

PRESS INFORMATION

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For immediate publication

LABOUR PLEDGE ON INFRASTRUCTURE WINS MID-BEDFORDSHIRE

Labour candidate Alistair Strathern narrowly won yesterday's by-election with a majority of just 1000. Voters responded positively to his claims that the current planning system wasn't working, and his pledge to not support any developments planned without proper infrastructure. That pledge is made in spite of Labour Leader Keir Starmer's proposal to impose new towns over local objections. Mr Strathern has 12 months or so, until the next general election, to convince the voters.

Mid-Beds already faces massive development proposals. The Government-backed East West Rail project depends on huge growth along its route. It would bring new towns with thousands of new homes to the Marston Vale area, causing huge population growth – but few new jobs– to the area.

Nick Burton, a Mid-Beds constituent and member of Stop The Arc Group (STARC) said 'People across the area are already suffering the downside of massive development. Ask them about promises of new towns, and they'll show you Wixams – a community of 4,500 homes, built over ten years ago. It's still without any healthcare facilities, transport connectivity, or adequate community resources. Developers just don't deliver on their promises, and voters in this area have simply had enough.'

'The huge development threat being faced by Mid-Bedfordshire voters is driven by East West Rail, from Milton Keynes all the way to Cambridge, said Burton. 'The new railway lacks any kind of business case, and assumes a demand created by enormous tracts of new housing along its route. But developers will only build those new towns because a railway is planned alongside them. The absence of a business case, usually a statutory requirement for a project like this, has now caused the National Accounting Office, prompted by Richard Fuller, MP for NE Beds, to launch an investigation into the economic and strategic case for the project.' This will examine:

- how the context for the East West Rail project has changed over time
- the Department for Transport's assessments of the economic and strategic case for the East West Rail project
- the cross-government working to plan and deliver the intended outcomes

The current Benefit Cost Ratio for EWR is around 0.3 – three times worse than the now cancelled leg of HS2.

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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