

BE

Oxford
Cambridge ARC
Development
Conference

Oxford Cambridge ARC Development Conference

Conference Report

Thursday, 20th June 2019

MK Dons Stadium, Milton Keynes

#OCADC19

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 Built Environment Networking

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Contents

<p>03 Foreword</p> <hr/> <p>04 From the Keynotes</p> <hr/> <p>06 The OxCambs ARC - The State of Play</p> <hr/> <p>08 Connecting the ARC - Infrastructure Plans</p> <hr/> <p>10 Universities and Colleges - Creating Campuses to Attract and Retain Talent</p>	<p>12 A view from Curtin&Co</p> <hr/> <p>14 Major Developments; Placemaking in the ARC</p> <hr/> <p>16 Conference Photos</p> <hr/> <p>18 Conference Partners</p> <hr/> <p>19 Save the Date</p>
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Foreword



Keith Griffiths,
Managing Director,
Built Environment
Networking

Milton Keynes has become a home away from home for the Built Environment Networking team over the past couple of years and this event was the third OxCam Arc Development Conference which has become a staple of our annual calendar.

Feedback from previous events played a big factor in designing the agenda with an overwhelming number of previous delegates asking that we place a focus on housing and the environment in this edition; I'm pleased to say we delivered and even more delighted to say that the instant feedback we received on our rating machine as people exited turned out to be 100% green, meaning every delegate professed to having an 'excellent' or 'very good' experience.

Much of the chatter surrounding the day and in between sessions was about the forthcoming appointment of an Arc 'champion,' with a mixed response from our delegates and speakers who fear it could lead to another level of bureaucracy at a time when plans need to accelerate to compete internationally. In particular, a major focus needs to be placed on digital infrastructure (a message we're hearing across the UK) at a time when other cities across the globe are able to offer investors and blue chip companies much better broadband and digital connectivity.

One of the hallmarks of our recent events is that we are not putting speakers on the stage that are a bunch of consensus sharers who nod along and tow the 'party political line.' Healthy debate and disagreement often leads to quicker resolution and it has been heartening to see the networks developing not only between attendees but between content contributors. On the evening before our full day conferences (and immediately following all of our evening events) we always hold a dinner which is attended by some of our speakers. These dinners are a great place to interact with conference contributors and ask specific questions on issues that matter to you. We welcome any organisation that would like to involve themselves in these dinners to get in touch with myself via email or phone.

2020 is just around the corner and we will be returning to the Arc with conference number four next June by which time the dust from Brexit will hopefully be settled and a host of new schemes that we have heard are in the pipeline will be able to take centre stage. I very much look forward to seeing you all there.

Keith
keith.griffiths@built-environment-networking.com



From the Keynotes



Ahmed Goga

Director of Strategy and Programmes, Oxfordshire LEP
[@OxfordshireLEP](#)

OXFORD CAMBRIDGE ARC'S PROVISION OF FULL FIBRE BROADBAND AND WET LABS LAGGING

The Oxford Cambridge Arc lacks enough of the full fibre broadband or wet lab space that its growth industries require – a Local Enterprise Partner (LEP) boss has warned.

Ahmed Goga, Director of Strategy and Programmes at OXLEP, said the rate of full-fibre connectivity in the Arc is “seven to eight per cent” but while this is “pretty good” within a UK context it does not compare well with Scandinavia where the rate is 80-90%.

Goga also said there is currently just 15,000 sq ft of wet labs available for occupation in Oxford, while 90% of such space due to be delivered this year in Cambridge is already let, leaving “virtually no capacity”.

By contrast, Boston has 10m sq ft of flexible lab space available now, he said: “We’re competing

with Boston day and night for some of this, but we’re in no position to offer this capacity in the Arc at the moment. If you are looking to attract major international investors and mobile businesses into the Arc, you have to change the way you think.”

But pointing out that its name already featured the area’s two world class universities Goga said the ARC must not get fixated on branding:

WE HAVE THE TWO MOST CRITICAL BRANDS IN THE NAME ALREADY, LET'S NOT WASTE ANY MORE TIME ON IT.

He added that the LEPs’ local industrial strategies are due to be published before the end of July 2019.



Jane Hamilton

Chair, Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway Trust
[@JohnBunyanBoat](#)

‘DISAPPOINTMENT’ AIRED DUE TO LACK OF EMPHASIS ON ‘BLUE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE’ IN MAJOR UK INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

Jane Hamilton, Chair of the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, has told our event that she is “disappointed” about the lack of emphasis on “blue and green” infrastructure, like waterways and parks, in the Arc’s plans.

