

Oxfordshire Environment Board

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12 October 2021

OxCam Arc Spatial Framework Vision Consultation – Oxfordshire Environment Board Response, October 2021

The Oxfordshire Environment Board was founded in 2018 as an alliance of environmental organisations. We work in partnership to ensure a strong and united voice exists for Oxfordshire's natural environment. Our vision is an Oxfordshire where beautiful landscapes, rich in nature, are integral to a sustainable economy and healthy lifestyles; a county where the natural environment and natural capital are valued and protected for current and future generations.

Our comments on the OxCam Arc Spatial Framework Vision are as follows:

1. The nature and climate emergencies must be at the core of any proposals and delivering this will require unequivocal, measurable policies.
We welcome much of the positive wording about environmental and climate aspirations contained in the consultation document. However, it is not clear how these will be impacted by the focus on economic growth and what delivering 'sustainable and green economic growth' will look like in practice.
2. Arc Environment Principles – we are deeply concerned that the consultation fails to acknowledge the set of environment principles endorsed by the Arc Leaders' Group. We would consider these principles an excellent framework from which to progress. However, we note that the Government has yet to announce any specific commitments to or targets for restoring nature in the Arc or adopting higher standards of environmental sustainability in the new houses and infrastructure its proposals would see built.
3. Environmental safeguards must not be bypassed. Decision-making about the nature, quantity and locations of growth should not pre-empt sustainability and environmental assessments of overall growth plans.

4. We strongly support the reference to Nature Recovery Strategies.
It is evident that for many decades economic growth has come at a heavy price for nature. The principle of securing biodiversity net gains from new development is a significant step forward compared to the previous principle of minimising harm. In practice, however, the emerging arrangements for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) raise serious concerns in terms of the assessment methodology and how it is applied at strategic and site-specific levels, as well as the resources that will be required for effective long-term monitoring. These concerns may be surmountable but are currently unresolved. In any case, BNG will only scratch the surface of what is needed for the economy to repay its ecological debts. Serious investment in regenerating nature is therefore essential.

5. Green Infrastructure - When planned strategically, Green Infrastructure should deliver a network of natural and semi-natural areas, both urban and rural, which can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life. It also supports a green economy, creates job opportunities and enhances biodiversity. Any Arc Spatial Framework should therefore incorporate a comprehensive Green Infrastructure Plan to focus not just on benefits to biodiversity but also accessible green space. Access to, along with the means and ability to engage with, green places, particularly natural green spaces and places, has been identified as being a key determinant of physical health and mental wellbeing. Lack of access to green and blue spaces has shown to have contributed to inequalities throughout the pandemic and continues to do so. Access and engagement with the environment leads to proactive environmental behaviours and actions.

6. Landscape – protecting and enhancing both designated and non-designated landscapes across the Arc is vital for our views, tranquillity, heritage, trees and hedgerows. A strategic landscape character and capacity assessment must therefore form a key part of any emerging evidence base.

About the Oxfordshire Environment Board

The Oxfordshire Environment Board is an alliance of organisations concerned with the promotion, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment of the county. See www.oxeb.org

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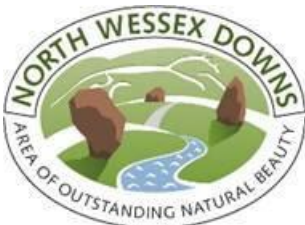
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