

News Release

A6 - M1 Link Road

Democratic deficit: Central Bedfordshire Council & the A6-M1 Link Road

CPRE Bedfordshire has condemned the A6-M1 Link Road on environmental grounds (see news release dated 19th September 2019) but there is another issue - a lack of transparency and local democracy.

We believe that there is a huge democratic deficit in Bedfordshire - residents are simply not being consulted on key strategic issues, they have been eliminated from the decision making process.

Gerry Sansom, Chair of CPRE Bedfordshire said

"We are also hugely concerned about the role of SEMLEP in this affair.

This unelected QUANGO holds all of its meetings in secret and yet is responsible for allocating many millions of pounds of Government and EU Funding. SEMLEP has allocated £32.75m of government Local Growth Fund to the A6 - M1 Link Road (total cost £60m). There was no public consultation or Environmental Assessment of the Project.

The funding allocation was made many months before the application for its construction was approved - making a mockery of the democratic process.

The Mayor of Bedford, Dave Hodgson is a board member of SEMLEP and he would have approved this funding even though it will also lead to a massive increase of HGVs along the A6 in Bedford Borough. We don't remember Dave Hodgson explaining this to his Bedford Borough electorate.

Dave Hodgson is also Chair of the Transport Forum, part of England's Economic Heartland - the body responsible for Strategic Transport across an area stretching from Swindon to Cambridgeshire.

We don't remember them consulting on the new road either, despite the fact that CBC has claimed that the Link Road is a crucial part of the Strategic Road Network across the Ox- Cam Arc."

The road will be built entirely in the Green Belt and will slice through the northern part of the Chilterns AONB, seriously impacting Ancient Woodlands and SSSI sites. This is one of the worst acts of environmental vandalism that CPRE Bedfordshire has encountered.

Note to Editors:

- Because the new road is entirely within the Green Belt and impacts the Chilterns AONB, The Secretary of State (SoS) at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHC&LG) will now consider if the application should be "Called - In" for review by his office before it can go ahead - the SoS can refuse to support the CBC decision. The current SoS is Robert Jenrick MP.
- CPRE Bedfordshire has already written to the MHC&LG (in July 2019) requesting that the application be "Called-in" - we have been told that it will be considered once the application has been dealt with by CBC.

- The planning Application number is CB/19/00887/FULL and details can be found here:
https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/44/planning/478/view_and_comment_on_planning_applications
- SEMLEP = South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership