



## Leader of the Council

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By Email Only

Christopher Pincher MP  
Minister of State for Housing  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

03 March 2020

Dear Christopher,

### **Re: Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc**

I was interested to receive your letter of 18th February alongside the MHCLG paper 'Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc'. MHCLG officials have always described the 'Arc' as a 'coalition of the willing'. Therefore, some months ago, after some three abortive years as a member of the so-called 'Arc Leaders Group', Buckinghamshire, along with its Local Enterprise Partnership and with support from its two Universities and college, withdrew from the Arc.

In this decision we had the strong support of all our local Members of Parliament. This was not because we are an insular or unambitious council. On the contrary, I, along with the Leader of Oxfordshire, helped establish England Economic Heartland which has worked across multiple local authorities' boundaries on an integrated Transport Strategy. Similarly, we have developed our own ambitious 'Recovery Proposal' which is business led and supports companies cooperating across a wide geography. The problem with the so-called Arc is that this geography is far too large, amorphous and has little in common for top down 'Spatial Planning'. Frankly, I find it hard to explain to residents and businesses in say Marlow, what they have in common with say Corby or the Fenlands.

The MHCLG paper appears to recreate the tried and failed policies of previous Labour Governments with 'National Plans' and 'Regional Strategies'. It will be derived and, after some local input and 'consultation', decided ultimately from Whitehall. I am concerned that an imposed strategy will be too slow and cumbersome to realise the economic benefits that we need at pace in this part of the country and indeed nationwide in a post Covid economic landscape. It also risks creating widespread local opposition from communities who fear that they will be adversely impacted by remote Government decisions. Clearly many of our residents are deeply suspicious of central Government after HS2.

In Buckinghamshire we have collectively taken a new and refreshing approach which has the timely delivery of results at its core. We recognise that the national economy has taken a sizably blow, with GDP down some 9-11%. We need to rebound fast with a focus on 'jobs, jobs, and more jobs'.

The rebound needs to move at pace, with drive, focus and determination. The Government should work quickly with willing partners who:

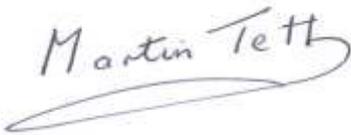
- Have a proven track record of delivery
- Contain sectors with potential for fast growth
- Have clear strong and aligned Governance and decision making
- Cooperate across boundaries on a business led basis.

Buckinghamshire as a large single unitary, with aligned local partners in its LEP, business organisations, Health partners and Universities and colleges, has all these prerequisites. Even more importantly, as a strong Conservative council, we want the Government to succeed. Rather than centralisation and state control, we would urge MHCLG to renew its commitment to Devolution to enable recovery and growth. Surely strong, willing partners are far better than the alternative of a slow unwieldy structure of disparate parts with unproven delivery, political divisions and where business is not central to its purpose.

In conclusion, Buckinghamshire has just launched its 'Recovery Proposal to Government' (copy enclosed). Recently we had a very productive meeting with Robert at which we agreed to progress a number of propositions.

We would really like to take you through our proposition and demonstrate how local and national Government working together willingly can deliver results when they are most needed. I will ask my secretary to contact your office to see if we can organise a convenient date and time.

Yours Sincerely,



Martin Tett  
Leader  
Buckinghamshire Council

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*Dame Cheryl Gillan M.P.*

*Steve Baker M.P.*

*Joy Morrissey M.P.*

*Rob Butler M.P.*

*Greg Smith M.P.*

*Andrew Smith, Chair Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership*

*The Right Hon. Robert Jenrick Secretary of State for MHCLG*