

Historic England's Response to the National Infrastructure Commission's Call for Evidence on the Cambridge–Milton Keynes–Oxford 'Growth Corridor'

Historic England

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence regarding the Cambridge–Milton Keynes–Oxford growth corridor. Our response to each of the questions posed by the National Infrastructure Commission is set out below.

3.1 Many places across the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford corridor have very successful local economies and are perceived as highly desirable places to live.

- **What have been the key drivers of that success?**

The local economies across the Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford corridor have been highly successful resilient and dynamic, driven by a number of different factors including proximity to London, a knowledge based economy linked to the presence of world class universities, and a rich, diverse and attractive historic environment and rural hinterland.

The corridor forms an arc to the north of London from Oxford, through Milton Keynes to Cambridge. The capital is accessible from these locations, and its proximity contributes to the success of the local economies and to making these areas highly desirable places to live.

Often described as the 'brain belt' of the UK economy, there is a strong link between the presence of world class universities in both Oxford and Cambridge (currently ranked sixth and third in the QS World University ratings) and the strength of the local economies. Cambridge has the highest percentage of working age population with NVQ4 and above (65.7%¹) with Oxford second with 60%.² 63.5% of Oxford's residents have degree level qualifications (almost twice the UK or SE averages).³ Oxford has a larger proportion of adults in full-time studies than any other city in England and Wales).⁴

¹ NOMIS 2014, Annual Population Survey, residents analysis, 2013 data, DETINI 2014

² Oxford Local Plan Employment and Economy Background Paper

³ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

⁴ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

This knowledge-based economy has flourished since the development of the Cambridge Science Park on the edge of the city in the 1970s. Since that time, the area has become a world leader in terms of its technology-based business community and wider research base. There are now around 1,500 high technology businesses employing around 53,000 people in the Cambridge Area.⁵

There is a strong focus upon high value, high skilled jobs in life sciences, advanced manufacturing and scientific research including drug discovery, bioinformatics, software, computer hardware, electronics, etc.

Oxford's economy is growing, with currently 4,600 businesses providing 114,000 jobs, adding £6.8 billion to the UK economy in 2014. The major employment sectors include research, publishing and health, with 67% of Oxford's jobs in knowledge-intensive activities.⁶

Heritage assets and a proactive approach to managing the historic environment have played an important part in making Oxford and Cambridge highly desirable places to live. Historic places add distinctiveness, meaning and quality to the places in which we live, providing a sense of continuity and a source of identify. Historic places are also social and economic assets and can be used to support regeneration, place making and community development.

The corridor as a whole includes a wealth of historic assets including Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, 205 Scheduled Monuments, 48 Registered parks and gardens, 7321 listed buildings, and 144 Conservation Areas.⁷ Cambridge and Oxford in particular both have a high concentration of heritage assets (see Table 1).

Table 1: Heritage Assets and Heritage Champions by District⁸

	Cambridge	South Cambs	Oxford	Milton Keynes
Grade I listed buildings	67	49	199	30
Listed buildings	818	2665	1172	1092
Conservation Areas	11	86	18	27
Scheduled Monuments	5	103	10	48
Registered Parks and Gardens	12	12	4	0
Heritage Champions	1	1	1	0

⁵ Cambridge Local Plan

⁶ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

⁷ Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stakeholder Reference Group

⁸ *Heritage Counts Data*

These assets have helped to make this area a highly desirable place to live, work and invest. Far from being a barrier to growth, heritage is an important planning consideration and can serve to promote a strong and vibrant economy.

- **What is holding back further growth and greater productivity?**

However, as with any area there are a number of constraints which may be seen as hindering further growth and greater productivity in the area. The principal issues that we identify in this area include **transport, housing** and **skills**.

In respect of **transport**, Cambridge is expected to see a 40% increase in travel demand by 2031. Milton Keynes has identified transport infrastructure as a vital precursor to development and the Oxford local LEP has itself described the city's road network as 'woefully outdated'.⁹

In particular there are major concerns regarding the A34 south of Oxford, A421 single carriageway east of the A4421, A421 through Milton Keynes, and the A428 single carriageway section. More broadly, road infrastructure in the Cambridge area is at or over capacity with particular issues associated with the A14 and also congestion in and around the city at peak periods.

Journey times between Oxford and Cambridge city centres at peak periods take between two-and-a-half to three hours to travel approximately 83 miles. Undoubtedly, improvements in transport infrastructure would help to increase connectivity along the growth corridor and hopefully reduce journey times.

