

# NEED *not* GREED OXON

Planning for Real **NEED** not Speculator **GREED** in Oxfordshire

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **OxLEP fails to listen to public concerns over forced economic growth strategy**

The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) has this week published its Report on Responses to the public consultation on the draft Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) Refresh - the document responsible for driving much of the county's economic growth strategy over the next 15 years. [1]

The Need not Greed Oxon coalition [2] is concerned that the OxLEP Report does not adequately address the concerns expressed by the majority of respondents to the consultation over the scale of planned growth for Oxfordshire.

### **1. OxLEP lacks democratic mandate - even from business community**

There were only 262 sets of comments received during the consultation period on the SEP Refresh, despite the consultation being publicised 'widely' by OxLEP.

Of these 'the vast majority' supported Need not Greed Oxfordshire's view that the LEP is:

- an unaccountable non-elected body
- aggressively driving growth
- responsible for unrealistic and unachievable housing and jobs figures contained in the SHMA
- heavily influencing the Local Plan process which will result in new development that will destroy Oxfordshire's environment and communities. (Para.3)

Although the report does not make it clear, it seems ONLY FOUR replies were received from business representative organisations or individual firms! [3] The report merely states that this low level of responses from the business community 'is a concern'.

Helena Whall, Coordinator of Need not Greed Oxon coalition said: "The very low response rate suggests a lack of democratic mandate for OxLEP. If the business community has not endorsed the SEP Refresh and the vast majority of public responses were critical of the forced economic growth strategy at the heart of the document, it begs the question - on whose behalf is OxLEP pushing this economic nightmare for Oxfordshire?"

“Having failed completely to engage with their key constituency, it also raises the question, what is the LEP for? This consultation process suggests it is unfit for purpose.

“It is clear that there is a serious disconnect between what local people want and what OxLEP is pushing for in the SEP Refresh.

“OxLEP held a public consultation on the SEP Refresh - it is now incumbent upon the Partnership to take heed of local people’s responses.”

## **2. The SEP Refresh will do nothing to solve the problem of affordable housing**

The Report acknowledges that lack of affordable housing is a key issue but puts responsibility for this with the local authorities.

Its own action will be limited to ‘evolving approaches to social/affordable housing’ - whatever that means!

Helena Whall said: “The need for affordable housing is a very real concern in Oxfordshire and it remains unclear what the SEP is doing for ordinary people already living and working in Oxfordshire who face the inability to buy or rent a home.

“The revised SEP must tackle this issue head on and provide assurances to the people of Oxfordshire that more growth and more jobs won’t just translate into higher house prices.

Need not Greed Oxon want to see the right houses (permanently affordable), in the right place (where they are most needed) and at the right price (for rental or purchase).”

## **3. OxLEP implies there will be no environmental impact on Oxfordshire from the Strategic Economic Plan**

191 (73%) of respondents to the consultation expressed concern about ‘the level of growth ‘proposed’ by the SHMA and that its impact on the environment (including air quality / flooding / climate change) and quality of life has not been considered. Many called for the SEP to be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment.’ (Pages 3-4)

In response to four pages of intelligent criticism on the failure of the SEP Refresh to address the cumulative impact of the economic growth strategy on Oxfordshire’s environment, OxLEP offers just two comments: it refers the public to Annex 3, which provides legal advice from the County Council on the need to undertake an SAE and Annex D of the draft SEP on the case for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

In Annex 3, Oxfordshire County Council concludes that there is no lawful requirement for an SEA on the SEP.

Helena Whall said: “It may or may not be the case that a Strategic Environmental Assessment on the SEP is not legally required, however, OxLEP still has a duty to the public to undertake a voluntary assessment of the likely environmental impacts of the SEP.

“Surely OxLEP is not implying that there will be no environmental impact on Oxfordshire from the Strategic Economic Plan? This is absurd.

"If three quarters of all respondents expressed concern about the level of economic growth and its impact on the environment, surely OxLEP is obliged to address these concerns in the revised SEP."

END

**NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

[1] A link to the Report can be found on the OxLEP website at:

<http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/content/sep-refresh-consultation>

PDF of the Report:

<http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/SEP%20Consultation%20Report%20June%202016.pdf>

[2] Need not Greed Oxon is a coalition of local organisations and individuals campaigning for a future for Oxfordshire which meets the real needs of local people not speculator greed. See: [www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk](http://www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk)

[3] The business representative organisations and individual firms that responded included Ace, Bicester Vision, Thames Valley LEP and West Ox Monorail.

The obvious omissions are businesses providing or using the infrastructure that is central to the SEP and future economic growth eg: Stagecoach, Oxford Bus Company, Network Rail, Great Western Railway, Chiltern Railways, Thames Water, BT and other broadband network suppliers; the key operators of the Knowledge Spine economy, eg: Harwell, Culham, Oxford Science Park and Milton Park; Academia eg: University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University (despite being on the LEP); and Motorsport, to name but a few.

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