

lost cities of the arc?



While COVID-19 distracted us, the Oxford-Cambridge Arc (as it now called) moved along, although the project still barely registers in public consciousness. One reason is the yawn over a 'Big Idea' that has been around for ages, further news about which does not appear to touch current life. Another is poorly explained, random high-tech research initiatives that have the Arc as their focus or possible test-bed but will have uncertain impacts, if any. It is exciting to watch a robot deliver a takeaway here in Milton Keynes, but such things clutter strategic planning discussions like the effect of chaff dropped to confuse radar. A third reason appears to be a degree of political fear about speaking the truth to our educated democracy by using euphemisms, and a Fawcett Towers type of urge not to speak about the housing.

But the Arc is an epic strategic spatial planning manoeuvre of national importance. When its shape and content finally breaks cover it will make people jump.

New readers start here ...

First, the Arc arises from real geography. It is part of the western extent of the backbone of Europe – the *Dorsale*; the greatest concentration of capital city regions, population, and economic activity (sorry, Paris). Brexit disrupts but does not destroy our end of this geography. Simultaneously, the Arc is the interface between the South East and the Midlands. Historic private and state investment in its towns and cities, its environment, its liveability and its present degree of connectivity in all directions and by all modes (as compromised as that might be at the moment) confer exceptional advantage in education, research, innovation, indigenous population growth, and inward migration. Propitious geography, indeed.

Second, in recognition of this geography, in 2003 its three Regional Development Agencies (created by the Blair government) instituted the 'O2C' (Oxford to Cambridge) brand to promote the Arc's potential by establishing institutions and co-ordination arrangements.¹ At the risk of diving too deep, and

with too much brevity, John Prescott's wise Sustainable Communities Plan of 2003 established formally a great central chunk of the Arc as a 'Growth Area': Milton Keynes and the South Midlands (MKSM, as it became known). This led to the Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy of 2005, which kept the flame burning into the South East Plan of 2009. Prescott also set up Cabinet-level supervision of MKSM, with a co-ordinating team of civil servants.

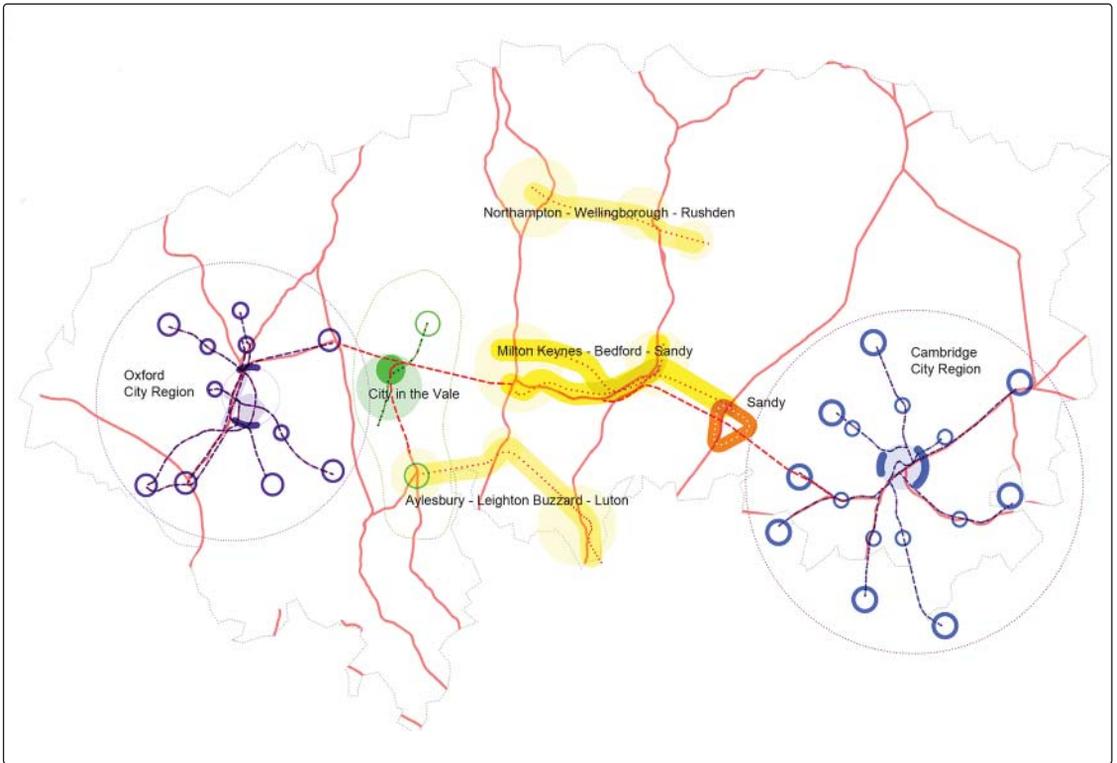
The Cameron/Clegg coalition government of 2010 abolished Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Development Agencies (they were finally snuffed out in 2012). O2C expired. Very soon, in April 2011, Lord Wolfson of Aspley Guise (near Milton Keynes) launched in *The Times* his great new idea for a 'Brain Belt' from, er, Oxford to Cambridge. In 2016 the government asked the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to report on Wolfson's idea.

Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc (National Infrastructure Commission, November 2017)

In *Partnering for Prosperity*,² the NIC validated the strategic concept of the Arc. 'In brief', said the NIC: *'The Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc must be a national priority. Its world-class research, innovation and technology can help the UK prosper in a changing global economy. But success cannot be taken for granted. Without urgent action, a chronic undersupply of homes could jeopardise growth, limit access to labour and put prosperity at risk. [...] rates of house building will need to double [...] and this] requires a new deal between central and local government – one which aligns public and private interests behind the delivery of significant east-west infrastructure and major new settlements, and which seeks commitment to faster growth through a joined-up plan for jobs, homes and infrastructure. Any deal must give local areas the certainty, freedoms and resources they need to create well-designed, well-connected new communities.'*

East-west infrastructure enabling new settlements

East West Rail and the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unlock land for new settlements.



Conceptual spatial framework

Source: Page 33 of Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project³

Local and national government must work together, with developers and investors, to align the delivery of infrastructure **and major new settlements – including the first new towns to be built in over a generation.** [Emphasis added]

Equipping local areas with the tools to deliver growth

New settlements are only part of the solution. Meeting the arc’s future housing needs will require development in and around existing towns and cities. Local areas must be equipped to meet this challenge and to remove the barriers that frustrate privately-led development. Government should ensure local areas have the powers and resources to shape high quality, well-connected places that respect the environment, and enhance quality of life for new and existing residents.

A long-term vision for the arc and its sub-regions

A new deal will only succeed if it is based on a long-term vision for the arc shared by Government, local authorities and communities. Developing and delivering this vision will require effective leadership at the national and local level. It will require a strong strategic planning framework

integrating opportunities for jobs, homes and infrastructure and robust collective decision-making.

The success of this arc matters, not just to those who live and work in it, but to communities across the country. Local leaders must commit to work collectively, with Government, and in the national interest to realise its economic potential. Without this commitment, the arc will be left behind, damaging the UK’s global competitiveness.’

The NIC described a truly amazing project for the nation, and practical steps to be taken to make it happen. Its report was founded on huge consultancy reports that were ready to view. Here was the science of an evidence base³ combined with the art of the visionary. Strategic planning as it should be.

Autumn Budget 2017 (HM Treasury, November 2017)

Cherry-picking his November 2017 Autumn Budget statement⁴ for this column, it is noted here that the then Chancellor Philip Hammond said: ‘Following the National Infrastructure Commission’s report, the Budget sets out an ambitious integrated

programme of infrastructure, housing, business investment and development.

Housing – The government recognises the need, highlighted by the NIC’s report, to build up to 1 million new homes in the area by 2050 to maximise its economic potential, starting with a housing deal with Oxfordshire for 100,000 homes by 2031 [...] The government will also consider significant new settlements and the potential role of development corporations to deliver these using private finance.

Rail – By 2024 the western section of East West Rail will be complete, allowing services between Oxford and Bedford, and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. A new East West Rail Company is being established to accelerate delivery of the central section between Bedford and Cambridge, aiming for completion by the mid-2020s and leveraging private sector investment. [...]

Road – Construction will begin on key elements of the Expressway between Cambridge and Oxford in the second Roads Investment Strategy. [...]

Land value uplift – [...] The government will also encourage authorities to explore the introduction of a Strategic Infrastructure Tariff, in addition to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), [requiring] developers to baseline their contributions towards infrastructure into the values they pay for land.