Speaking at our Oxford Cambridge Arc Development Conference she said: “We’ve heard a lot about the Expressway and east-west rail, which are essential to underpin investment across the Arc, but so is green and blue infrastructure.”

Comparing the £1.2m, earmarked by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the Arc’s environmental infrastructure to the far larger sums being invested in road and rail “says it all”, she added.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS HOW THE PLACE FEELS TO THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE AND THAT DEPENDS TO A LARGE EXTENT ON ACCESS TO WATER AND GREEN SPACE

the former Milton Keynes Chief Planner said, referring to recently published research, showing that a couple of hours spent in green space has a “huge impact” on peoples’ mental health.



“If people don’t understand that, developments won’t work.”

As an example of how green infrastructure could be integrated, Hamilton pointed to how the network of parks originally designed to help Milton Keynes’ cope with its drainage problems were now “major assets” for the town.

She said that “upfront” investment, combined with “very strategic” planning had been key in delivering this infrastructure.

In his presentation, Peter Horrocks CBE Chair of South East Midlands LEP, said that sustainability must underpin the Arc’s planning:

ZERO CARBON LOCATIONS COULD BE THE WAY OF GETTING PEOPLE BEHIND THE ARC.

He highlighted a project in Corby supported by his body to create a zero fuel bills homes – and whilst admitting the scheme “is not quite there yet” the project has achieved fuel bill savings of 15%.

He also said that consultation on rebuilding the Bedford to Cambridge section of the new east-west rail route and the Expressway road is due to take place in the autumn.



The OxCambs ARC - The State of Play

Panel Members:



Chair: Phil Laycock

Director, Built Environment Networking

[@BENetworking](#)



Richard Harrington

Chief Executive Officer, Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

[@BTVLEP](#)



Jo Lancaster

Managing Director, Huntingdonshire District Council

[@huntsdc](#)



Roz Bird

Commercial Director, MEPC Silverstone Park

[@SilverstonePark](#)



Ahmed Goga

Director of Strategy and Programmes, Oxfordshire LEP

[@OxfordshireLEP](#)



Jim Rawlings

Senior Planning Manager, Barratt David Wilson Homes

[@BarrattHomes](#)

COUNCIL CHIEF DOWNPLAYS ROLE OF MINISTERIAL ARC CHAMPION

Progress on the development of Oxford to Cambridge Arc should not be held up by the delayed appointment of a Ministerial Champion, one of the area's leading local government chiefs has said.

The government made a commitment last year to appoint a ministerial champion for the Ox-Cams Arc but has yet to fill the role.

Jo Lancaster, Managing Director of Huntingdonshire District Council, told delegates at the Oxford Cambridge Arc Development Conference that she is not "completely convinced" that it needs an organisational infrastructure:

THE ARC IS NOT ABOUT A SINGLE FIGUREHEAD BUT A MOVEMENT, AND SINGLE FIGUREHEADS CAN ALSO BE SINGLE POINTS OF FAILURE. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SPENT 12 TO 18 MONTHS GOING THROUGH TURMOIL, BUT THE LACK OF MINISTERIAL SPONSOR HASN'T STOPPED US.

She added: "A coalition of the willing is being built. We are in the 21st century. We don't have to rely on Victorian governance and structures, we can create something genuinely different. We need to be careful about over focusing on structures: we are doing something new and different."

Branding the focus on government contact points as a "red herring", Lancaster said: "We need to do it for ourselves."

And noting that "99 out of 100 people living in the Arc have no idea" what it is, she said: "We need to engage a broad group of people."

Roz Bird, Commercial Director at MEPC, said:

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL THAT WE DON'T END UP WITH ANOTHER LAYER OF ORGANISATION AND PEOPLE PUSHING PAPER ABOUT. IF WE DON'T GET A GRIP ON THIS AND ARTICULATE A VISION THAT GETS PEOPLE INSPIRED, WE WON'T BE MAXIMISING THE OPPORTUNITY. WE NEED TO BE ARTICULATING A VISION.



OXLEP's Ahmed Goga said that while the government is currently in talks with candidates about becoming the business champion for the Arc, time shouldn't be wasted by waiting for a "dynamic figure" to emerge.

