *When will Government be making a decision on the future of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and how will you ensure through the Spatial Framework that this and other major infrastructure projects in the Growth Arc do not cause damage to irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland?*

A: The Government announced on 18th March that Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is formally cancelled. The government will continue to work on alternative plans to boost transport connectivity in the arc, alongside delivering East West Rail, as set out in the accompanying press release. Our Policy Paper '*Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc*', is designed to explore how best to protect and enhance the environment, taking a natural capital approach to inform planning and decision-making. It will also be underpinned by a Sustainability Appraisal that will proactively embed sustainability into the development of the strategy.

Q to Kris: *The poll is an interesting balance of jobs/economy, place and infrastructure. Environment lags in 4th place. The 'right' type of development is sought. The right processes are required. Delivery needs a delivery plan, How does OxCam learn from North Essex?*

A: The poll was one answered by those attending the seminar. Our recent policy paper we have set out up front that the aim of the Spatial Framework is to:

- support long-run sustainable economic growth across the area
- help to make the area a brilliant place to live, work and travel in – for existing residents and future communities alike
- support lasting improvements to the environment, green infrastructure and biodiversity

All three of these are core aims for the framework and we need to achieve all of them to deliver sustainable growth in the Arc.

Q to Bev: *The commitment to consultation is welcome but there is enormous scepticism in South Oxon as to the value of it. This is because Robert Jenrick effectively neutered the DC when it signalled its intention to rewrite the draft LP in order to introduce missing sustainability considerations. What can the panel say to reassure the residents of this area, and others similarly concerned.*

Clearly the proof will be in the approach taken by Government. The commitment to engagement with the Arc Leadership Group and indeed to authorities and the public is very much welcomed but I suspect scepticism can only really be removed by proving a different and committed approach. That commitment must also be both ways and we all will need to help get the messages and engagement as wide and deep in communities as possible so that people, businesses and stakeholder groups feel they have been able to take part effectively.

Q to Kris: *There are a number of LPAs in the arc. Some are more accommodating of growth than others, some are more "geared up" for dealing with significant planning applications than others. How will the framework help to ensure consistency of approach and to unlock planning log jams?*

A: The Spatial Framework has a role to coordinate and provide a starting point for local planning authorities. If it fulfils its role effectively there will be some burdens that are lifted off planning authorities that will free up their resources to redeploy for other planning functions. These ambitions link closely to the Government's wider ambitions for planning reform, the use of data and digital tools in the planning system and a future for plan-making and decision making that simplifies processes to enable planners to fulfil their role effectively.

Q to Kris: *re: Digital Tools, that get headlines in the various releases and documents? Are there plans to wait until there is a complete "digital twin" (which might take years), or is the proposal to use digital tools in a more innovative manner, bootstrapping up from what already exists and works?*

A: As our launch paper for the Spatial Framework sets out, we have an ambitious delivery timetable and see the need to act quickly as important. Nevertheless, I also appreciate there are longer term ambitions which also have significant potential to deliver significant change. It is important for us to use what works effectively now in an innovative way to deliver the best Spatial Framework possible, whilst also working with those at the forefront of change to help deliver longer term innovation as well.

Q to Kris: *There is some really positive language in the document on the benefits of protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Will the Spatial Framework translate these aspirations into measurable targets for environmental enhancement: eg expansion of tree canopy cover, doubling of land managed for nature etc etc?*

A: The Spatial Framework will be shaped by public consultation on the high level Vision this summer and be based on a robust evidence base. These will be refined into a series of more detailed options before consultation on the draft Framework itself. The translation of the Vision into Options and the Draft will see firmer, measurable objectives emerge and working with colleagues across Government (including agencies in DEFRA and BEIS) these may include targets or longer term investments to demonstrate our commitments.

Q to Kris: *Why not just stick in the infrastructure and then go bottom up rather than top down?*

A: Effective planning requires greater certainty for different actors in the system of development than takes place at the minute. For a number of different requirements there is a co-ordination failure where infrastructure providers, planning authorities, transport authorities and others are all looking for a 'first mover' to help deliver transformational change. The spatial framework will be a proactive piece of work to plan holistically and help act as this first mover. Transport and land-use planning must be brought together in this way to achieve effective sustainable development in the Arc and the Spatial Framework will help us to do this.