Governance – The government is setting out its vision for the future, and inviting local partners to contribute. The government has agreed with Oxfordshire that it will work toward the adoption of a new joint statutory plan (JSP), and will seek further JSPs in central and eastern sections.’

Government Response to Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc (HM Treasury, October 2018)

A less rushed government response to the NIC proposals came nearly a year later, in October 2018.⁵ A heavily edited extract of key points from the document appeared in this column in December 2018,⁶ but salient points and comments for today are:

‘As recommended [by the NIC] we have commissioned analysis to test and evidence the strategic case for significant housing growth and explore the potential for new and expanded settlements across the Arc. [Who, and to what

brief, is not said.] [...] Over the next 12 months we intend to:

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- Publish an ambitious, corridor-wide Joint Vision Statement to 2050 with local partners by Spring 2019. [Issued in March 2019 – see below.]
- Explore options for delivering a pan-Arc spatial vision, underpinned by a local natural capital plan, to co-ordinate investment in housing, infrastructure and the environment to support delivery of transformational growth across the Arc. [Consultants are now at work, although ‘natural capital’ was a new language for most people at this time.]
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Over the next 12 months, we intend to:

- Appoint an independent business Chair for the Arc to provide expert advice and act as an advocate and champion to help galvanise local, national and international support, particularly from business and industry, for our collective ambitions across the Arc. [An awesome brief – in July 2021 it was announced to be Emma Cariaga of British Land’s Canada Water development project in Southwark and a member of the British Property Federation Development Committee. She is to have a panel to chair, but inexplicably is only to look at the area between Bedford and Cambridge and is only to be ‘stood up’ for six months.⁷]
- Appoint a Ministerial Champion for the Arc, to provide further focus and facilitate coordination across Whitehall. [It is a low-key appointment: Iain Stewart, Conservative MP for Milton Keynes South and joint Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.]
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The government will ensure that the appropriate vehicles to deliver this growth are in place; we believe that New Town Development Corporations can be appropriate for delivering high quality new communities at scale where there are complex delivery and co-ordination challenges. [The] Autumn Budget 2018 announces a consultation on the draft guidance for the use of compulsory purchase powers for new town development corporations. These bodies will support the creation of exceptional new garden towns that are supported by robust legacy and stewardship arrangements. Such corporations are overseen by the local authorities covering the area rather than by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The government is open to discussions

with ambitious local authorities in the Arc who are interested in the potential to establish such bodies.

The Government will consult on the legal framework for Development Corporations. It will also launch a £10 million competitive fund to support local areas to generate locally-led proposals for new business-backed Development Corporations and similar delivery bodies.’ [This consultation took place in 2018⁸ and, presumably after a ‘competitive’ process, funding was announced on 10 September 2021 to enable Milton Keynes Council to study the possibility of a having its own Locally-Led New Town Development Corporation.⁹]

We are alerted here to what appears to be a strategic shift. Instead of the NIC studies’ suggestion of up to four strategic-scale New Town Development Corporations (NTDCs), two of which might be tasked with creating cities of 500,000 residents (‘City in the Vale’ and ‘Sandy’?¹⁰), and all answerable to the Secretary of State and Parliament, we descend to Locally-Led New Town Development Corporations (LLNTDCs), to be created at the instigation of local authorities, who would also be wholly responsible for their doings and their funding.

Instead of ‘major new settlements’ and ‘the first new towns to be built in over a generation’,² we are told of ‘exceptional new garden towns’.⁵ These schemes appropriate the cachet of the Garden City brand to make places of 1,500-10,000 homes sound nicer, but are not what was recommended by the NIC. Local authorities ‘who are interested’¹⁵ in being invited to bid for an LLNTDC by competitive process to do small things doesn’t cut the mustard. It is an abdication of strategic planning responsibility. Yes, places of that small size can be made when tortuous planning processes allow, and maybe to a good standard, by the private sector. Some may involve Homes England spending public money to make them happen, for reasons that are not clear in this Arc of hot housing markets. But how many ‘new garden villages’ is it imagined will be needed, and by what planning processes, and how many local planning disputes will be induced?

We are told that ‘the government supports the Commission’s ambition to build up to one million homes by 2050’.⁵ It will not happen by this method. The NIC proposal for two new cities of 500,000, and its identification of broad locations, are ideas not to be wasted. Partnering with landowners or funding institutions is not an issue – it is a matter of doing some very large things well so that much of the Arc can be spared an ugly or irritating scatter of smaller things. It’s what planned growth points are for.