And Richard Harrington, Chief Executive Officer at the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP, warned against the risk of spending another 12 months trying to create a "perfect governance structure".

Jim Rawlings, Strategic Planning Manager at Barratt David Wilson Homes, said that the identity of the decision makers mattered less than levels of resources available to the Arc's cash strapped planning authorities.



The 50-year timescale for the Arc's development stretches beyond conventional planning approaches, said Huntingdonshire's Lancaster:

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE IS SO RAPID, BUT WE ARE LIMITED BY WHAT WE KNOW. PLANNERS LIKE RULES AND CERTAINTY. IF WE ARE GENUINE ABOUT CARBON NEUTRAL, WE NEED TO EXPERIMENT WITH HOUSING LAYOUTS AND DESIGN STANDARDS.

But she said it was good news that agreement has been secured on the name of the Arc.

Barratt's Rawlings said that the company had also been "massively slowed down" by issues with brick and block construction on its schemes, adding that greater uptake of offsite technologies is inevitable.

He said: "We will move to more MMC (modern methods of construction) because we have to."

He also welcomed the work by the Arc's authorities on producing a spatial framework, which he said will boost investors' confidence in the area.



Connecting the ARC – Infrastructure Plans

Panel Members:



Chair: Phil Laycock

Director, Built Environment
Networking

[@BENetworking](#)



Euan Hall

Chief Executive,
The Land Trust

[@thelandtrust](#)



Jane Hamilton

Chair, Bedford and Milton
Keynes Waterway Trust

[@JohnBunyanBoat](#)



Matt Jackson

Conservation Manager,
The Wildlife Trusts

[@WildlifeTrusts](#)



Hugh Brennan

Managing Director,
Hive Energy

[@hiveenergy](#)



Jacqui Cox

Infrastructure Locality
Lead, Oxfordshire
Cotswolds Garden Village

[@OxfordshireCC](#)

FAILURE TO ELECTRIFY MOOTED OXFORD CAMBRIDGE RAIL LINE BRANDED A “DISASTER”

Using diesel instead of electric trains on the proposed line between Oxford and Cambridge has been branded a “disaster” for the development of the surrounding Arc, one of the area’s most eminent planners has said.

The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust’s Jane Hamilton told the infrastructure panel session at Ox-Cams conference, that “backsliding” on cost was to blame for the decision not to electrify the route.

A key theme from speakers throughout our Oxford Cambridge Arc Development Conference was how sustainability should underpin the development of the Arc.

Using more polluting diesel trains was a “very disappointing decision” in this context, said Hamilton: “If the Arc is going to be like this, it’s never going to deliver what we need it to do. If that kind of thinking underpins the Arc, it’s going to be a bit of a disaster.”

Hugh Brennan, Managing Director, Hive Energy, agreed “It sounds like a shocker on the face of it.”

Matt Jackson, Conservation Manager at the The Wildlife Trusts, said the rail link’s route has been driven by cost considerations rather than inter-relationships with development planned along the route:

AT THE MOMENT WE ARE MAKING THOSE DECISIONS IN ISOLATION AND NOT LOOKING AT HOW IT IS GOING TO INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

He added: “We need to consider the two together. It’s not happening so far with the Oxford to Milton Keynes stretch of

the road or Bedford to Cambridge stretch of railway where the route is about cost rather than development patterns to the north of Cambridge. We need to think about what impact development patterns are going to have.”

Earlier in her presentation, Hamilton had outlined her trust’s proposals for a waterway park linking the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes to the Great Ouse river in Bedford: “Closing a small gap in the waterways network will have a transformational impact on the area but it needs upfront investment and can’t be an add-on.”

“We know it will pay for itself in the long term and can offset the impact of major road and rail schemes,” she said, adding that the park should be treated as “serious infrastructure” that is integrated into the wider planning of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

The project would also create new accessible green space, help efforts to transfer water between regions and mitigate potential flood risks for new development by linking three major lakes in the Arc.

Hamilton estimated that around five per cent of the £170m project, which she described as a “very small” sum of money compared to the rail and road projects being elsewhere planned in the Arc, can be delivered by the private sector. This includes developer O&H, which has committed to deliver 5km of the waterway as part of its plans for 5,000 homes development in central Bedfordshire. And investing in the proposed waterway park could have a much better impact on sustainability than smaller scale projects, she said: “If you invest upfront, the payback is enormous: if we think it’s about a fast buck, we’re never going to solve this problem.”