Q to Kris: *Can Kris share any update on the appointment/role of the Arc Ministerial Champion? Is that still part of the thinking?*

A: The Prime Minister is the lead sponsor for the cross-Government activity on the Arc, supported by Chancellor of the Exchequer and lead by the SoS and Chris Pincher in MHCLG. This work is supported by Ministers in DfT, DEFRA, BEIS, and DIT. On a day to day basis Chris Pincher chairs the Arc Inter-Ministerial Group in Government.

Q to Kris: *How was this figure arrived at in your document? 'clean water supplies "provided by the natural capital assets" in the Ox-Cam Arc counties, are valued at £747m. If these 'natural capital assets' were not available how much would it cost to replace clean water supplies from elsewhere? This is not just about the Arc*

A: The Local Natural Capital Plan for the Arc is clear about its methodology and I would recommend looking at the resources on their website in more detail. A natural capital approach provides a practical framework to manage nature as an asset so that it can continue to provide services that benefit people. If we degrade the assets, the services and benefits we value cannot be sustained. A natural capital approach helps us to understand this in detail so we can plan effectively for the future.

Q to Kris: *Where does agriculture fit into your plans?*

A: I understand the importance of agriculture in the Arc, with it being 6.32% Grade 1 agricultural land and 24.17% Grade 2, as compared with England-wide figures of 2.72% and 14.18% respectively. Our approach to sustainable development will take these factors into account when we are looking at the most sustainable uses for land in the Arc as part of our wider work.

Q to Bev: *Is the panel confident that communities/grass roots will be enabled to go beyond consultation participation and actually be fully active in the delivery and creation of the ARC place?*

A: This is a really good question – there is a significant difference between passive and active consultation, engagement and participation. It is a massive undertaking in a very constricted timeline which will make deep engagement difficult. However, I know the Arc Leadership Group will be working to support and bring consensus together as much as possible on the vision, the key policy areas and eventually the direction for future growth and my hope is that other organisations will actively help raise not only their voice, but those of others

Q to Bev: *The Arc is home to some of the most innovative and creative people and businesses in the world. How can they be harnessed to deliver a better Plan and better Arc outcomes?*

A: I used to use that word harness a lot until I was told that actually it means to constrict and control and in the case of the Arc, we should be active facilitators and leaders in recognising how to unleash the power of our collaborative innovation to provide greatest benefit to our communities locally and globally for now and the future. Anywhere else this may sound like a nice soundbite, but in the Arc, this is really its potential. Bringing innovators, entrepreneurs, community leaders together to actively identify what outcomes we want, what environment we need for success, what blockers need removing and what policies and measures must be in place to meet our objectives would truly create a very different spatial strategy than we have seen before.

Q to Rob Hopwood (Planning Partner, Bidwells) *Could the emphasis on environmental issues justify more favourable planning treatment for brownfield sites?*

The government message is clear in the introduction document to the Arc Spatial Framework that the natural environment and climate change is one of three issues it is 'particularly concerned about' and it will be taking a 'strategic approach to support cleaner air and biodiversity net gain.'

The government has confirmed that that the arc will 'embody England's 25 Year Environment Plan, which will work together to deliver local nature capital.' The document talks of 'a stressed and fragmented natural environment'. The natural capital approach will inform decision-making.

Given that the government has clearly stated that the Spatial Framework will be an exemplar in all aspects for other areas to follow, I envisage that the plan will set the highest policy standards not only for the infrastructure required across the arc but all development proposals to contribute towards the strategic environmental objectives. The environmental targets are likely to be set out in the final plan. The final plan will carry the same weight as the NPPF and thus all local plans and the authorities and developers across the arc will need to have regard to it.

I suspect for the redevelopment and densification of brownfield sites in the arc that such sites will still have to pay their contribution (potentially as a proportion based on built floorspace) towards the natural capital uplift required on other sites identified as 'environmental opportunity areas'

The brownfield site developers are likely to argue that site specific issues which need solving like contamination and demolition are costly and if natural capital payments are onerous then it may make the proposal unviable. Obligation priorities will then need to be agreed between the parties involved. However, if the environmental targets set out within the SF is clear then the developers will know how high the bar is to jump.