

National Infrastructure Commission Call for Evidence on the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford ‘Growth Corridor’

Response from Aylesbury Vale District Council

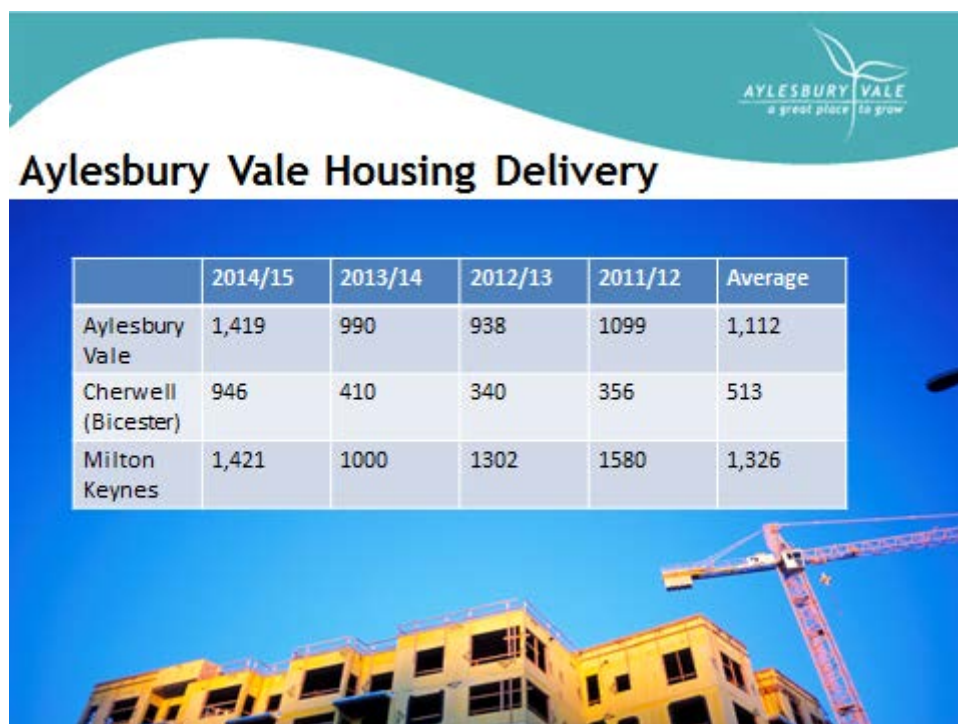
General

Aylesbury Vale District Council welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Commission’s call for evidence about this important growth corridor and supports the submissions that have been made by the six LEPs that cover the wider corridor area and also supports the joint submission made on behalf of the local authorities in Buckinghamshire.

We are also pleased to be directly engaged with Highways England on the discussions about the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study, which has obvious links with this call for evidence.

However, in light of the fact that Aylesbury Vale is the single largest district that forms part of the growth corridor, has one of the highest housing growth targets to deliver and needs to accommodate most of the expressway “gap”, it is important for the Commission to be aware that Aylesbury Vale is key to achieving the maximum potential of this growth area.

This district is one of the fastest growing places in England and has been consistently producing some of the highest housing delivery rates across the country for the last few years, as clearly demonstrated in the table below.



It is worth noting that if all areas in England were to produce the same rate of housing delivery as Aylesbury Vale, then England would have seen over 300,000 additional new homes delivered last year alone.

This rate of sustained housing delivery and growth is even more impressive in light of the fact that there has been very little investment from central government to help deliver or

accelerate this growth but very clearly this position needs to change if the area is to be able to sustain this level of growth over the medium to long term.

The Cambridge-Milton Keynes- Oxford corridor provides an ideal opportunity for the maximum gain to be achieved from the expected growth this area is currently making provision for and to enable the area and the wider growth corridor to deliver transformational growth that will be sustainable for future generations.

Q1. 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?

Most fundamentally it is about the combination of people and places. Basically many of these areas across the corridor possess the right mix of conditions that go to create successful places. Location and proximity to key economic centres are crucial, coupled with highly skilled and entrepreneurial people, a strong business base to build from and a high quality of life.