The Wildlife Trusts’ Jackson agreed that green infrastructure must be factored into the early planning of the Arc. “We have

to look strategically at how to deliver green infrastructure. We have opportunities to build in (sustainability) at earlier stages but need the mechanisms to do that. We are not anti-developer, but we struggle with the process of getting gains built in at earlier stages.”

The government’s reliance on voluntary approaches and “ducking” the “easy” decisions that would bring infrastructure forward means “nothing has happened”, he said: “Mechanisms can be put in place, but we need to start thinking about them now. If we rely on local plans, the review rate means the Arc will be built long before we have the policy drivers to put in green infrastructure on the ground.” And while it contains rare floodplain meadows, the Arc has an “incredibly low level” of natural capital assets, Jackson said.

While 8.6% of the overall country is covered by designated Sites of Special Scientist Interest, the equivalent figure for the Arc is only 2%. But rewetting dried out Fenland soils provides “significant opportunities” to prevent losses of carbon, he said: “You can literally see the carbon disappear with the wind blowing soil off: We should be rewetting soils and keeping carbon in the ground.”

As an example of how natural capital can be enhanced through the development process, Jackson pointed to the new town at Camborne, where biodiversity has increased on a site that was largely farmed for oil seed rape before it was built on.

Calls for environmental infrastructure to be factored into the Arc’s planning were backed by Euan Hall, Chief Executive Officer at The Land Trust. He said: “Mainlining biodiversity, getting it into planning system, is key as long as it doesn’t slow up the planning system.”

Hive’s Brennan outlined his company’s plans for a 350 plus MW ground mount PV installation on a 888 acre site, which is designed to provide subsidy-free solar power. The site near Sittingbourne has been chosen because it is located close to the 400 KV ring running around the south east of England and a sub-station built to serve the London Array offshore wind farm in the Thames Estuary.

The scheme, a joint-venture between Hive and Wirsol (UK), also features a battery capable of storing up to 2.1GWh of

electricity, he said:

“IF RENEWABLES ARE GOING TO BE THE FUTURE, ENERGY STORAGE IS GOING TO BE KEY.”

Brennan said the target for securing consent for the scheme is in the first quarter of next year with a view to connecting to the grid in 2021. But the staunchest opposition to his company’s plans has come from local Green Party councillors, he said: “The Earth may be hurtling toward oblivion, but Nimbyism survives.”

Jacqui Cox, Infrastructure Locality Lead for Cherwell & West Oxfordshire Councils, outlined plans to create a new garden village between Witney and Oxford. The new 2,200 home village is designed to be a “stand alone” settlement, providing “significant” employment.

The scheme entails an extension of the dual carriageway of the “very congested” A4, which runs past the site, including east and west bound bus lanes to Oxford.

Cox said the development will also feature one of a new outer ring of park and ride facilities around Oxford, which is designed to build on the success of transport policies that have kept a lid on car use in the university city.

Detailed policies for the development, which were adopted by the government in its garden village programme in 2017, are due to be set out in an area action plan.



Universities and Colleges – Creating Campuses to Attract

Panel Members:



Chair: Simon Toplass

Chief Executive, PAGABO
@PagaboEDU



Professor Linda King

Deputy Vice Chancellor,
Oxford Brookes University
@oxford_brookes



James Rolfe

Chief Operating Officer,
Anglia Ruskin University
@AngliaRuskin



Peter Horrocks CBE

Chair, SEMLEP
@SEMLEP

ARC UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT TO FOCUS ON NEW INSTITUTIONS

The next phase of university development in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc is likely to be focused on new institutions rather than the expansion of existing facilities, our event has heard.

Both Peterborough and Milton Keynes, currently the largest population centres in England that lack their own universities, are keen to set up institutions. The only higher education facility in Milton Keynes is an outpost of Bedfordshire University.

Highlighting recent developments of Northampton University, most existing campuses in the Arc are well catered for, SEMLEP's Peter Horrocks said:

**NEW UNIVERSITIES ARE PROBABLY
LIKELY TO GENERATE THE MOST
PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITIES RATHER THAN
REFRESHES.**



James Rolfe, Chief Operating Officer at Anglia Ruskin University, said the proposed facility at Milton Keynes would be a "very different kind of university and more technically focused."

He said that a number of commercial partners in Cambridge have moved in during recent months to occupy wet labs at Anglia Ruskin, which is one of the few places in the eastern region with such space available to occupy.

Rolfe said tenants and students benefited from interacting with one another in the labs with the latter enjoying opportunities for internships and the former getting the chance to liaise with the university's academic staff.

Turning to the university's student accommodation plans, Rolfe said that Anglia Ruskin is exploring "different commercial models" to cut its students' housing costs, such as by increasing the density of its estate.



and Retain Talent

But he didn't mind whether this accommodation is provided by the private sector or the university itself:

**WE DON'T HAVE A PREFERENCE AS
LONG AS IT PROVIDES STUDENTS
WITH WHAT THEY NEED.**

Rolfe also said while the combination of Brexit and the prospect of reduced fee income means that the university sector faces "some uncertainty", it is "manageable".



The Augar review of post-18 education finance, which was published at the end of May, recommended that the cap on student fees should be reduced to £7,500.

But while the university sector faces greater uncertainty than a few years ago, it has more stable prospects than local government, the former council executive said: "A headline reduction in fees won't be welcome and there will need to be investment from government if they are serious about particular subjects but nevertheless we are prepared."

Horrocks said universities faced a "temporary period" of a "little more difficulty", but added the sector's prospects are good because of the central role they will play in tackling society's pressing issues.

The government's decision to lift the cap on the numbers of students universities can enrol had been a major challenge, said Professor Linda King, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Oxford Brookes University:

**FIVE OR SIX YEARS AGO, WE NEVER
NEEDED TO THINK ABOUT
MARKETING THE UNIVERSITY BUT
IT HAS CREATED COMPETITION,
WHICH HAS BEEN HEALTHY.**

She also told delegates that the university is starting work this year on the third phase of its redevelopment programme which is partly funded through the planned sale of the university's Wheatley Campus. The £144m programme is designed to rationalise Oxford Brookes' footprint and cut down on the need for travel between campuses.

The third phase of the ten-year programme, which is due to be carried out over the next two years, will provide new facilities for the university's computing, engineering, maths, arts & design and architecture departments.

King also said that the Oxford Brookes has a ten year £132m worth of investment in accommodation, which is designed to provide students with a greater range of options.



A view from curtin&co

TIME TO CAPITALISE ON GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

It is absolutely clear that Government at all levels has a commitment to delivering an Oxford Cambridge ARC. That commitment is articulated in a number of ways, not least the joint declaration between Government and partners that was published in March. The reasons for the commitment are obvious: both the Cambridge and Oxford economies are booming, but more importantly, they have the potential to achieve more and contribute more to the exchequer. But it doesn't end there, there is also potential to extend the corridor at both ends and, indeed there are already active discussions that are aimed at achieving just that - such as to extend from Oxford to Bristol, or develop a new Arc linking Cambridge and Norwich aimed at maximising the intellectual capital that is currently being invested in agritech. For all of this ambition to be realised, in a country where the reputation of politics has never been lower, there is a genuine need to create a sense of aspiration around the Arc project and to develop a sense of pace that develops support and holds public confidence.

Arguably, HS2 provides a perfect example of what should not happen. The growing concern about the rising costs have partly arisen because of lack of pace, but it is accompanied by a lack of public clarity about what is to be gained from it. A louder and louder voice of opposition to the scheme (from across the political divide) means there is a real potential threat to its eventual delivery. The latest cost estimate is £56b, which has risen from £36b. Interestingly, the original forecasts suggested that HS2 would generate about £71b in revenue (£27b in fares and £44b in economic benefits). On the surface, this suggests that the costs of HS2 may reach a point where

they outweigh the benefits; at no point has there been any attempt to communicate those benefits for the economies of affected areas. Certainly, there are many more schemes where the cost to benefit ratio is much higher than that being predicted for HS2. For example, the Mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has been promoting a metro scheme for Cambridge where it is estimated that benefits will outweigh costs by somewhere between 2 and 4 to 1. This is not to say that HS2 should be cancelled, but that there needs to be a much clearer case for delivery - and that lesson needs to be learned as we start to get serious about the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Planning and housing is one area that needs to be examined closely. Most of the 31 local authorities involved in the Arc project had elections in May, and whilst it would be easy to say that the many surprises that happened were a simple reaction to the current Brexit chaos, many of those councils also faced a level of controversy around local plans and a resistance to housing growth, so that cannot be ruled out as a factor. Yet an analysis of the joint declaration on the Oxford Cambridge Arc is clear that more housing is essential. Since 2000, the median house price to income ratio along the Arc has risen from 5 (a figure which was on a par with National statistics) to over 10, whereas the National figure is now 8. Even before the Arc was becoming a meaningful project aimed at accelerating growth and demand for housing, we were not building enough homes to match the jobs growth along the corridor, and it meant that more and more people were finding home-ownership out of their reach and the cost of rental rising. This needs to be

addressed quickly; to quote the joint declaration, rising housing unaffordability is "threatening to constrain the growth trajectory of the Arc."

