

Discussion note:

AoU Urbanism Lunch Hour. Oxford - Cambridge Arc in Focus: Focus 3. Greening the Oxford - Cambridge Arc. 11th December.

Introduction

The Academy of Urbanism is running a series of online lunchtime talks about the OC Arc. These talks will build on the foundations that have already been laid for the OC Arc and will look at its future development through the four thematic areas of productivity, environment, connectivity and place making. These are the four thematic areas that were presented in the March 2019 joint declaration made between the Government and the local partners.

The session on the 11th December will address the environment. We will be looking at both the natural world, the way we live, the impact this is having on our surroundings and how these aspects might inform a growth model for the OC Arc. A growth model that will support the local partners' aspiration to deliver a 'Green Arc' and an environmentally sustainable growth model that can be seen as a significant response to climate change and an exemplar across the world.

The objective of this session is to start or rather contribute to a debate that has just been started and to question what the 'Green Arc' is, and what represents an environmentally sustainable model, what its key principles are and how it will be successfully delivered. There are already some early pieces of work that will inform this process, notably: The OxCam - Local Natural Capital Plan Overview, the Economic Prospectus and the document prepared by the Universities Group on the environment.

The Ox Cam - Local Natural Capital Plan Overview

At a local level our natural resources must be seen as fundamental building blocks and a key part of any growth model. This has started with a commitment to protect and improve the environment in the OC Arc to ensure net environment gain and net zero carbon. The Local Natural Capital Plan LNCP by mapping the Arc's local natural capital and recording its ecosystem services and existing environmental assets will help the local partners in the Arc to provide an improved level of environmental protection and enhancement. To achieve this a partnership will need to be built, vision and goals established and options addressed.

Link: <https://www.oxcamlncp.org>

The OC Arc Economic Prospectus

The OC Arc Economic Prospectus prepared by the local partners presents the ambition for a 'Green Arc', and seeks to address climate change and enable us to advance towards a net zero carbon arc and net environmental and biodiversity gain. The Prospectus supports a circular economy and sets out to promote the supply of renewable energy, more efficient use of resources alongside improving travel choices, support for changing working practices and enhancing building design, planning and construction that will enable the development of sustainable communities. An ambition that calls for a re-imagining and a transformative long- term vision for the Arc.

Link: <https://www.semlep.com/oxford-cambridge-arc/>

The Arc Universities and the environment

The Universities Group report sets out some clear aims including the intent to illustrate the expertise within the group that can enable the sustainable development goals. The group wants to understand the potential of collaborative working and to apply the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the UK 25-year Environment Plan as frameworks to inform the context of a sustainable development process. Heading out a list of five recommendations to support these aims is the proposal to develop a positive courageous environmental vision for the OC Arc.

Link: <https://arcuniversities.co.uk>

Nature's Arc, 100 miles wilder and Doubling nature

There are a number of other important documents prepared by local interest groups that also inform this debate including:-

Nature's Arc Partners. RSPB, BB&O Wildlife Trust, BC&N Wildlife & the Woodland Trust.

Link: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/images/get-involved/campaigning/oxcam-arc/natures-arc-4-pager-final-low-res.pdf>

100 miles wilder. The BC&N Wildlife Trust.

Link: <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/100-miles-wilder>

Doubling nature. C&P Local Nature Partnership.

Link: <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/Doubling-Nature-A-Natural-Vision-low-res.pdf>

The 'Green Arc'

So what is the 'Green Arc' and how do we define a growth model that's robust enough to respond to the drivers of change: a frail and shifting global economy, significant life style changes particularly in work and living, and issues around climate change and the environment? Is adopting the Prime Minister's ten-point plan for a green Industrial revolution that covers clean energy, transport, nature and innovative technologies sufficient to base a growth model on?

Key as the proposals are to supporting an environmentally sustainable growth model there needs to be a framework that brings together the four thematic areas of productivity, environment, connectivity and place making. These are all aspects of sustainability. A process structure is also needed that can ensure an integrated approach to delivery at a regional level.

A transformative, long- term vision

All the pieces of work mentioned above point towards the need for a vision, a re-imaged and transformative long- term vision for the OC Arc, a set of clearly defined aims and goals and a framework to inform the sustainable development process. This seems to be the starting point.

Through our speakers we will explore these ideas and the journey towards building a truly environmentally sustainable growth model and a vision that binds the natural and man made environments into one coherent and integrated ecosystem.

We will take a quick look at what is meant by the Arc's local natural capital, what the assets are and how these natural resources contribute to the environment as fundamental building blocks. We will touch on an approach to a shared vision, and explore the overarching aims, goals and a framework to inform a sustainable development process.

This talk is a shared discussion about the role of the environment. We are looking for pointers to take us forward on a journey that will take time. Through this session we want to stimulate further ideas, actions and identify collaborative opportunities that will help to define the 'Green Arc.' Start to build a more detailed picture and one that will inform how best to cross that that bridge when it comes to specific proposals for the development of sustainable communities.

Could we by the middle of next year have an environmentally sustainable growth model, or at least an outline that can be seen as a significant response to our current challenges and to climate change and the basis of something that in time might become an exemplar that could be showcased around the world? Could we work towards this and even have something to present at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow next year?

Stuart Turner. AoU OCA regional group - 01.12.20.