

CPRE Oxfordshire address to Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Meeting, 21 July 2015

The Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England is an entirely locally run and supported charity, which exists to protect and promote the Oxfordshire countryside.

Pulling together a County-wide transport plan is no mean feat, especially when there is no money to fund it. CPRE's fear is that this has led the County into desperately 'following the funds', adopting over-inflated growth figures to try to extract infrastructure money from government, rather than a proper strategic look at what is required for its existing population. Given the level and speed of growth proposed - over three times the rate needed for Oxfordshire to take its 'share' of predicted UK population growth - it is almost inconceivable that sufficient funds will become available to manage this without further negative impacts for current residents and the landscape as a whole.

CPRE Oxfordshire therefore asks the County Council to reconsider its fundamental approach by:

- *Re-examining the highly aspirational economic growth projections of the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan*, including making existing residents fully aware of the vision of the county being signed up to on their behalf and giving them an opportunity to have a say.
- *Moving away from a policy based on getting more and more people into the inherently small City of Oxford*. In seeking to inflate the City to match the inflated figures, the County risks bursting the balloon altogether, ruining what makes Oxford special in the first place.
- *Recognising the value of the Oxford Green Belt in protecting the setting and character of Oxford and its surrounding villages, and as a natural capital asset*.
- *Revisiting issues in relation to the 30% of the Oxfordshire population that lives in small rural communities, such as subsidised buses, rat-running and road maintenance*.
- *Producing a green infrastructure strategy to guide development appropriately* - a proposal which was in the draft LTP but has now mysteriously vanished without trace!

Given the above, the proposed **remote Park & Ride Strategy should be dropped, in line with your consultation responses**. We acknowledge that the County has now said it will look at 'a comprehensive Park & Ride study' but fear that this is Alice in Wonderland politics. In the words of the Queen of Hearts: 'sentence first, verdict afterwards'!

Surely in the real world, the evidence must come first, before any strategy is decided? *What assurances can the Cabinet therefore give us that this will be an open and thorough look at all options, not just assessing the options that it has already decided upon?*

We are particularly concerned about the Lodge Hill area of the A34 and the proposals for a freight service area/lorry park, a Park & Ride and a 1,000 house development - together these would represent a thorough extermination of the Green Belt in this area, as well as a potential threat to Cothill Fen Special Area of Conservation. How can this possibly tally with David Cameron and George Osborne's statement in the Times earlier this month... '*We will always protect the green belt and make sure planning decisions are made by local people.*'

The local people have had their say - they want the Green Belt protected. Is the County Council going to deliver?