Oxford has the second highest proportion of those commuting to work by bike in the country. At peak times, very high bus patronage of over 1000 passengers an hour is found on 5 of Oxford's key bus corridors, and these bus corridors have over 40 buses an hour. 190 buses and coaches enter the city centre per hour at peak times. Oxford's narrow streets can contain air pollution, and also mean that there is more likely to be conflict between motorised traffic, pedestrians and cyclists. With the level of population and job growth expected, the way that people will move around the city in the future will be very important for the environment, health and well-being.¹⁰

Regarding **housing**, outside of London, Oxford and Cambridge are the least affordable cities in the UK to live relative to wages, with the average house price:earnings ratio in 2014 being 16.2 for Oxford and 14.9 for Cambridge.¹¹ Affordability pressures make it harder for firms to recruit and retain staff. Significant 'unmet' housing need and real concerns about affordability with high house prices together with the very low unemployment numbers means that the local labour market is subject to problems of both recruitment and retention of staff in Oxford.¹²

⁹ Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stakeholder Reference Group

¹⁰ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

¹¹ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016, Land registry 2014, Market Trend Data, Price Paid 2004 and 2014 data, Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics 2014, Mean house prices 2004 and 2014 data, ONS 2013 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), average gross weekly residence based earnings, 2012 and 2013 data.

¹² Oxford Local Plan Employment and Economy Background Paper

The report 'Oxford Innovation Engine: Realising the Growth Potential' (2013) found housing to be the biggest obstacle to achieving economic growth.

Substantial growth in housing stock is planned for the region (the Oxfordshire LEP local authorities propose to deliver 93,560–106,560 new dwellings by 2031, the South East Midlands LEP around 86,700 by 2020/21, and the Great Cambridge/Greater Peterborough (GCGP) LEP around 156,610 by 2031). Oxford needs about 32,000 new homes by 2031 to meet its predicted housing needs but only has room for about 10,000 of those in Oxford itself, which means that, if this need is to be fully met, additional development is required in the adjoining authorities' areas. The scale of housing growth in the area will inevitably put pressure on the distinctive character of historic towns such as Oxford and Cambridge. Planning policy and site allocations used to increase housing supply will need to be mindful of impacts on the historic environment and individual heritage assets.

This new housing construction inevitably leads to greater pressure on existing transport networks and potentially impacts upon historic assets. Growth around Oxford is likely to mean incursions into the Green Belt, which might affect its purpose to preserve the setting and special character of the city.

In terms of **skills**, whilst Oxford and Cambridge both have high proportions of residents with degree level qualifications, nevertheless there remain areas where high proportions of the population have little or no qualifications. Oxford has below average educational attainment amongst young people in state schools and 22% of adults have no or low educational qualifications.¹³ Milton Keynes reports business skills shortages across a range of sectors in both leadership and management as well as more technical and basic skills.¹⁴

- **In particular, what planned or new infrastructure improvements would best support sustainable growth and promote innovation over the long-term?**

Sustainable growth and innovation in the long term are best supported by improved infrastructure, particularly addressing current issues including the A14, links between Oxford and Cambridge (be they road, rail or other forms of public transport) and sufficient housing (sustainably located and at a price that is affordable) to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding population whilst at the same time, building upon the historic assets of the corridor through their protection, enhancement and re-use through constructive conservation. For example, we have given our support to the A14 improvement process, which has resulted in some positive benefits for the historic environment.

The 'National Planning Policy Framework' makes it clear that the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment is an integral part of sustainable development, and that to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. Therefore, if it is to be truly sustainable, any new infrastructure,

¹³ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

¹⁴ Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stakeholder Reference Group

whether transport or housing, must achieve growth alongside the conservation and enhancement of the region's environmental assets, including the historic.

- **Does the corridor require better connectivity to other major centres of growth?**

Connectivity between major centres of growth will serve to maximise the potential for growth within the corridor. This can best be achieved through a range of modes: road, rail, better public transport generally, and also through ensuring that digital infrastructure meets the needs of the population.

3.2 Does the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford area, including Northampton, form a recognizable economic corridor? If so:

- **What factors unite the area?**

The area is united by a number of different factors. Cambridge and Oxford are both **historic seats of learning**, with the universities ranking third and sixth in the world. The two cities host over 3,000 technology firms.

Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Northampton all experienced very **high levels of population growth** between 2004 – 2013, with all three cities in the top 10 cities with the highest population growth in the UK. Milton Keynes had the fastest rate of growth in this period, expanding by 16.5% (an increase of 36,200; Cambridge had the fifth fastest rate of growth, at 12.7%, and Northampton ranked seventh with a population increase of 11.3 % during the same period).¹⁵ Oxford's population increased by 12% between 2001 and 2011¹⁶ and is expected to increase by a further 20% by 2036.¹⁷

The highest rate of **growth in the number of jobs** was achieved in Milton Keynes (an increase of 18.2% between 2004 and 2013, with Cambridge ranked third with a 15.7 % increase during the same period).¹⁸

The area has **high levels of employment** with 79.4% in employment in Oxford, and 78% in Cambridge compared to the national average of 73.6% for the period January – December 2015.¹⁹ The level of unemployment in Oxford is significantly lower than the South-East and England. Both Oxford and Cambridge have similar **strengths in the education, research and high technology sectors.**

As detailed in response to Question 3.1, the corridor as a whole boasts a wealth of **historic assets**, with Cambridge and Oxford having particularly high concentrations of listed buildings and conservation areas. It is these unique assets that help to make these cities such attractive places in which to live and work (Oxford is the seventh

¹⁵ ONS 2014 mid-year population estimates, 2004 and 2013 data

¹⁶ Oxford Local Plan Employment and Economy Background Paper

¹⁷ Oxford Local Plan consultation booklet June 2016

¹⁸ ONS 2014

¹⁹ NOMIS data, 2016

most visited city by international visitors in the UK, attracting approximately 7 million visitors per year, generating £780 million of income for local Oxford businesses²⁰).

- **Would greater emphasis on corridor-wide planning and decision making benefit local communities and local economies?**

There is already a degree of corridor-wide planning for infrastructure in place which is important in ensuring a joined up approach to tackling the issues surrounding growth.

The cross-boundary issues around housing delivery have already been touched on, above, and the existence of cross-boundary LEPs. Historic assets and their settings may themselves straddle boundaries and prompt cross-boundary working, and closer working and co-ordinated planning can help to ensure that the issues are adequately addressed. The Duty to Cooperate is an important tool in tackling cross boundary issues.

- **Would that same emphasis on coordinated planning and decision making provide wider benefits for the UK economy?**

A coordinated approach to planning and decision making is key in addressing strategic issues such as growth and housing delivery.

- **Should adjacent towns and cities be incorporated into the corridor in terms of growth and infrastructure planning?**

It is imperative that adjacent towns and cities are incorporated into the corridor in terms of growth and infrastructure planning. Each of the main cities has a hinterland. Growth in one area inevitably leads to impacts upon the surrounding area. In Cambridge, for example, whilst many of the jobs are located in Cambridge and the surrounding science parks, the population is more widely spread across the market towns and villages leading to considerable net commuting into the city across the Green Belt. It is these historic towns (Ely, Saffron Walden, Newmarket, etc.) that house many of the working population of Cambridge.

A similar effect is felt in Oxford: almost half of Oxford's workforce (45,900 people or 46%) commuted into the area in 2011. In addition, there is seen to be a need for 22,000 dwellings in the settlements around Oxford to meet Oxford's housing need to 2036.

The knock-on effects of growth in the main cities upon the ring of market towns – both in terms of transport infrastructure and housing – need to be taken into consideration. Each of these adjacent towns has its own special character that needs to be preserved and enhanced through sustainable development in the future, and this includes the provision of appropriate infrastructure networks. It is this character that makes such towns very attractive places to live and work, and thus supports the economy.²¹ Growth needs to be carefully managed in these towns to

²⁰ Oxford Local Plan Sustainable Tourism Background Paper

²¹ See 'Heritage and the Economy' (Historic England, 2015).

encourage and accommodate appropriate and high quality urban growth whilst at the same time ensuring that all those elements that make them special are not lost but rather maintained and enhanced.

Currently the Cambridge Sub-Regional Housing Board acts in partnership, with learning and other experiences shared across the housing market area. The Board includes a number of local authorities including Cambridge City, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Forest Heath, Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire, St Edmundsbury and Cambridgeshire County. Similarly, the LEP boundary incorporates Forest Heath, Uttlesford, St Edmundsbury and North Herts in recognition of the fact that these areas are all inter-related. Growth in the main cities will inevitably lead to the effects being felt in their wider hinterlands.

Therefore it is vital that the corridor is broadened to include these areas. If adjacent towns and cities are excluded from the corridor for the purposes of growth and infrastructure planning there is a danger that this may lead to additional pressures or decline in these places.

3.3 Describe your vision to maximise growth, maintain a high quality environment, and deliver more jobs and homes across the corridor over the next 30 years:

- **What does that mean for growth and infrastructure investment in your area?**

Historic England's vision for the corridor over the next 30 years is to see continued growth but in a sustainable manner which does not compromise the very things that have served to contribute to the success of the region to date, in particular the historic assets of the area. As set out in our response to Question 3.1 above, the 'National Planning Policy Framework' makes it clear that to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

- **What steps are currently being taken to realise that vision, and what more needs to be done?**

Historic England recognises the importance of historic places as both social and economic assets. As the public body that looks after England's historic environment, we champion historic places, helping people to understand, value and care for them.

We are actively involved in helping to shape future growth and infrastructure, and in working closely with local authorities in the East and South East of England, providing expert planning advice for the preparation and revision of a wide variety of development plans, development proposals, environmental strategies and assessments.

Our constructive approach to conservation is being increasingly adopted by other public agencies and in particular by local planning authorities, who are usually, and rightly, the first point of contact for developers seeking to make changes to historic places. In engaging with development, from an early stage, our vision for balancing

growth with careful protection and enhancement of historic assets can be realised. The aim is to recognise and reinforce the historic significance of places, while accommodating the changes necessary to ensure their continued use and enjoyment.

A good example of this approach can be seen in the redevelopment of the Station Area in Cambridge, where a constructive approach to the conservation of Listed Buildings was taken, building upon the unique heritage of the area and enhancing the scheme as a whole. Similarly, Christ's Passage in Cambridge involved the redevelopment of a shopping centre and opening up of a historic route through the city, creating a much more pleasant and attractive mixed-use scheme.

- **What value could new cross-corridor intercity road and rail links bring? How do these compare to other transport initiatives e.g. intra-city links, or wider infrastructure, priorities?**

As outlined in our response to Question 3.1 above, transport is one the key factors holding back further growth in the corridor. In particular there are major concerns regarding the A34 south of Oxford, A421 single carriageway east of the A4421, A421 through Milton Keynes, and A428 single carriageway section. More broadly, road infrastructure in the Cambridge area is at or over capacity with particular issues associated with the A14, and also congestion in and around the city at peak periods.

Journey times between Oxford and Cambridge city centres at peak periods take between two-and-a-half to three hours to travel approximately 83 miles. Undoubtedly, improvements in transport infrastructure, be they road or rail, would help to increase connectivity along the growth corridor and hopefully reduce journey times. This would enable greater movement between nodes and improved accessibility to affordable housing in turn improving the ability of firms to recruit and retain staff.

3.4 Are there lessons to be learnt from previous initiatives to maximise the potential of the corridor?

We would also draw your attention to two recent research reports. Firstly, the 'Cathedral Cities Report' (by Foster and Partners with input from Historic England and Terence O'Rourke). This report was prepared to help inform the debate about the expansion of cathedral cities and more broadly historic cities in general. The report consisted of a number of case studies of British historic cities and contrasting these with analysis of a number of European examples. From this, different approaches to conservation and development in sensitive locations were identified as well as key lessons to be learnt. ['The Sustainable Growth of Cathedral Cities and Historic Towns'](#) was undertaken by Green Balance on behalf of Historic England. It looks in detail at the mechanisms employed by a number of local planning authorities in historic towns and cities to ensure successful housing growth that respects and integrates with the local historic environment.

3.5 Are you aware of any examples of UK or international good practice, for example in respect of new technology, local frameworks or the built environment, that are relevant to this review?

The following publications provide useful examples of good practice that are relevant to this review.

[A Prospectus for Growth](#): This document highlights the key role played by heritage as an economic driver, examines how heritage can help our economy grow faster and in a more sustainable way and emphasises that heritage is not a barrier to growth.

[Constructive Conservation – Sustainable Growth in Historic Places](#): This volume shows the many ways in which historic buildings can contribute to job creation, business growth and economic prosperity.

[Conservation Bulletin 72 – Housing](#): This bulletin provides a helpful overview of a variety of housing schemes. We would particularly highlight the articles relating to Accordia in Cambridge, demonstrating the important role to be played by the historic environment in influencing and shaping good design.

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer Services Department:

Telephone: 0370 333 0607

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk