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

**Need not Greed Oxfordshire response to One Oxfordshire Unitary Consultation**

 **February 2017**

Need not Greed Oxfordshire is a coalition of 31 local organisations from across the county, who are dedicated to protecting Oxfordshire’s rural environment, whilst recognising the development and infrastructure needs of local residents and others.

The coalition was set up to challenge the county’s ‘forced economic growth

strategy’ and to offer an alternative vision for the future of the county – one that is based on meeting local people’s real needs, not speculator greed.

The coalition does not have a position on the overall structure of local authority organisation in the county and therefore does not endorse the single County Unitary proposal or those being offered by some District / City Councils. However, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the One Oxfordshire Unitary Consultation, since one of the main planks of our campaign work is to ensure that all proposed county-wide growth plans are open to full public scrutiny and ongoing public engagement; and it is on this particular issue that we wish to respond. We want to ensure that any new organisational structure will foster and enhance ongoing public engagement, increase transparency and deliver democratic accountability.

We note and endorse the ambition (Page 42 of “A Fresh Start for Oxfordshire) “to deliver a council that enables:

• communities to [be] shaped by their residents, and where everyone can play an active role in decision-making

• investment in new homes, jobs, education and transport that creates sustainable economic growth and supports everyone’s quality of life

• everyone to lead the healthiest and most independent life that they can

• everyone to be protected and is safe from abuse and neglect

• rural and urban environments in the county to be protected and enhanced”

Irrespective of the eventual structure adopted, we will continue to lobby for the adoption of policies that deliver these ambitions, underpinned by full recognition that Local Authorities exisit to deliver better services and outcomes in the interests of all residents. In essence we seek truly sustainable development, that is democratically accountable, focussed on peoples’ real needs in a plan-led environment.

A county wide structure plan, with full and ongoing public engagement, subject to full public scrutiny, via an Examination in Public.

**NNGO supports the One Oxfordshire determination to introduce a county-wide spatial approach, irrespective of whether this were achieved via a County based Unitary or the addition of a Combined Authority sitting above two or more Unitary Authorities**. As such, we endorse the statement in the consultation document that ‘One of the first tasks for the new authority will be to begin the development of a Strategic Plan for Oxfordshire to serve as the new Local Plan for the whole county, considering need and opportunity across the whole economic area.’

At present, growth targets, including housing and jobs, are proposed for the county as a whole, but the planning is done by our local authorities, via Local Plans. As a result, there is no proper assessment of the cumulative environmental and social impacts on the county, and no Oxfordshire-wide strategic planning, other than that foisted upon us by the undemocratic unaccountable Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). We therefore endorse the statement in the consultation document that the current arrangements ‘do not enable effective and joined up strategic decision-making in the interests of residents’. However, we seek absolute reassurance that a One Oxfordshire approach will not empower bodies such as the LEP and the Heart of England Strategic Alliance to circumvent democratically accountable decision-making.

We therefore believe it is imperative that there is a county-wide structure plan to address this issue, subject to the above concerns.

**NNGO would also like to see the One Oxfordshire document amended to make a clear commitment to full public scrutiny and ongoing public engagement** **in all forms of the planning process including Local Transport, Infrastructure, Minerals and Waste and, most importantly, the replacement Local Plan.** We believe mechanisms must be put in place to ensure there is full public scrutiny and ongoing public engagement in all Plan processes and furthermore that they must be subject to independent scrutiny via public examination led by a Planning Inspector. This is currently implied, but not clearly spelt out in the consultation document.

We believe any re-organisation of local authority structure for Oxfordshire should be seized as a valuable opportunity to enhance democratic accountability and we will be seeking to hold those responsible to account for delivering this outcome.

**Helena Whall**

**On behalf of the Need not Greed Oxfordshire coalition**



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