

Dear Editor,

During a busy news week you may have missed the official launch of the Oxford Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework consultation, to run from now until the 12th October:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-vision-for-the-oxford-cambridge-arc>

Without much fanfare, and with no apparent formal communication with the communities across the five counties of the Ox-Cam Arc (Oxon, Bucks, Beds, Northants and Cambs), this consultation follows a familiar pattern of the unhelpful and secretive approach adopted by the Government over many major developments of the unpopular Ox-Cam Arc plans that were highlighted in last week's Westminster Hall Debate in which Steve Baker (Wycombe) and Richard Fuller (NE Beds) pointed out that the Arc is the wrong approach to the wrong area for the wrong reasons.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-07-13/debates/D92B505B-E714-45C3-91D3-029228AE741D/Oxford-CambridgeArc>

The survey itself is designed for a digitally literate audience in an attempt to engage a younger demographic that is usually put off by traditional consultations. It involves questions, however, that are so vacuous and lacking in any detail of the hard choices ahead that the answers are already predictable. The danger is that the consultation responses may well be taken as an endorsement of what is freely admitted by its advocates to be a Whitehall plan that involves over-development of the Arc in the name solely of economic progress.

1. The consultation contains no explanation or justification either in words or numbers of whether such a thing as the Arc exists or, if it does not, what is involved in bringing it into being.
2. The questions could be asked of the development of any area of any size anywhere in England, if not the world
3. The majority of the questions are simplistic and are obviously designed to engender a positive response - "Should new developments be built in sustainable locations?"; "Should the natural environment be protected, restored and improved?"; "Should we make better use of resources and managing waste?" etc. etc.
4. No data are provided in the consultation documents to inform any of the judgements or comments that respondents are asked to make.
5. The survey makes no mention of the cancelled expressway, or the withdrawal of Buckinghamshire and Fenland councils from the project, indicators of bad planning or disquiet among unwilling participant Local Authorities.
6. There is concealment of the role of the three Growth Boards which have either already signed, or are about to sign, binding 'contracts' with Government to deliver a fixed and high level of development all the way across the Arc. The transport strategy developed by England's Economic Heartland and the connectivity corridors that will open up land for development and for large, new settlements are not mentioned at all.
7. Consultation participants are being given the false impression they can shape their own future, when, in fact, this is already being decided for them in Whitehall.
8. The timing of the consultation is specifically designed to restrict parliamentary scrutiny. Parliament will only be sitting for two weeks during the twelve week consultation period.
9. There is no public record of the award of the consultation contract to Future Fox (a new "disruptive Transport Planner"), whose previous experience appears to be mainly about cycle lanes.

The company's last balance sheet showed it was worth 18k with only 6 employees. It is unclear how it met Gate 2: economic and financial standing for the procurement process.

The **Stop The Arc** Group is so concerned about this consultation, and the way in which its results might be taken as endorsing Government plans for the region, that it has decided to run its own survey, in conjunction with other expert groups, in order to provide a more constructive and authoritative view of public opinion about the Arc plans.

Please contact **Stop the Arc's** Nick Burton (07930 556012, nickburton429@yahoo.co.uk) or David Rogers (01865 351348, david.rogers@zoo.ox.ac.uk) for more information.

A fuller statement will be issued by **Stop the Arc** next week.

<https://stopthearc.org>

Stop the Arc is a non-profit volunteer-run campaigning group raising awareness of Ox-Cam Arc plans among the affected communities. It is the successor to the **No Expressway Group** that campaigned against the proposed Ox-Cam Expressway and the over-inflated housing targets for the Arc region. The Expressway was finally cancelled in March 2021, but all other elements of the Whitehall plans for the Arc remain in place and in play.