What is holding back further growth and greater productivity?

The ***lack of a co-ordinated and strategic focus*** on this growth area and corridor at a national level has not helped the area to achieve its full growth and productivity potential in the last 10 years. The original Growth Board that previously existed for the MKSM area under Lord Rooker helped to focus attention and energy on this area but since this disappeared there has not been the same momentum for the areas that have functional economic links and the prospects for growth in a truly co-ordinated and transformational way.

In addition to this, ***the lack of certainty over the delivery and timing for key infrastructure projects*** that are actively supported in the area, such as the East-West Railway project, has resulted in delays to future growth and therefore productivity.

Although many parts of this corridor are strategically well placed, ***the level of connectivity for some areas, in particular Aylesbury Vale is poor*** and again is a constraint on achieving the full potential this area has to offer. Managing this at a strategic level is crucial and any sub national transport board will need to include the planning authorities to be truly effective.

The ***lack of forward funding*** for essential infrastructure is hampering the rate and speed that growth is delivered at and leaving this to individual developments results in piecemeal infrastructure and a slower rate of delivery. We have had examples where we have forwarded funded elements of a scheme in order to assist the development industry to progress a scheme and this is then repaid by the developers. However to be able to do this on the scale that is required for the growth we are now having to plan for requires a major investment from Government and has been proposed in the Local Growth Fund round 3 application process. This would assist with accelerating and maintaining our growth rates and deliver benefits to existing residents at the outset of the development rather than at the end, which helps to make development more acceptable to local communities.

Lack of housing affordability will hold back further growth and the provision of affordable housing is crucial. Ensuring that all the levers that Government has available to it are deployed to this growth area is essential, such as prioritising HCA funding to growth areas.

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

The delivery of East-West Rail needs to be formally confirmed and a programme for its delivery announced without delay. Aylesbury Vale has committed £5m of New Homes Bonus funding to this project along with significant contributions by many other local authorities and as a rail project that can very quickly unlock opportunity, it should be a Government priority.

Enhanced road connectivity within this East West corridor is also important through an expressway. Again it would be helpful for this work to be accelerated in order that the opportunities related to this corridor can be joined up at the local plan level at the earliest opportunity.

In addition, investments in strategic local connectivity around Aylesbury in particular, fast and reliable digital connectivity, and transforming public services are essential.

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

Yes.

The corridor is positioned close to a number of areas and towns that also have major growth challenges and opportunities and looking at ways to “join up more of the dots” should be a focus for the Commission. Linking the work on this corridor with a wider review of the national infrastructure requirements should help the UK increase its economic performance and prospects and is therefore clearly of national importance.

It is also crucial that there is an unequivocal decision from Government on how runway capacity in the South East of England will be increased.

Q2. Does the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford area, including Northampton, form a recognisable economic corridor? If so:

The corridor does not currently form a single functional economic area but a series of related and overlapping areas. However the area does have the potential to form a stronger recognisable and related corridor – the East-West Powerhouse perhaps?

What factors unite the area?

There are a number of factors that currently unite the area including the need to continue to support and plan successful growing places. There are also synergies in the rate and delivery of growth, the current economic performance, its excellence and potential, an open approach to innovation and collaboration.

There are also some existing clusters that already unite a large part of the corridor area for example the High Performance Motor cluster. The cluster study recently commissioned by MEPC identifies the connections and opportunities in this sector across much of the corridor area. Further information about this report can be found [here](#).

Would greater emphasis on corridor-wide planning and decision making benefit local communities and local economies? Would that same emphasis on coordinated planning and decision making provide wider benefits for the UK economy?

Yes greater emphasis on corridor-wide planning and decision making would certainly benefit local communities and local economies. We support the move to have better co-ordinated corridor-wide planning and decision making and it is crucial that all of the strategic planning authorities are actively engaged in any formal Government supported structure or body that is established to look at strategic transport planning, which is not presently the case with the England Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance.

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

Yes relevant adjacent towns and cities should be considered and it would be helpful for the Commission to give an early indication of the scope it sees the corridor covering so that the adjacent towns and cities can be clearly identified and incorporated appropriately.