Moving on, the government’s response recites the many projects it has funded in the Arc since the Chancellor’s 2017 Autumn Budget Statement. Notable has been the establishment of the East West Rail Company on 14 December 2017, taking the project out of Network Rail.

What happened next?

Government Ambition and Joint Declaration between Government and Local Partners (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, March 2019)

The *Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Government Ambition and Joint Declaration between Government and Local Partners* publication¹¹ is another recital of intentions and an update of actions taken, this time presented jointly with the Arc’s local authority leaders and chairs of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

The political narrative in this document puts economic growth first and ‘embeds natural capital thinking’¹² second. Then, coyly reversing the NIC advice on the Arc, housing is mentioned as the consequence, not the pre-condition:

‘meeting this economic potential will demand our collective determination, over the long-term, to deliver significantly more homes in the Arc, of the right quality and in the right places to meet its needs. We recognise that this could include the development and expansion of existing, as well as new, settlements. This will be needed both to address the housing affordability issues already felt in many parts of the Arc, and to provide places to live for future communities attracted by the Arc’s economic opportunities.’

It goes on to say that:

‘Crucially, we value the natural environment highly, and aim to meet our economic and housing ambitions while overall improving, rather than degrading, the environment in the Arc. We want better places to live, which are beautiful and inspiring, to benefit the Arc’s residents today as well as tomorrow. The Government has already set out its intention for the Arc to embody England’s 25 Year Environment Plan, which we will work together to deliver, including through planning for local natural capital.’

The green lobby and its consultancy industry have done well in having their interests placed higher than housing in the narrative. In ‘natural capital’ the public has another technical priesthood with its own language to comprehend.

Twelve new co-ordination groups are described, and it is said that they will ‘listen to and engage with

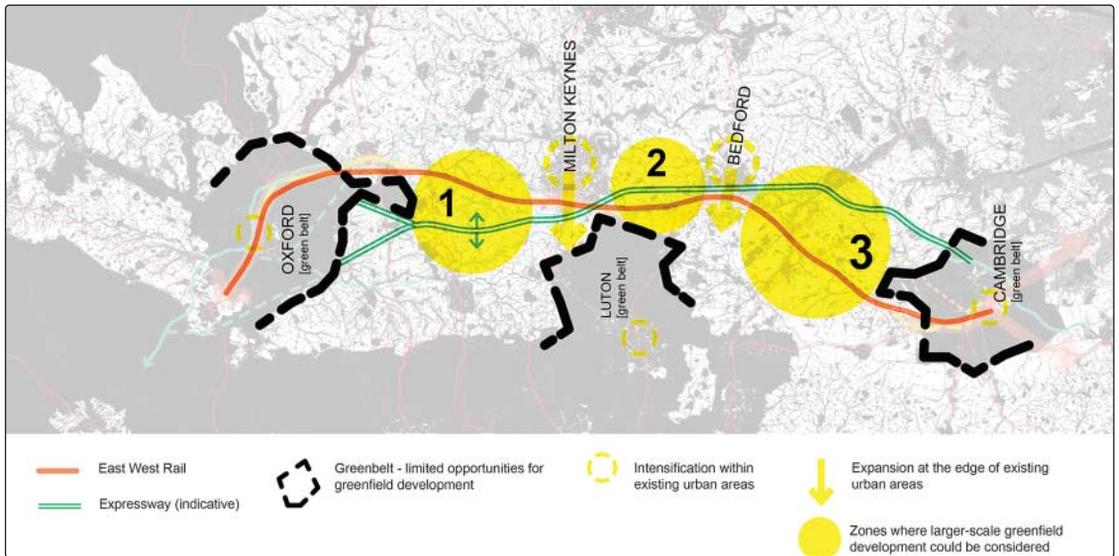


Diagram of different conditions along the East West Rail and Expressway corridors (only) generated from the constraints mapping summarised in the ‘Introduction’ chapter of *Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project*

Source: Page 31 of *Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project*³

local communities and business [...] utilising the breadth and depth of our networks of leaders and local partners, as well as government departments and their agencies, to drive conversations and engagement with groups, communities and businesses across the Arc. There are ‘four inter-related policy pillars’ – ‘productivity’, ‘place-making’, ‘connectivity’, and ‘environment’. Dizzy yet? How will the public interested in the Arc follow all this chatter?

Other actions – the west end of the Arc

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) prepared by the county’s six authorities. Second-stage public consultation launched on 30 July and expired 8 October 2021. The plan will update to the Arc Spatial Framework when it emerges.¹³

Other actions – the centre of the Arc

Milton Keynes Council, in dialogue with Aylesbury Vale and South Northamptonshire District Councils (both since replaced by a unitary council – Buckinghamshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council, respectively), and with Central Bedfordshire Council as an observer, produced a non-statutory city-region plan, the Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050.¹⁴ This was approved by Milton Keynes Council in January 2021, but all the other authorities had already withdrawn their support by then. No JSSP under way yet.

Other actions – the east end of the Arc

The Mayor of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority from May 2021 is Dr Nik Johnson. In confirming his support for the public consultation on the Arc Spatial Framework he seeks to relegate the 1million new homes pre-condition prescribed by the NIC to being ‘an advisory recommendation that will be kept under consideration as the evidence base develops.’¹⁵ No JSSP under way yet

Other actions – East West Rail

The Oxford to Bicester connection (now running down to Marylebone) is in operation. Bicester to Milton Keynes Bletchley (and then up to a Milton Keynes Central stub end) is under way and will be finished by 2025. The line from Milton Keynes to Bedford never closed but stakeholder consultation on controversial upgrading continues. Public consultation on a new route (with stations) between Bedford and Cambridge took place from January to March, and the preferred route was announced in May 2021. Further consultation on the detailed alignment along that route, and possible station locations, closed in June. Two possible station locations are where the NIC suggested a new city.¹⁶

Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, February 2021)

The Boris Johnson government took office on 24 July 2019, and *Planning for Sustainable Growth*

in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: An Introduction to the Spatial Framework,¹⁷ published six months later, will have passed through the No. 10 policy sieve. 'The so-called growth corridor is one of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's top priorities', said Kris Krasnowski, Portfolio Director for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), speaking after the launch at a Bidwells webinar. It marks the point that the MHCLG formally started work on an Arc Spatial Framework, as promised in the Budget 2020, and where the possibility of four LLNTDCs between Bedford and Cambridge pop up instead of the NIC's recommendation of a city for around 500,000 people.¹⁸ How the idea of a string of small places at stations along this part of the Arc came to be decided upon when work on the Strategic Framework for the Arc had not even started, and the East West Rail detailed consultation has been concluded, is back to front.

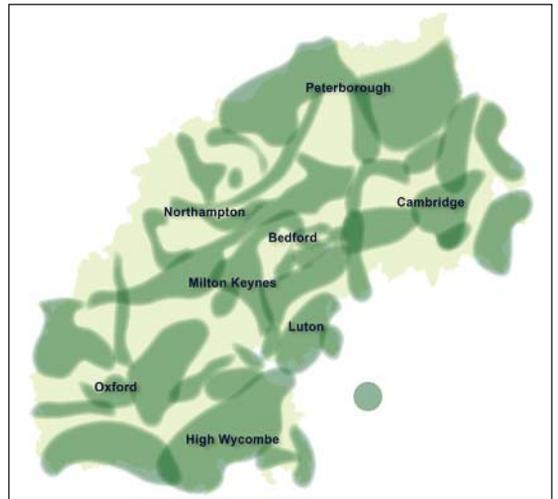
We learn the Spatial Framework will have 'National planning policy status [which] will allow it to have significant weight in the planning system for guiding local plan production and in decision-making. It will sit alongside the National Planning Policy Framework.' It will also have 'National transport policy status [which] will allow it to guide the plans prepared by local transport authorities. Transport policies will sit alongside land use policies in the Spatial Framework in a fully integrated single land use and infrastructure plan.' All good.

But overall, and sadly, this is a gentle and waffly document, in which the best words are (in para. 1.12): *'There is significant potential to foster agglomerative benefits by better connecting people, places, services and businesses, and to see more effective commercialisation of research and development through better, more sustainable transport and truly sustainable patterns of development across the region.'*

The writer's lament (not for the first time, since the publication of the Planning White Paper) is that it is all to be 'Digital-first – we will make better use of digital tools to support better, more collaborative long-term policy-making.' Bye-bye the digitally excluded. Bye-bye scrutiny and transparency – there are so many hidey holes when institutions slide behind the digital invisibility cloak.

Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Consultation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Jul. 2021)

And so we arrive at long last at the most recent public consultation, *Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Consultation*,¹⁹ which, unforgivably,



Strategic-scale environmental opportunity zones

Source: Fig. 2.2 in *Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Consultation*¹⁹

was launched at the start of the summer holiday season on 20 July 2021 with a consultation period which, by the time this issue is published, will have just closed (on 12 October). Entry-level error in public engagement.

It is sad to report that there are numerous leading questions, practically all of which have obvious answers. Those matters requesting a scale of assessment from 'Not important' to 'Very important' will create useless fine-grained shades of opinion. Open-ended questions are often breathtaking ('Anything else to add about your vision for air quality and waste?').

Sometimes the line of questions on a topic is led by the heading 'What you have told us so far', when, obviously 'we' haven't said anything yet. Dig down (to para. 6.4) and 'we' are 'around 120 residents and representatives of businesses, local authorities, charities and campaign groups...' with whom conversations were held earlier in 2021. Who, when, where? Oh dear.

The consultation is amiable but does not move things along. Simple facts and graphs are familiar and will let new readers catch up with the Arc, but the complicated topic of environmental opportunity mapping gets a platform as if standard and unchallengeable, joining natural capital as a new mystery. It seems that the government is frightened of letting people think that the Arc involves designed urbanisation – to present an unintelligible diagram of 'environmental opportunity zones'²⁰ (see above) without explanation is weird.

The people need to be carried along with the Arc vision and its implementation. Making it hard to

track what's going on, presenting survey data as if they are facts rather than opinions and being oblique about development does not breed trust.

The consultation says that by spring 2022, MHCLG expects to publish the vision as well as a public consultation on options for the policies in the Spatial Framework – 'We will also publish a summary of comments received and our response as part of this consultation.' There will also be consultation in spring 2022 entitled *Towards a Spatial Framework: 'using the vision as a foundation, we will develop options for delivering its objectives. The options will be based on feedback from engagement, initial evidence gathering and analysis. We hope to publish this, including a Sustainable Appraisal 'Issues and Options' Report... to give everyone a chance to have their say.'*

And in a *Draft Spatial Framework* to be published in the autumn of 2022:

'we will consider responses to the previous consultation, and undertake further spatial analysis, option testing, impact assessments and engagement [and we also] hope to publish the draft Spatial Framework with its Sustainability Appraisal Environmental Report, for consultation [...] with implementation of the final framework shortly after.'

This programme for the strategic planning is far too long, given how much work was done by the NIC. The months are to be filled with engagement with local communities which will likely be mostly invisible and unauditible. Best to give up the day job if you want to be involved.

Why bother with the Arc?

Despite the smoke and mirrors, hang on to this: growing the latent potential of the Arc is in the national economic, social and environmental interest. It requires design – of places (old and new) and of connections within them and outwards, in order to welcome and accommodate growth in population and business and to cultivate their institutions. The enhancement of the host environment must be integrated with urbanisation. Taken together, this will create a multiplier engine, as shown by the work of the National Infrastructure Commission. That engine will invigorate the matrix and its wider reach, and the whole nation.

Picking out any of the components in that long formulation as being any more important than any other is either political gaming or special pleading by interest groups with an agenda of their own.

The task of strategic planning is, by art and science, to help decision-makers keep the big picture in

frame and maintain the balance of the whole. It is neither practicable nor useful to try to vacuum up every piece of information, or every opinion.

How is it to be co-ordinated?

The responsibility must be taken at Cabinet level – by the Secretary of State. It requires more authority than a part-time 'Ministerial Champion'. The co-ordinating team should be led by the Secretary of State, and should be populated in part by civil servants, of course, but they need some experienced strategic planning professionals at their side, rather than learning to be a client for a task of a type last attempted a generation ago. Commissioning a strategic planning framework and co-ordinating its delivery is not just an administrative task, but an artful one. It is also intensely political at the national level (bending other government departments to climb out of their silos and put their shoulders to the wheel) and locally (smiling politely at the blockers and posturing gamers, while walking on). We need grunt, not puff.