Another lesson from HS2 should be that slow progress leads to escalating cost (or at the very least a perception of it), and this is one of the factors that will lead to dissatisfaction and potentially, a political threat to the whole project. The less clear the case, the wider the opposition; the stronger the opposition, the greater the political brake - and the greater the cost too. The Ministerial Foreword to the declaration mentions the need for "new ways of working between the Government, local partners and, businesses" as a means of ensuring the undoubted benefits the improved infrastructure for the Arc will bring. There now needs to be a discussion about what that means. One way could be to delegate more to a local level, but certainly something is needed. At the last count, separating out the 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships, 31 local authorities and 10 universities, all of whom have a stake in the Arc, there were at least 8 different committees and boards cascading down from Ministerial to local Government level. That seems to be a means of demonstrating commitment and cohesion, which is fair enough. But I strongly suspect that businesses will look at this political structure with a sense of foreboding. It certainly does not look like a new way of working, nor does it look like a structure that can deliver any project with any pace. When you consider that underneath those structures there are also a myriad of Parish Councils who will all want their say and who will inevitably be stirring the pot to try and get their way and it already looks very much like a project that is headed for trouble.

As well as revisiting that structure, there is a need for a serious thought about consultation. The view of the Arc's promoters is that this burden is (at the very least) shared with the private sector. Part of Curtin&Co's specialisation is advocacy; finding the voice of support and making sure that it is represented as a project moves forwards. We know that with any programme of development, of whatever size, the voice of opposition and concern is traditionally the loudest. That does not mean that voice is the majority voice, but it can feel like that to local politicians and indeed to MPs; if we wish to avoid the HS2 scenario, then it is critical that real effort is made to identify and bring out the supportive voice so that politicians know that there is backing for the project. That does not mean we should not listen to the concerns, but getting the balance right means that they can be used to hone and improve the programme rather than become something that creates opposition amongst key influencers and decision-makers. This should also prevent the continuous tweaks and changes which are a partial cause of delays and cost-overruns in major projects.

We should be enthusiastic about the Oxford - Cambridge Arc it has the potential to both accelerate economic growth in an important sector of the UK economy and deliver housing in a way that stops the current acceleration of house prices which is causing disillusionment amongst people trying to get on the housing ladder. But, surely we should also be looking at HS2 and trying to learn some lessons? The political structures should be honed so they deliver with vision and pace, using excellent consultation as means of ensuring a much needed project is delivered to budget and with clear, demonstrable public support.



Major Developments; Placemaking in the ARC

Panel Members:



Chair:
David Collins

Managing Director, Hadham Construction



Hanayyah Sutton

Programme Director, Santander
@santanderuk



Harvey Bibby

Director, Grovemere Property
@GrovemereP



Bryn Maidman

Divisional Managing Director, Taylor Wimpey
@TaylorWimpey



Pat Mahoney

Director, Salmon Property
@Salmon_Property



Andrea Imaz

Senior Urban Designer, MEPC / Perkins+Will
@perkinswill_LON



Guy Dixon

Head of Property and Portfolio Management, Orbit Homes
@orbitgroup



Andrew Taylor

Director - Head of Planning, Countryside Properties
@CountrysideProp

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES BUILDING NEW TIMBER PANEL FACTORY

Countryside Properties is building its own timber panel manufacturing site to remedy shortfalls in its supply chain.

Andrew Taylor, Head of Planning at Countryside Properties, told delegates at the Oxford Cambridge Arc Development Conference that the housebuilder has purchased a site for manufacturing timber panels which its plans to roll out over the next year.

