

Dear No Expressway Group Supporter,

NEG apologises for the lack of newsletters during the Covid-19 period. We have not been idle, and we are keeping abreast of the many events, both national and regional, that affect the Ox-Cam Arc area. We are working hard to re-establish regular news updates to all our supporters.

We are writing now to bring you up-to-date with developments in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc area, and to alert you to two webinars in this coming week, covering the future of the Arc.

First, the two webinars:

On **Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> November from 1200 to 1330hrs** the Arc Leadership Group (ALG, under the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, MHCLG) will hold a virtual meeting on *"The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: A global asset and national investment priority"*

For a few more details, and to register, please use this

link: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/3626036926728955916>

Before the meeting, you may like to read the ALG's *"The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Economic Prospectus"* document that you can find

here: [https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file\\_name=2132](https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=2132)

On **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November from 1330 to 1430hrs** the Arc Universities Group (AUG) will hold a virtual meeting on *"Building a green economic region: the environmental ambitions of the AUG"*

For a few more details, and to register, please use this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-a-green-economic-region-the-environmental-ambitions-of-the-aug-tickets-126964055909>

The Arc Universities' home page is here: <http://arcuniversities.co.uk/>

Both meetings are free and there seems to be a Q&A session during each one.

These will be the first opportunities for members of the public to hear directly from, and to question, those who are planning the future of our region. Please do sign up, join in and ask questions!

**Brief lockdown news:**

Following is a summary of key news since our last newsletter following the successful delivery of our petition to 10 Downing Street at the end of February this year (for a short video of this event please see <https://www.noexpressway.org/expressway-stories> ).

In **March** the Ox-Cam expressway was officially paused by the Government to allow alternative road links to be investigated. At time of writing (November 2020) the expressway is still officially paused, despite many enquiries and pleas for clarification from individuals, Local Councillors, and MPs asking questions in the House.

In **June**, the Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust and the RSPB launched the '*100 Miles Wilder*' campaign to promote Nature across the Arc (<https://www.wildlifebcn.org/100-miles-wilder>). Many supporters saw this as buying into all the proposed development across the Arc (i.e. 'greenwashing' it), and with no 'red lines' defining the limits to growth. A scathing Guardian article by George Monbiot caused many wildlife trust supporters to cancel subscriptions (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/24/how-did-wildlife-groups-start-collaborating-in-the-destruction-of-nature->). NEG is in conversation with BBOWT about the needs to establish baselines and to determine the 'carrying capacity' of our area for more houses, especially in the light of the Prime Minister's instruction in the same month to 'Build, Build, Build' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-build-build-build>).

In **July**, England's Economic Heartland launched a consultation on a '*Draft Transport Strategy*' that included associated documents on rail, freight and decarbonising the transport network over an area slightly bigger than the Ox-Cam Arc region (<http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Pages/transport-strategyconsult.aspx>). The documents looked at two new rail and 19 possible road connections, including one called the "Oxfordshire-Milton Keynes Connectivity Study". 13 of the 19 road connections were carried through for further study; it is not clear if the Oxon-MK link was one of them. Among many others, DJR of NEG submitted a personal response to this consultation, available on request.

Also in **July**, Water Resources South East (WRSE) launched a very large consultation on water supply in the wider region for the decades ahead (<https://wrse.uk.engagementhq.com/> ). Following this consultation, a document on the Future Water requirements for the region will be produced in February 2021. Even without the Ox-Cam Arc developments it is predicted that 2 million Londoners will be short of water by 2040; in response, the water companies are planning to increase supply (e.g. new

reservoirs, and/or joining up the Severn and Thames catchment areas) and to reduce demand and leakages.

Finally, **July** also saw the launch of Natural England's '*Natural Capital Atlas*', an attempt to map the natural resources of each English county (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6672365834731520> ). Atlases such as these contribute towards establishing the baseline for natural capital accounting and offsetting (for example DEFRA's at <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/3930b9ca-26c3-489f-900f-6b9eec2602c6/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach> ).