Q3. 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:

Aylesbury Vale District Council has just issued its draft local plan, which sets out how we see the Vale growing in the next 30 years, which need to accommodate the needs of our own district but also see how it can help with the unmet needs identified by more constrained adjoining areas. The delivery of the East West Rail project is crucial in achieving this level of growth, as is the impact that the decisions about the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor will have, as well as the East-West Expressway. The draft plan for the district can be found by clicking [here](#).

As the table below illustrates the scale of growth to be accommodated over the life of the plan period is significant and unprecedented in terms of our previous growth delivery. Achieving this scale of growth will require delivering at housing rates not previously seen in the district at a sustained level every year for the next 17 years.

Aylesbury Vale Housing Delivery

| | Local Plan Housing Figures |
|---------------------|--|
| Aylesbury Vale | 30,000 *(2013-2033) <i>draft figures</i> |
| Cherwell (Bicester) | 22,800 (2011-2031) |
| Milton Keynes | 28,000 (2010-2026) |

Our vision for the district is to ensure that growth will be shaped by strong place-shaping and sustainability principles to create well-designed developments that are sensitive to the district's local character and are well integrated with existing communities, both in terms of scale and design and that people will have a sense of pride in their communities, wherever they live in the district.

Delivering the jobs to match the housing growth is also a challenge and the recent designation of three Enterprise Zones is an excellent boost to this ambitious vision and again a sustained focus on securing the success of these EZ's is essential in the overall 'masterplan' for the area.

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

To achieve the levels of growth mentioned above we first need to have a multi-agency Growth Board that is focused on delivering the growth proposals across the district. On a wider economic geography level we also need an integrated growth strategy for investment supporting delivery of higher productivity jobs, higher levels of employment, and accelerated delivery of housing to support business-led growth.

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

Work is on going to firm up the detailed proposals for growth in this part of the corridor through the local plan process. In terms of realising the complete potential of Aylesbury, which is set to increase by 50% in the next plan period, we need to get Aylesbury designated as part of the Government's Garden Town programme. An application is scheduled to be submitted for Garden Town status shortly. Approval of this is essential in terms of ensuring that this level of growth can deliver the ambitious vision we have set for the town and be an exemplar of how to manage and achieve such intensive growth and create the type of place and communities we can all be proud to be associated with.

In addition to this approval of Aylesbury as a Garden Town, support is also required for unpacking the potential cumulative impact and opportunities that the three related E-W corridor projects will have on this district in particular.

We also need to have early confirmation of the funding commitments to critical transport schemes submitted as part of the LGF3, Major-Majors Bids and Local Majors where they relate to growth in the district.

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?

The three key infrastructure opportunities that are currently focused on this growth corridor have the potential to provide immense value to the wide geographic area that it covers, but also nationally. As yet it is not possible to have any accurate or even broad estimate of the 'value add' these key projects could make but in light of the scale of the improved connectivity they can deliver, the associated GVA and VFM must be amongst the best of any scheme nationally.

Priorities and Wider Infrastructure

The vast majority of the areas in this corridor are at the stage where the requirement is for investments that can create and unlock a step-change in growth. Without this full potential being unlocked, growth will stagnate and the economic conditions for sustained growth will dissipate.

There is a greater need now than perhaps ever in the past for there to be a consistent and focused commitment by central and local government and other partners to energise the focus on this particular growth corridor as the UK evolves its new economic agenda. Co-ordination across national infrastructure projects, particularly in the areas where they intersect, eg HS2, East West Rail and the Cambridge-Oxford growth corridor is also critical.

Q4. Are there lessons to be learnt from previous initiatives to maximise the potential of the corridor?

The previous work on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is an interesting comparison but it was never obvious that it really delivered any tangible outcomes. It is likely that it's lack of a delivery body that could hold partners and agencies to account and the absence of any real focus and key objectives resulted in the initiative drifting away.

As referenced earlier, the MKSM partnership was a more positive experience in terms of outcomes and focus and the oversight by a Government Minister helped to positively drive this agenda forward and corral the various agencies and partners into a delivery mode.

Q5. 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?

Examples are cited in the joint LEPs submission.