



Planning for Real **NEED** not Speculator **GREED** in Oxfordshire
Coalition Secretariat, c/o CPRE Oxfordshire, First Floor, 20
High Street, Watlington, Oxon OX49 5PY.

www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk E: info@neednotgreedoxon.org.uk

7 October 2021

By email:

'Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' Consultation

Response by Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, October 2021

Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of 36 groups from across the county, representing thousands of community members. Our campaign is committed to

- A restoration of planning principles, with a proper balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations;
- Local democracy, with planning control in the hands of locally elected and accountable representatives; and
- Environmental and rural sustainability, ensuring that our landscape, natural world and rural communities are at the heart of decision making.

The Consultation

We have waited a long time for Government to make good on its promises for public consultation on the Arc. Now that this has arrived, we are very disappointed to see that the overall tone of the consultation suggests that opportunities for increasing rates of growth will continue to trump the needs of the Climate and Health Emergencies.

We are therefore responding briefly, addressing the fundamental flaws we believe inherent in the Arc proposals. We are specifically not responding to your template, because we fear it is constructed in such a way as to allow reporting of selective supportive statements from consultees. We endorse the Stop the Arc (STARC) and Oxfordshire's 'Poets' Alternative Questionnaire¹, and we believe that its responses will be very much more representative of local opinion.

¹ <https://www.noexpressway.org/news-updates/2021/8/25/stop-the-arc-suggests-responses-to-the-arc-spatial-framework-consultation>

Climate and Health Emergencies

We believe that planning needs to be reset. Many of the really significant events and changes over the last 20 years were simply not foreseen; not least the truly urgent need for action on the Climate Emergency, and the way in which the Covid Crisis has revealed underlying health and other huge social problems.

Long term planning needs therefore to be much more contingent, and risk-mitigating, allowing for much more future uncertainty. In these regards, the Arc proposals with their undue emphasis on growth through excessively high house-building rates and infrastructure provision, fail at the first hurdle.

Economic growth of the scale contemplated, particularly in this already stressed area, cannot help address either Emergency – but will exacerbate both.

Further, the Arc proposals will have huge implications for issues that Government pretend to espouse. We make illustrative points under the three headings below.

Environment

Although the consultation document puts this heading first, it is clear that instead ‘transformative’ economic and housing growth are being sought.

The South-east is the most water stressed part of UK, and is already at risk of water shortage by 2050. Existing demands on the natural environment are well in excess of capacity to supply, and biological diversity is declining at an increasing and alarming rate. The environment needs ‘transformative change’ in a different direction.

(How little joined-up thought has gone into the environmental issues, is perhaps illustrated by the fact that Government will not even commit to electrification (ab initio) of East-West Rail.)

Democratic Accountability

The Arc is a top down project – initially pushed by the National Infrastructure Commission. It is expected to have the status of National Planning Policy and to be required to be taken account of in the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan yet there has been no democratic scrutiny of the Arc proposal.

The lateness of this consultation and the way in which questions have been structured, are of great concern (see earlier). Central Government already has form in forcing Local Planning Authorities in Oxfordshire to bow to its will, and the lack of clarity for how any Arc proposals will be implemented does not offer reassurance.

Regional Policy and ‘Levelling-up’.

There is no clear regional planning framework in England. The Covid Pandemic has reinforced many regional inequalities (both socio-economically, and directly in terms of death rates), and these inequalities are expected to get worse (Ref UK 2070 Commission, 2020, *Make No Little Plans: Acting at Scale for a Fairer and Stronger Future*).

Forcing yet more growth and public expenditure into an already overheated area has been described by the Prime Minister as follows;

“...so you end up investing in areas where house prices are already sky high and where transport is already congested and by turbo-charging these areas, especially in London and the south-east, you drive prices higher and force more and more people to move to the same expensive areas...” (Ref www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-prime-minister-levelling-up-speech-15-july-2021)

A 2019 study by Smart Growth UK (Ref *Smart Growth 2019: the Overheated Arc: Part 2: Sustainable Alternatives*) examined alternative locations for Arcs and concluded that several were generally more environmentally sustainable and more in need of investment.

Finally

In any event, given the Emergencies mentioned earlier and the need for contingent planning, we are wholly sceptical about the relevance of this Arc concept. Certainly there has been no proper assessment of the logic of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a sub-region for ‘transformative growth’, and it is impossible to see how international obligations on Climate and Biodiversity and national obligations on levelling up can be anything other than seriously harmed by continuing this approach.

We would be grateful for an acknowledgement of and a response to our deep concerns.



Planning for Real **NEED** not Speculator **GREED** in Oxfordshire
Coalition Secretariat, c/o CPRE Oxfordshire, First Floor, 20
High Street, Watlington, Oxon OX49 5PY.

www.neednotgreedoxon.org.uk E: info@neednotgreedoxon.org.uk