

Fleshing out the vision for the Oxford2Cambridge Arc

The Government is trying to create a full-scale picture of what the Oxford2Cambridge Arc should look like for those who live and work in the area, *writes Michael Jones, head of the Commercial department at Cheffins.*

By creating a digital platform they are looking for as much input as possible from the public as to how the Spatial Framework can be created in a sustainable way, whilst also supporting the significant economic input this area has to the rest of the UK.

The four policy themes of the environment, the economy, connectivity & infrastructure and place-making have become the essential backbone in the start of creating the initial plan for development.

The Government notes that the OxCam Arc has the potential to deliver the largest space cluster in Europe, primarily for research and development centres and this would be welcomed by many in the industry as the severe lack of lab and R & D space continues to characterise the market.

As the level of demand we have seen for lab space around Cambridge continues at an unprecedented level, I think that the focus for development of research and lab space will continue to be around both the city and Oxford with the areas between the two helping to provide the facilities needed to support the growth of the two knowledge clusters.

Where the Arc will come into its own will be in delivering primarily housing plus warehousing, factories and so on to underpin the development of Oxford and Cambridge themselves.

The Government had dropped its plans to deliver a million

homes by 2050, with the Arc now focused on growth and jobs. However, the people that work in the two clusters will need to live somewhere and with house prices within easy reach of the two cities becoming increasingly unaffordable, the Government will need to focus on providing reasonably-priced homes, along with its plans for placemaking. And this will need to be backed up by proper delivery of infrastructure.

Hopefully, the new East West Rail project ought to help ensure that sustainable travel is possible across the varied businesses and research institutions and better connect Oxford and Cambridge and this will need to be supported by improvements to the region's road networks.

Commercial development land is at a premium around the Cambridge cluster, with sites now being achieving rapidly increasing values, and with this in mind, sourcing the right sites for the right development will be an essential part of the Government's consultation process, particularly for the areas of the Arc which already fall into the framework of Oxford and Cambridge's current science parks.

There has been a huge amount of hype around the OxCam Arc and we look forward to seeing the government's draft spatial framework which will be open for consultation in Autumn 2022.

My colleague Claire Shannon, an Associate in Cheffins Planning team comments: "We welcome the Government's commitment to digital engagement on the emerging Spatial Framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and trust that it will include a healthy provision of housing which needed to support this significant project not only within Cambridge, but also within towns and villages around the city.

"The document highlights that the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is already home to a booming and varied economy, with world-leading companies, internationally recognised research and development centres and universities at its core; however, the

perennial issue is the delivery of housing to support this.

“With over 400 major companies already based in the Cambridge Cluster alone, this geographical area is of huge importance to the UK economy and has the potential to grow even further should the Spatial Framework be initiated in a considered manner.

“The Government has announced that there will be an expert panel which will advise on sustainable economic and housing growth and we welcome this move to ensure that the government follows its commitment to exploring the case for new or expanded settlements around the Cambridge and Bedford area.

“There are a number of towns and villages within the Arc which would benefit from inward investment and we hope that as the Spatial Framework continues to develop that this will be considered as part of the overall plan.

“This is the first of three consultations which will be initiated by the Government in order to inform a Spatial Framework over the next two years and this new digital platform has been created for the public to make their views known, and we would encourage anyone potentially affected by the Arc to make a comment.”