'Growing the latent potential of the Arc is in the national economic, social and environmental interest. It requires design – of places (old and new) and of connections within them and outwards'

There is also the hurdle of the obsession with administrative areas to be jumped. As with O2C and MKSM before it, the perceived need to define the boundary of the Arc using local government boundaries, and to include those authorities with FOMO (fear of missing out), has created a vast Arc. The current scope includes the ceremonial counties of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Cambridgeshire, with Buckinghamshire unitary, Milton Keynes, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Luton, and Peterborough. This is too wide and diffuse to be manageable.²¹ Too many agendas in play, too many actors. It denies real geography and practicality.

The Arc is an *idea*, not an object. It is the sweep of a fat calligraphy brush drawn across damp hand-made paper. It has no edges to be delineated on a map. There are places, people and institutions that are core, and those that are less so.

No great expertise is offered here on the structures and diplomacy needed to make multi-dimensional things happen in peacetime over many years,²² but it seems practicable that the 'core'

should, by invitation, form a type of Advisory Conference; and those at the margins should, by invitation, form a type of contact group that witnesses all the committee's meetings. 'By invitation' enables persons to be moved into the core or out of it, over time, and enables persons other than just elected politicians to be involved if they have a positive contribution to make.

What are the main challenges to co-ordination?

The Arc project faces three main co-ordination challenges:

- **Time horizons of politicians:** The need to manage the tension between the short-term horizons of politicians and the long-term nature of the project is mentioned above.
- **Technical studies to inform the Arc Spatial Framework:** At considerable expense, no doubt, the recommendations of the NIC drew upon extensive consultancy reports, all of which were published with *Partnering for Prosperity* in November 2017. In starting out on its Arc Spatial Framework, MHCLG has not acknowledged that public investment – it is as if the NIC is not part of the apparatus of government – but seems to have commissioned much of it again.²³ Commissioning an update of those NIC studies which are relevant would save time and money, and it is to be hoped that is what is happening.
- **Planning for quality housing at scale and at pace:** The political mistake of abolishing strategic planning and requiring instead that every local authority in England should provide for its own housing needs within its own boundaries was grave. Instead of a few rows in a handful of 'regional growth points' to which housing and related development was directed, such as Milton Keynes, the East Thames Corridor, and MKSM, England is now spattered with hundreds of fierce rows about smaller developments.

The solution, as readers of this journal are well aware, is to enable established places to grow at a scale and pace that they can absorb. The public are not stupid about the need for new housing in the right place and at the right time. But the pressure relief valve is found through strategic planning which will identify a small number of major growth points where big things could be done very well and delivered over many years. The NIC background proved the argument and pointed to possible locations.

The NIC was 'optimistic that Government and local authorities will reach agreement on the scale and location of new settlements in the national interest. However, if agreement cannot ultimately be reached, the Secretary of State should designate

these new settlements,' notes the Government's response to *Partnering for Prosperity*.⁵ But there the matter is left hanging.

Best to take a deep breath and speak truth to Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on this: the alteration of the New Towns Act to enable one or more local authorities to establish small Locally-Led New Town Development Corporations with the Secretary of State somehow their midwife, but with no further responsibility, will not deliver large-scale, high-quality housing employment and community development at the scale, pace and quality required. First, their local authority parents are too busy with normal service provision. Second, they cannot underwrite borrowing on the scale and for the duration that is required to build large towns or cities. Third, they work to short electoral cycles, and elected members cannot keep themselves from back-door interfering when they own the delivery body. Fourth, they are answerable only to themselves.

Grown-up New Town Development Corporations answerable to the Secretary of State and Parliament, on the other hand, are a proven method of procuring large-scale mixed development. They can be few in number, and can yield serviced development land for decades (40-50 years will be needed to deliver each of the strategic city-scale growth points in the NIC studies) and 'do all that is necessary' to make good places. They are able to return their loan funding (whether public or privately sourced) with interest, and will in due course yield a surplus. They need sponsorship from the Secretary of State for the essential inter-departmental budget-bending and wheeler-dealing that is needed, and to evidence 'blue chip' status to comfort inward investors. The scale and duration of the endeavour also attracts high-calibre staff to commit their careers and their families to the project, living the dream, and being part of building community.

All these things are among the lessons of history. We must not lose the NIC's new cities of the Arc.

