

AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

A strategic case for city-led growth, innovation and renewal

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven the resilience and strength of England's local government in keeping our communities safe. Equally, the ongoing socio-economic consequences demonstrate the need for strong place-based leadership and governance at the right level to help our recovery.

This is especially true for Oxford, one of our country's leading cities and one that has a global impact and leadership role in areas such as medical science and biotech. The city's unique strength and assets as the prime national knowledge economy hub have been reinforced by the success of the Oxford/Astra-Zeneca vaccine. Oxford must and will, therefore, be a focal point for post-pandemic and post-Brexit growth.

Along with Cambridge and Milton Keynes, Oxford is also a key economic node within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, and with GVA of £6.75bn per annum one of the few parts of UK that makes a net contribution to Exchequer.

Faced with the need for robust social and economic strategies for recovery, there is an imperative to make a clear case for strong urban leadership driving renewal from the pandemic.

Oxford is a core element of a number of distinct economic geographies, including the functional economic areas of the city, travel to work and housing market areas, the "knowledge spine" that runs north to south of the city and more broadly the Thames Valley. This requires the city to coordinate and align strategies across administrative boundaries locally and regionally. This collaborative approach strikes a vital balance in enabling a strategic vision whilst also allowing for the local knowledge and focus on area specific issues and opportunities to be maintained.

Oxford and its economic and innovation assets are central to both Oxfordshire and Arc ecosystems and their COVID-19 economic recovery. Oxford City Council shares a common purpose and ambition working collaboratively with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire's district councils. This is manifest in the success of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and expressed through the Local Industrial Strategy and the Economic Recovery Plan.

Oxford's ability to invest in its own good growth will allow for wider benefit to be seen across the Arc, and crucially, make the city a better engine for growth within it. With strong city-led governance, Oxford is able to use its unique assets and particular strengths to recover stronger than before. Focusing these assets in the right direction will streamline the city's local levelling up efforts.

Oxford City Council is already convening the collective voice of its city partners including anchor institutions such as the universities, hospitals and strategically important businesses to shape a response to immediate needs: the requirement for an inclusive recovery that addresses in particular the widening educational attainment and skills gap caused resulting from the pandemic; and coordinated action to support the retail economy which has been badly hit.

The City Council is similarly convening many of the same partners to shape: the creation of Oxford West End Innovation District – the largest city centre science and tech led regeneration opportunity in the Arc; the redevelopment of Oxford Station and expansion of rail capacity through the Oxford corridor; and a common commitment among all of the city's major businesses and institutions to create a zero carbon city.

With this in mind, *'At the Right Level – a strategic case for city-led growth, innovation and renewal'* presents Oxford's case for city governance as a **compact global city** as the best means for retaining and building on this strategic regional and national advantage.

The benefits of a good growth recovery leading to sustainable science-led economic success will spread far beyond Oxford's boundaries to the Ox-Cam Arc and wider, to the national and international level. To achieve this Localis recommends the following city governance is needed:

City governance at the right level

This recommendation is designed to situate Oxford as a compact global city within the aegis of governance frameworks not just vested in Oxford City Council but also extending sub-regionally to those of Oxfordshire County Council and OXLEP and regionally to the nationally vital OxCam Arc – so as to provide sufficient power and resource at the right level to allow the city to deliver for its residents and to further accelerate the growth potential of the arc and the county.

A long-term £1bn endowment fund for supporting good growth within the city.

- To address the central issue of budgetary uncertainty also need, Localis is calling for a £1bn Endowment Deal for Oxford, taking the form of a single long-term investment strategy for city-led growth.
- This deal would give Oxford city council power to: target investment in key physical and transport infrastructure requirements, build the capacity needed to develop a skills supply chain, give strategic planning powers relating to Oxford's decarbonisation targets, and allow for city led investment strategies on social, digital, and smart energy infrastructure.

Oxford City Council's relationship with its residents

- Statutory convening role in the development, alongside County and Arc partners, of a skills supply chain for the City of Oxford which focuses on maximising the human potential of the city's resident population.
- The city should put forward a transparent community asset and social infrastructure investment strategy as part of a revised social contract with residents.

There is a need to seize the initiative in searching for and implementing the correct interventions to help guide the process towards imbedding inclusivity within the local economy. **Good growth** is where the need for deeper collaborative working and meaningful engagement between the different key stakeholders of the local state, including business, government partners, and local community, is paramount.

Clean growth is a vital part of good growth, and they need to be taken together to be successful. There is an imperative to align the strategies, given clean growth links closely to health and wellbeing and physical infrastructure in place.

Oxford's ability to grow at the city level

- The power to raise levies to fund placemaking efforts:
 - On businesses, in a manner similar to the provisions laid out in the Business Rates Supplement Act.
 - On residents, in a progressive manner using council tax bands as a guide.

Oxford's relationship with Oxfordshire County Council and the Ox-Cam Arc

- Co-decision powers with Oxfordshire County Council on local transport infrastructure decisions.
- Some strategic planning powers for the City Council, specifically on the ability to go further within the city than national and regional targets dictate for planning standards and design codes relating to good growth targets.
- Key cities for the Arc's future growth, including Oxford, Cambridge, and Milton Keynes need to have a clear voice on its governance i.e. through direct representation on the proposed Arc Growth Body.