

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 March 2021

Consideration of the Oxford to Cambridge ARC Environment principles

Report of Assistant Director Environment Services and SRO for Growth Deal in Cherwell.

This report is public.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to update the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the proposal to develop an Environmental Advisory Group of the Oxfordshire Growth Board

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To recognise the opportunity for partnership activity for climate action
- 1.2 To support the establishment of an Environmental Advisory Group of the Oxfordshire Growth Board
- 1.3 To endorse the shared principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc
- 1.4 To note the progress concerning the development of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This 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. Some examples of current partnership activity across three themes of climate action, action for net zero carbon emissions, resilience to climate change and renewal of the environment including biodiversity net gain.
- 2.2 This Council supports the Oxfordshire Growth Board principles for 'good growth' as set out in the draft Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
- 2.3 This Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and launched a Climate Action Framework in Autumn 2020 with a target of achieving net zero by 2030. Besides

achieving net zero from our own operations this Council has committed to work in partnership with a range of key stakeholders to get to net zero across the district. Hence the Council working in partnership with the Oxford to Cambridge Arc will support the overall goal of net zero.

- 2.4 There are a number of drivers coming together to strengthen the potential for an Environmental Advisory Group for Oxfordshire. These include:
- a) 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.
 - b) The collective ambition of local authority Leaders to take partnership action for climate change, including organisational commitments towards the net zero ambition for this Council.
 - c) 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
- 2.5 This Council adopted a Climate Action Framework last autumn which recognises the need to review and develop our partnerships including strengthening support to key partners. 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 this Council's leadership role on climate action.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 This Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 and working with our partners launched a Climate Action Framework in October 2020. The target of the framework is to achieve net zero from our own operations by 2030. In addition, the framework commits the Council to work with range of stakeholders to achieve net zero in the wider district.
- a) Oxfordshire Strategic Vision
 - b) Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire
 - c) Oxfordshire-Cambridgeshire ARC
 - d) The ARC Environment Principles
- 3.2 The **Oxfordshire Strategic Vision** is due to be agreed by the Oxfordshire Growth Board on 22nd March 2021. The vision has been developed through the collective ambitions of local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership and other key stakeholders across the County, it has been shaped through extensive public consultation and engagement. The draft Oxfordshire Strategic Vision provides a bold over-arching framework to deliver real and lasting change for sustainable development, integrated environmental, social and economic wellbeing across all of our communities.

- 3.3 Central to the draft vision is the concept of “good growth”, i.e. economic growth that will:
- a) Enhance the historic and natural environment
 - b) Support a diverse high value economy
 - c) Be high quality and resilient to change
 - d) Be sustainable, clean & green
 - e) Embrace innovation & technology
 - f) Be healthy & inclusive.
- 3.4 The draft Strategic Vision contains nine key outcomes, two of which relate directly to the environment and climate action, set out as follows
- a) We will be the first generation to leave Oxfordshire’s natural environment in a better state than when we found it. The natural environment will be more biodiverse, support social, economic and ecological resilience and have the capacity to adapt to change.
 - b) Oxfordshire will already be carbon neutral and will be moving towards a carbon negative future, removing more carbon than it emits each year. Energy production will be sustainable.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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.

3.9 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.”

3.10 The **ARC Environment Principles** supporting this vision align with the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan and the commitment in the joint declaration to embody the 25-year plans goals and ambitions. The principles, set out in Appendix 2 are intended to inform and become an integral part of developing plans and statements in relation to the Arc, including Local Plans, local authority activities, plans, projects and programmes for all statutory bodies operating in the Arc.

3.11 The regional principles have been written and agreed by the Arc’s local partners and stakeholders. They are informed by Government policy. The principles address how the Arc will tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time: achieving net zero carbon, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain, environmental net gain, doubling the area of land actively managed for nature, restoring, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and ensuring renewable natural capital (resources derived from living things that if properly managed can be replenished) remains available for future generations. To endorse these principles would strengthen the commitment of this Council to climate action, to achieving net zero carbon emissions, resilience to the impacts of climate change and renewal of the natural environment, including biodiversity net gain and natural capital.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 This Council has a commitment to deliver the Climate Action Framework, agreed at Executive in October 2020 and to work in partnership with other stakeholders to achieve a net zero ambition across the district. This activity can be grouped under three pillars for climate action:

- Net zero carbon – targets for our own operations and the wider district we need to work in partnership
- Resilience – both in terms of responding to the impacts of climate change arising from extreme weather events and ensuring resilience in energy efficiency and security of supply
- Renewal – renewing the natural capital and environmental assets for ‘good growth’ ensuring outcomes for environmental wellbeing are integrated into all decisions for social and economic wellbeing

4.2 This Council is working in partnership with many stakeholders across a range of Sectors. Participation by this Council in the Oxfordshire Environment Advisory Group would strengthen the role of this Council across all partnership networks and align our commitment for environmental renewal, zero carbon and resilience to the

impacts of climate change with the environmental principles underpinning growth across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

5.0 Consultation

Officers are fully engaged with Oxfordshire system-wide working via the ARC, Growth Board, Executive Officer Group the Growth Deal and through other means and this work is part of an overall process to ensure that the environment and climate change is at the heart of current and future thinking and strategies.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To adopt the proposed recommendations.

Option 2: To reject the proposed recommendations and ask officers to reconsider

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no direct financial implications in relation to this report.

Comments to be checked by Karen Dickson, Strategic Business Partner;
Telephone: 01295 221900; Email: karen.dickson@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

7.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications.

Comments to be checked by Richard Hawtin, Team Leader: Non-contentious;
Telephone: 01295 221695; Email: richard.hawtin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

7.3 Risk Implications

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

Comments checked by Louise Tustian, Head of Insight and Corporate Programmes; Telephone: 01295 221786; Email: louise.tustian@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

7.4 Equalities & Climate Implications

The recommendations support equality & inclusion.

Comments to be checked by Robin Rodgers, Head of Strategy, Policy, Communications & Insight; Email: robin.rodger@oxfordshire.gov.uk

8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision N/A as not an Executive report

Financial Threshold Met: N/A

Community Impact Threshold Met: N/A

Wards Affected:

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

An enterprising economy with strong & vibrant local centres

Lead Councillor

Councillor Dan Sames, Lead Member for Clean & Green.

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Appendix 1: Environment Advisory Group Terms of Reference
- Appendix 2: Arc Environment Principles
- Appendix 3: Examples of Country Council Partnership Activity for Climate Action

Background papers

None

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