



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

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CPRE challenges Arc Leaders to open up to the public on development plans for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc

CPRE branches in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire, are challenging Council Leaders, Elected Mayors and Chief Executives from local authorities across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, to tackle the lack of transparency and public involvement that has characterised the way that a transformative growth strategy for the Arc is taking shape.

CPRE, the countryside charity, has consistently opposed the proposals for large-scale development in the Arc both for its effect on the countryside and that it far exceeds local need.

CPRE is particularly concerned about the lack of public awareness, especially in local communities, of the huge development proposals for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Apart from the initial report by the National Infrastructure Commission (2016-7), there has been no public engagement or consultation on the principles of the Arc nor on specific proposals for the massive development that it seeks to deliver. It is still unclear how it will be planned strategically or how it will be subjected to community impact or, crucially, environmental impact assessments.

One exception to this has been in respect of transport, where detailed proposals for East-West Rail and the Expressway have been opened up for public consultation. The public reaction to the Milton Keynes to Oxford Expressway led to the plans for this road to be scrapped, or at least put on ice for the time being.

However, the aspiration to deliver transformational growth, through massive development programmes for housing, employment, and associated infrastructure, has not been tested through any meaningful attempt to engage the public and to seek their views.

We are concerned about public accountability given that much of the planning seems to be being shaped within Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs are partnerships between local authorities and businesses which are increasingly playing a central role in deciding local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and create local jobs without any environmental impact assessment.

As far as we are aware, no local authority has sought a mandate from its electorate for its position on the Arc or consulted its residents.

CPRE urges Council Leaders, Elected Mayors and Chief Executives to place the matter of transparency and public engagement high on its agenda. This should include:

- i. **Early involvement of informed stakeholders in the discussion of policy**, so that expertise can be captured at initial stages, rather than setting up later 'tick box' consultation exercises which are inclined to lead to the suspicion that the engagement is not being taken seriously. The current England's Economic Heartland development of the Transport Strategy shows early promise in this regard, although it is not by any means a complete answer. We feel that a Transport Strategy will be of limited value in the absence of a Spatial Plan.
- ii. **Each local authority to establish a clear, democratic mandate for its position on the Arc.**
- iii. **Early and meaningful opportunities for consultation** including publicity, exhibitions and public meetings in order to involve local communities right from the early stages of the proposals.
- iv. **Meetings to be held in public, with published agendas and minutes**, and the opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and address the Groups.

CPRE is also challenging Council Leaders, Elected Mayors and Chief Executives to reconsider the plans to develop a "Spatial Framework" for the area.

We understand that this will be non-statutory, and as such will be exempt from the rigours of options testing, environmental and community assessment, and consultation. This would be completely unacceptable because local authorities bringing forward Local Plans would feel bound by a document that was only advisory.

Local Authorities across the Arc should insist on a robust statutory "Spatial Plan".

This should specify better development outcomes than currently seen, especially in terms of the provision of affordable (and especially social) housing, better design, and the creation of good quality places with excellent public transport links, green infrastructure and biodiversity gain, and avoiding the temptation to create mere dormitory suburbs and commuters' estates.

Economic growth at any cost will not provide the environmental regeneration and quality of life improvements that residents across the Arc demand.

CPRE are keen to work with Council Leaders, Elected Mayors and Chief Executives to identify positive steps that can be taken to build public confidence in the process, so that the final vision and delivery plan for the Arc is robust and can be shared by all concerned.

For more information:

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