In **August** the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launched two related consultations, one on '*Planning for the Future*' ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf) ) and the other on '*Changes to the current planning system*' ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/907215/200805\\_Changes\\_to\\_the\\_current\\_planning\\_system\\_FINAL\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907215/200805_Changes_to_the_current_planning_system_FINAL_version.pdf) ). Together these documents propose radical changes to the current planning laws and to the way in which the Government's housing target of 300,000+ new houses per year should be distributed between the English Local Authorities. Both documents became instantly controversial. The new planning proposals involve a zoning system for land (into 'Growth', 'Renewal' and 'Protected' areas), and the possibility that major new housing developments (new towns) could fall within National Strategic Infrastructure Project rules (removing virtually all control from Local Authorities). Southern MPs also realised that their constituents' Local Authorities' previous housing targets would be greatly increased under the new housing 'algorithm'. A multi-authored critique of the planning white paper came from the TCPA (<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f53db0a4-b78d-4898-80e4-647080dad84b>) and NEG was involved in the Smart Growth UK responses to both consultations (<http://www.smartgrowthuk.org/resources/> ).

Also in **August** Natural England released a second edition of its 2018 documents on '*Natural Capital Indicators: for defining and measuring change in natural capital*' (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6742480364240896> ) designed to support the ambitions of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP, launched in 2011) ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf) ) that should be enshrined in the Environment Bill working its way through Parliament at present

(<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-21/environment.html> ).

In **September** Natural Cambridgeshire launched its '*Doubling Nature – a landscape led approach*', designed to "put Nature at the heart of Cambridge's agenda" (<https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/docs/doubling-nature-landscape-led-approach.pdf> ). There is some debate as to exactly what is meant by 'doubling nature', as well as to how to achieve it. Natural Cambridgeshire is the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for the eastern end of the Arc, and similar partnerships exist across the entire Arc region. These partnerships have collectively defined an Environmental Opportunities Map for the Arc (a map and list of sites is available at <https://bucksmknep.co.uk/projects/doubling-nature/> ) that offers "large-scale investment potential – for example to create or enhance biodiversity, habitats and/or green infrastructure". The same map is, however, presented by the Wildlife Trusts as identifying "core areas of existing high value for Nature". It is difficult to reconcile these two statements, because sites with a high value for nature are not obvious targets for offsetting (best done in low value sites that would benefit more from enhancing nature).

**October** saw the launch in a blaze of publicity of '*The Oxford-Cambridge Arc Economic Prospectus*' by the Arc Leaders Group (<https://www.semlep.com/oxford-cambridge-arc/> ). The emphasis in this document is economic development across the Arc, but Arc connectivity (both road and rail), settlements of the future and environmental enhancements are also mentioned. The webinar on the 17<sup>th</sup> November should give us a few more details.

Also in **October** the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) produced its '*Final Response to the 25 year Environment Plan Progress Report*' ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/929370/ncc-final-response-25yr-env-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929370/ncc-final-response-25yr-env-plan.pdf) ). Originally set up by DEFRA, the NCC's rôle will be taken over by the Office of Environmental Protection to be created under the new Environment Bill. The NCC Report makes sobering reading, nine years into the 25YEP period. Of the seven resource areas covered by the 25YEP none is on course to achieve the 25YEP objectives, and five are rated Red, indicating a decline or deterioration over the study period. Dieter Helm, NCC Chair, concludes his introduction to the Report with "We can be green and prosperous, but it will not happen by default. The huge opportunities, both economic and environmental, should be grasped by this government". It is clear that businesses and developers are ready and willing to seize the economic opportunities offered by the Ox-Cam Arc. It is not at all clear that the environment will be protected and enhanced in the process. There are moral, aesthetic

and health reasons for preserving nature that transcend the 'dismal science' of economics.

Finally, the one million new houses by 2050 target across the Arc remains, as originally suggested by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and confirmed by Bridget Rosewell of the NIC in a webinar in September of this year. Developers always mention the one million figure (some even propose 1.2 million) and no politician has yet categorically denied it, or changed it to a lower figure. We understand that a spatial plan for the Arc is being developed and may be released soon. This should give us a clearer idea of the current infrastructure ambitions (rail, roads and houses) for the Ox-Cam Arc.

NEG thanks you for your continuing interest and support. Stay safe in Covid-19 lockdown and after.

David Rogers, Secretary, NEG 15/11/20

Glutton for punishment? Here are two more seminars that may be of interest.

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November 1500 to 1630 hrs.** *"London and the Ox-Cam Arc: a City dialogue"*.

<https://nla.london/events/london-the-oxcam-arc-a-city-dialogue>

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 0845 to 1630hrs.** *"Oxford Cambridge Arc Development Conference; sponsored by Morgan Sindall"* (tickets £45, no concessions)

<https://www.built-environment-networking.com/event/oxford-cambridge-corridor-economic-growth-conference/>

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