“We need to have greater certainty about supply to increase production in different areas,” he said, adding that the company will have delivered 1,500 timber panel homes by the end of the current year. Taylor said Countryside is also providing a wider range of tenures on its development sites, noting that just under one in five of the homes (19%) built over the past few years have been for private rent, in a bid to speed up delivery in line with the Letwin review’s recommendations. He said:

IF WE ARE SELLING HOUSES, WE NEED TO RESPOND TO WHAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC WANT. VOLUME BUILDERS NEED TO ENSURE STANDARDISATION AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

But purchasers do not “necessarily” see the value in more energy efficient homes, he said, adding that the simplest way of improving the sustainability of new build stock is through building regulations.



Bryn Maidman, Divisional Managing Director at Taylor Wimpey, agreed that improved environmental standards must be delivered through nationally mandated building regulations rather than councils setting their own standards in local plans. He said “It’s difficult for housebuilders if local authorities try to move on their own and we have different standards in different areas.

“Building regulations are the way to move towards zero carbon,” Maidman said, adding that piloting some newer technologies through the planning process “can be difficult”.

Taylor Wimpey has built prototypes of new house types on three developments using sustainable building technologies, including off-site construction techniques such as timber frame and cross-laminated panels with wood fibre insulation.

However, quality must not be sacrificed amidst the push to increase the pace of construction, he said:

WE MUST MAKE SURE WE SPEND TIME ON CONSTRUCTION QUALITY. AT TAYLOR WIMPEY, QUALITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PACE. PEOPLE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN HOW FAST THEIR HOME IS BUILT, THEY ARE INTERESTED IN HOW WELL IT IS BUILT. WE DON’T WANT TO EXPERIMENT WITH PEOPLES’ HOMES.

“We need to build from the basis of understanding customer needs much better as an industry. We need to go back to basics and see what customers want,” he said, noting that the proportion of customers who would recommend a Taylor Wimpey home drops from 90% eight weeks post moving in to 76% after nine months.

But the attractiveness of energy efficient homes could be enhanced by better reflecting differing energy costs in mortgage costs, Maidman said: “The way to make new homes more popular is to be able to borrow a lower mortgage.” He also said Taylor Wimpey is looking at new ways of bringing people into home ownership through its Springboard pilot rent to buy scheme. This gives those who rent properties from the company for two to five years the option to purchase the home at a five per cent discount, meaning that they do not have to save up a deposit.

Pat Mahoney, a Director of Salmon Property said electricity supplies is the “major challenge” facing the developer, particularly in the corridor to the south of Cambridge.

Salmon, which is half owned by insurer NFU Mutual, may have to build a mini power plant to service a three acre site after being quoted a £7m connection fee by its local district network UK Power Networks, he said: “It’s not just an Arc problem but a national problem and we see very little being done about it.”

Mahoney said the company’s current major scheme in the Arc is Cambridge South, an industrial/warehouse development located in the village of Sawston, where a total of 68,000 sq ft is ready for occupation with the 13 units ranging in size from 1,625 sq ft to 22,000 sq ft.

But Salmon will not over-bid to secure sites, he said:

THERE’S NO POINT DOING DEVELOPMENTS IF YOU ARE GOING TO MAKE A LOSS. WE’RE HAPPY TO COMPETE WHERE WE THINK SCHEMES ARE RIGHT FOR US AND WE WIN A FAIR PROPORTION.

Guy Dixon, Head of Property & Portfolio Management at Orbit Homes, agreed that competition is heating up for land in the Arc, but he said that the association had recently succeeded in buying 56 acres at Daventry where it will be experimenting with modular methods. Dixon also told delegates that Orbit, which is targeting the construction of an extra 2,400 units, is also drawing up a revised design standard.

Hanayyah Sutton, Programme Director at Santander, said the bank is “very close” to getting planning permission for a new office hub near Milton Keynes central station.

The new office, which will concentrate workers from a number of existing offices in the surrounding areas under one roof, boasts features like a rooftop running and walking track that are designed to attract young talent to work in the town.

“Milton Keynes has an uncool problem. When talking to the younger generation, they want to go to Shoreditch or Manchester so we are trying to create a really cool place,” she said, adding that Milton Keynes offered a much more affordable lifestyle than London.

Andrea Imaz, Senior Urban Designer, Perkins+Will, said that its plans to upgrade MEPC’s Milton Park business park at Didcot aims to double the number of jobs on the site.

Harvey Bibby, Director of Grovemere Property, said that its Compass Park development should be finished in about 12 months.



Conference Photos



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Save the date

18th June 2020

MK Dons Stadium, Milton Keynes
08:00 – 17:00

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