

NEWS RELEASE
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No environmental case for £79million ‘remote’ Park & Rides

The Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England has said a costly scheme to relocate Park & Ride sites would jeopardise the Green Belt, without any clear benefits. CPRE is also concerned that lack of time to assess responses to the scheme risks making the public consultation a whitewash.

The statement comes ahead of an imminent County Council decision on whether or not to accept the proposals as outlined in the draft Local Transport Plan.

Costly scheme would jeopardise Green Belt, without clear benefits

The relocation of Oxford’s existing Park & Ride sites could cost £79million, according to a report obtained under Freedom of Information by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

The preliminary report, undertaken by Atkins on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council¹, says purchasing new sites would cost £64million, plus a further £15million on access works.

No exact sites have yet been chosen, but the proposed new locations are Eynsham, Langford Lane, East of Kidlington, Cumnor, Lodge Hill (Abingdon) and Sandford, plus expansion at the existing Thornhill site.

Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE Oxfordshire said: “There is a complete lack of detailed research or supporting evidence to justify such a policy in either environmental or economic terms.

‘It would certainly encroach upon the countryside and undermine the Green Belt, but we do not think it will do anything to get people out of their cars. In fact, we fear it will just increase the amount of traffic to and from the radial routes to surrounding towns.

‘Fundamentally, it is ill-conceived as it is based on trying to get more and more people into an already over-crowded City.’”

The County Council is backing a 40% increase in housing across Oxfordshire. The Atkins report states that, as a result of this, commuter trips into Oxford are forecast to grow by 34% by 2031.

Helen Marshall said: “Moving the Park & Rides further out is never going to be a sustainable solution to such massive growth. The County Council needs to think again.”

CPRE believes that Oxford’s existing Park and Rides are increasingly going beyond their legitimate purposes of reducing car traffic entering the City, by becoming outward transport hubs, with cafes and soon shops. Thornhill has already been extended twice to serve non Park and Ride purposes and it seems likely that similar proposals will follow for Water Eaton and other sites in the Green Belt. The further out Park and Rides are located, the more likely it is that this will occur. CPRE believes the only legitimate place for Park and Rides is at the edge of conurbations, such as those at Redbridge and Peartree, both of which are identified for closure by the County.

Lack of time to assess responses risks consultation whitewash

CPRE is also concerned that public responses to the consultation are not going to be properly considered. Originally, the responses were due for publication in June. However, this has now been delayed until 13 July, just a few days before the Cabinet is due to vote on accepting the Local Transport Plan on 21 July.

Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE Oxfordshire said: “We understand they received a very high level of responses, so how can councillors possibly absorb this information and the officers’ conclusions so quickly?”

“We think this calls into question the fairness and accurateness of the consultation. The public need to know their views are taken seriously, and that there is a genuine willingness to modify the plan if required.

“The Local Transport Plan will have a dramatic impact on the future of our County, and is far too important to be rushed through. We think the decision should be postponed until at least the next Council meeting, to allow proper time for assessment of the consultation responses.”

-ENDS -

1. Oxford Transport Strategy - Preliminary Investigation into Park & Ride, Atkins, 9 February 2015 - see attached.

CPRE Oxfordshire promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural Oxfordshire by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. Established in 1931, the charity’s volunteers have been helping to protect and enhance our local countryside for over 80 years. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: www.cpreoxon.org.uk

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