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Notes

- 1 D Lock: 'O2C becomes CaMKoX – the arc is re-ignited'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2017, Vol. 86, Dec., 506-08
- 2 *Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc*. National Infrastructure Commission, Nov. 2017. <https://nic.org.uk/app/uploads/Partnering-for-Prosperity.pdf>

- 3 In addition to the brilliant work in *Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project. Final Report*. Revision A. 5th Studio and SQW, for National Infrastructure Commission, Feb. 2018. <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/growth-arc/future-development-concepts/>, leading to *Partnering for Prosperity*, essential reading for all planning enthusiasts is the excellent *Report for the National Infrastructure Commission: Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc*. AECOM, for National Infrastructure Commission, Nov. 2017. <https://nic.org.uk/app/uploads/AECOM-Planning-and-Delivery-Analysis.pdf>
- 4 *Autumn Budget 2017*. HC 587. HM Treasury, Nov. 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/661480/autumn_budget_2017_web.pdf
- 5 *Government Response to 'Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc'*. HM Treasury, Oct. 2018. www.gov.uk/government/publications/cambridge-milton-keynes-oxford-arc-study-government-response
- 6 D Lock: 'Establishing a local New Town Development Corporation'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2018, Vol. 87, Dec., 487-91
- 7 See J Geoghegan: 'MHCLG announces new expert panel to advise on housing growth in OxCam Arc'. *Planning Resource*, 26 Jul. 2021. www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1723171/mhclg-announces-new-expert-panel-advise-housing-growth-oxcam-arc; and 'Digital consultation launched to shape the future of the OxCam Arc'. Press Release, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government/Department for Transport, 20. Jul. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/news/digital-consultation-launched-to-shape-the-future-of-the-oxcam-arc (with link to 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc: expert advisory panel'. www.gov.uk/government/groups/oxford-cambridge-arc-expert-advisory-panel)
- 8 See D Lock: 'Locally accountable New Town Development Corporations – 2'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2018, Vol. 87, Jan., 11-13; and K Lock and H Ellis: 'Celebration with reservations'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2018, Vol. 87, Jul., 249-50
- 9 'Milton Keynes and Sheffield awarded £1.4 million to deliver more homes'. Press Release, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 9 Sept. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/news/milton-keynes-and-sheffield-awarded-14-million-to-deliver-more-homes
- 10 See *Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford Future Planning Options Project. Final Report* (see note 3), p.34
- 11 *The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Government Ambition and Joint Declaration between Government and Local Partners*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Mar. 2019. www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-oxford-cambridge-arc-government-ambition-and-joint-declaration-between-government-and-local-partners
- 12 Get into this – it was our Secretary of State Michael Gove's great achievement at Defra (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf). Here is the root of the emphasis to be joined into the Arc: 'this Government is committed to building many more homes. However, we will ensure that we support development and the environment by embedding the principle that new development should result in net environmental gain...'. It blessed the natural capital concept: 'Natural capital is generally considered to comprise three principal categories: natural resource stocks, land and ecosystems. All are considered essential to the long-term sustainability of development for their provision of 'functions' to the economy, as well as to mankind outside the economy and other living beings.' See <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1730> (Source: *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting 2003*. Studies in Methods, Series F, No.61, Rev.1, Glossary. United Nations, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Bank. United Nations, 2005, para. 1.23)
- 13 See <https://oxfordshireplan.org/>
- 14 See <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/>
- 15 See the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's 'OxCam Arc' webpage, at <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/what-we-deliver/business/oxcam-arc/>
- 16 See the Bedford to Cambridge page of the East West Rail website, at <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/the-project/bedford-to-cambridge>
- 17 *Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: An Introduction to the Spatial Framework*. Policy Paper. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Feb. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework
- 18 See *Budget 2020*. Policy Paper. HM Treasury, Mar. 2020, Section 2.20. www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020#budget-report
- 19 *Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Consultation*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Jul. 21. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-vision-for-the-oxford-cambridge-arc
- 20 Used referencing *Strategic-Scale Environmental Opportunity Mapping: Doubling Nature in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc*. Arc-wide Local Nature Partnerships, Apr. 2020. <https://bucksmknep.co.uk/download/2469/>
- 21 See the map in Section 1.1 of *Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc* (see note 19)
- 22 Postgraduate students might help by studying, for example, the arrangements made under Roosevelt's New Deal, and those for the post-war reconstruction of Germany and Japan, or the evolution of governance in Northern Ireland
- 23 There is no carry forward of the National Infrastructure Commission work in the *Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework: Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. HM Government, Jul. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-vision-for-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-sustainability-appraisal-scoping-report