



Aylesbury Garden Town  
c/o Aylesbury Vale District Council/  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
Aylesbury  
Bucks

EEH Business Unit  
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Date: 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Dear Sir/ Madam,

### **Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan Consultation Response**

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire, incorporating the area defined as the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. We provide the strategic voice on the region's infrastructure and services.

As the STB for the region, we are adopting a user-centred approach to our strategic transport planning. This reflects the need for a new approach to the planning, development and delivery of infrastructure priorities: one that places the user at the heart of the transport system and which harnesses innovation to encourage the new business models necessary to meet the Government's net-zero carbon target. We welcome the opportunity to set out our support for the Aylesbury Garden Town's (AGT) initiative through this consultation

The Government has identified the Oxford – Cambridge Arc as a national economic priority. Aylesbury is strategically located in the Arc region, sitting midway between Oxford and Milton Keynes. It is a key focus for planned growth in the Local Plan, with over 16,000 homes planned in the town by 2033 (some 50% of the total for the district). At the same time the town is the focus for an Enterprise Zone, with opportunities for high value economic growth within the town and surrounding area.

The Aylesbury Garden Town project is an exciting opportunity for this growth to be planned in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner and in doing so create an exemplar capable of being applied more widely across England's Shire counties.

EEH is currently preparing the draft regional Transport Strategy. This builds on the evidence gathered through the engagement on our Outline Transport Strategy in 2019.

The proposed vision for the Transport Strategy is *"to harness the Heartland's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class transport system that connects people and places within and beyond our region whilst de-carbonising our transport system"*.

The vision for the Transport Strategy is supported by four key principles, these are:



- Achieving net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050
- Realising economic opportunities through improved intra-regional connectivity
- Improving the Quality of Life and Wellbeing through enhanced local connectivity
- Improving access to markets through strategic connectivity.

This vision and these principles are consistent with the Government's overarching 25-year Environment Plan and the ambition set out by the National Infrastructure Commission that realising the economic potential of the Heartland should be achieved in a way that delivers net environmental gain. However, if we are to achieve this, we need to achieve a step change in the way we plan, develop and deliver planned growth, and do so in a way that integrates it with the existing urban fabric.

AGT's 2050 vision to be an 'exemplar in inclusivity and accessibility' aligns with EEH's vision and principles. The development of AGT presents a real opportunity to create a masterplan where the principles of high quality spatial design can be properly integrated with all aspects of individuals' lives, including access to health, wellbeing and services. EEH, through its work, has developed a strong and robust set of tools and insight that we believe can support the work of the team delivering the AGT initiative. In particular we see Aylesbury as an opportunity to be a pilot for the region by bringing the latest thinking in transport and spatial planning policy to the forefront of achieving a place-based approach.

EEH encourages AGT to use the recommendations and principles set out in the document Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places ([https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/10218/ciht-better-planning-a4\\_updated\\_linked\\_.pdf](https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/10218/ciht-better-planning-a4_updated_linked_.pdf)). This document was produced by the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation in collaboration with leading thinkers from across the transport sector. It provides an evidence-based framework on which to plan and deliver place-based communities. AGT is well placed to be a vanguard of applying this for real.

The opportunities present within Aylesbury are enhanced by the strategic context within which it sits, including:

1. East West Rail (EWR) is a transformational scheme that will provide new opportunities to connect people and realise economic opportunities. East West Rail will be the first direct rail link between Oxford, Bedford and Cambridge, and Milton Keynes and Aylesbury for over 50 years. Delivery of the scheme will bring significant benefits to the economy of the region, and in particular Aylesbury. There is a huge appetite amongst residents and businesses for East West Rail: as the initial phase of EWR has demonstrated that appetite will quickly turn into a highly successful service. AGT should capitalise on the potential of EWR to act as a catalyst for change and harness the confidence it delivers potential investors to commit to supporting the AGT initiative.
2. Network Rail's West Midlands and Chiltern Route Study makes the case for an improved connection linking Aylesbury through Princes Risborough and onward to High Wycombe and the multi-modal interchange at Old Oak Common station. Improved rail connectivity on this corridor will support the delivery of planned growth at both Princes Risborough and High Wycombe: more importantly it offers the opportunity to broaden labour access to economic opportunities in Aylesbury. It also provides businesses investing in Aylesbury with enhanced access to the global gateways at Heathrow Airport and London St Pancras.

The higher level of accessibility resulting from improved rail services will create new opportunities in/around the immediate station area to attract commercial activities and/or increase density of development. Taking advantage of the locational opportunities created by EWR in this way offers the AGT initiative to be innovative in its approach. Investment in enhanced local connectivity to/from Aylesbury station will – at the same time – connect it to

the wider community, offering opportunities for innovation in the approach to walking, cycling and local public transport.

England's Economic Heartland's first mile/last mile project has identified measures that can be applied in these circumstances. EEH would welcome the opportunity to work with the AGT initiative with a view to using Aylesbury as a regional pilot for the application of its first mile/last mile toolkit.

3. The AGT masterplan outlines ambitions for a full orbital link road. Moving through traffic out of the town centre will generate further opportunities for innovation in the approach to local connectivity, in particular it provides the opportunity to reallocate highway space in favour of public transport, walking and cycling.

In summer 2019 EEH submitted a programme of schemes for Major Road Network funding (2020-2025) to the Department for Transport. One of these funding proposals was for Eastern Link Road (ELR) dualling. This forms part of the strategic ambition for a full orbital link road. Removal of through traffic from the town centre will have a direct benefit on air quality. The EEH Business Unit continues to push for confirmation of the MRN funding.

4. Delivery of the strategic transport infrastructure, such as the orbital link road will improve strategic connectivity to economic opportunities such as Arla/Woodlands and the Westcott Venture Park – both part of the Aylesbury Enterprise Zone.

EEH is strongly supportive of the using the Garden Town as the opportunity to 're-imagine the economic future of Aylesbury' including creating the conditions for innovation and investment as a 'living lab'. This builds on the identification of Aylesbury in both the Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnerships (BTV LEP) and South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) as a 'living lab to test development of digital health, mobility and social care solutions and to use that as a framework for healthy towns and communities across the Arc.

The AGT Masterplan is accompanied by Aylesbury's Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP), which outlines plans for high quality walking and cycling routes which are accessible to all; bringing benefits for health, quality of life and enhancing access to services and employment. EEH shares the ambition to put sustainable travel choices at the forefront of options available for first mile/last mile travel. Aspirations to improve walking and cycling links to the station in Aylesbury will help to provide integrated, sustainable end to end journeys.

EEH strongly supports the vision and principles set out in the Aylesbury Garden Town's Masterplan and supports the need to develop and deliver a joined up, single programme of co-ordinated investment for the town. Securing certainty of funding for the identified infrastructure requirements will be critical to realising the ambition for Aylesbury.

Delivery of the masterplan and its components needs to be taken forward at pace. EEH would welcome the chance to continue working with AGT and Buckinghamshire County Council (and the future Buckinghamshire Council) to achieve the partners' ambitions for Aylesbury and to then disseminate the experience gained across the Heartland region.

Yours sincerely

**Martin Tugwell**



**Programme Director**

