

## **PRESS INFORMATION**

28 April 2023

**For immediate publication**

### **CAMPAIGN GROUP STARC ATTACKED BY BEDFORD LIB-DEMS**

Social media activity by a campaign group opposed to East-West Rail and the Oxford Cambridge Arc has been attacked by Bedford Lib Dems.

Paid-for posts by Stop The Arc Group (STARC) have highlighted the Lib Dem mayoral candidate's support for a destructive four- or six-track railway route through the heart of Bedford.

Christine McHugh, Lib Dem councillor for the Goldington Ward, wrote to STARC, warning the group against breaching campaign spending rules, and calling for sight of the group's spending returns.



**Photo caption:** Bedford Lib-Dem Councillor Christine McHugh.

STARC's Nick Burton says, 'The Lib Dems are clearly rattled by our social media posts. We've simply reported their Mayoral candidate's declared position on an unpopular West Rail route. We haven't told anyone how to vote. For our modest and perfectly truthful campaign to have generated what amounts to a threatening letter suggests we've touched a raw nerve somewhere.'

STARC says Ms McHugh's demands for sight of expenditure returns are wrong. 'As non-party campaigners in a local election, we don't have to declare our expenditure. But we're quite happy to say we've spent about £100 on the campaign to date – almost certainly a tiny fraction of what the Lib Dems have deemed necessary as their own expenditure for fighting unpopularity across Bedford.'

### **Note to Editors**

Rules that apply to STARC limit the group's total Bedford campaign spending to £720. Lib-Dem party spending is limited to £8,782.

Mayoral campaign spending rules can be found at:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/non-party-campaigners-local-authority-mayoral-elections-england/local-campaigns-local-elections>

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### **Stop The Arc Group**

Stop the Arc Group is a non-political campaign group, founded in 2018 to fight the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and associated development that threatened to destroy the environment and its inhabitants. The Expressway was officially cancelled in March 2021. Other plans for the Arc remain, against which STARC actively campaigns, and supports other organisations with the same objectives. STARC acknowledges that the environment is a national asset which should be protected for the health, welfare and well-being of all, making the Ox-Cam Arc not just a local and regional concern but a national issue.

STARC's mission is to fight to protect the countryside and its wildlife for the health and enjoyment of all future generations, and strive to educate people about the threats to our countryside posed by the proposed Ox-Cam Arc developments.

STARC supports new housing of the right kind and in the right location, but not the Arc's proposed growth in Oxon of more than 100%, of 66% in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, of 74% in Northamptonshire and 81% in Cambridgeshire.

STARC believes campaign groups are strongest when information and work is shared with other groups, and that local groups are most effective at mobilising their local communities. STARC has strong links with groups and Parish Councils from Oxford to Cambridge. STARC shares information and engages with BFARE, Cambridge Approaches, CPRE, BBOWT, RSPB, BEAG (Buckinghamshire Environment Action Group) and others.

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