

The Oxford Times



Celebrating our 156th year

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More than 3,000 protesters took to the streets of Oxford to call for action on climate change. The march – one of many around the country last Saturday to coincide with the COP26 Climate Change Conference – saw people marching from Cowley Road, up High Street to Broad Street, where MPs, wildlife experts, environmentalists and civic leaders addressed a rally. ● See Pages 3 and 33 Picture by Ed Nix

More than 90% oppose plans for Ox-Cam Arc

Eirian Prosser

eirian.prosser@newsquest.co.uk

CAMPAIGNERS are calling on the Government to urgently rethink plans for a multi-billion-pound rapid growth and development plan between Oxford and Cambridge as a survey reveals 90 per cent oppose it.

The Oxford-Cambridge (OxCam) Arc is the name given to an area identified by the Government as a key economic priority.

New plans aim to boost the economic output of Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire to £200bn a year by 2050 in a strategy akin to the Northern Powerhouse.

The scheme aims to build one million new houses, create 1.1 million

additional jobs, and upgrade rail with a new East-West link between Oxford and Cambridge, making the area economically significant both on a national and global scale.

A survey conducted by campaigners, however, has revealed that nine out of 10 people reject plans to develop the arc.

The results came after South Oxfordshire District Council asked Michael Gove, the new minister for 'levelling up' to pause the arc project calling it 'an arbitrary geographic construct'.

The Stop the Arc campaign group and an organisation of senior planning, environment and transport professionals called Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainability (POETS) conducted the survey asking whether people supported the plans for the region.

The survey had over 3,800 responses, from people in Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

90 per cent of survey respondents told the campaign groups they rejected the proposals.

When asked which way they'd vote in a referendum on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, 93 per cent said they would not vote for the proposal, with only four per cent in favour.

The campaign groups said they decided to create the survey to offer an alternative consultation to find out 'people's priorities for the future'.


Speaking on behalf of POETS, Noel Newson said "POETS is highly critical of the framing of the government consultation on the Spatial Framework for the Arc.

"Issues which need addressing

include the lack of democratic involvement in the NIC and central government promotion of the Arc; the inattention to the climate change, biodiversity and ecosystems crises; the vagueness of the boundaries of the so-called Arc; the inconsistency with effective levelling-up policies; and the boosterish [enthusiastic and uncritical] role of major development interests in the promotion of the Arc."


David Young, a member of Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, said: "There has been no proper assessment of the logic of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a sub-region for 'transformative growth', and it is impossible to see how international obligations on climate and biodiversity and national obligations on levelling up can be anything other than seriously harmed by continuing

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Public reject plans for Oxford-Cambridge Arc growth

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this approach. The public are right to be concerned.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: “The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is a globally significant area, and our plans will help build a stronger economic future for

the area, while protecting and enhancing the environment.

“Two further rounds of consultation will let the public comment on detailed options – and their responses will help guide local planning of the scheme.”

The department received over 5,500 responses to its first round

of public consultation.

Calling for clarity, Oxfordshire county and South Oxfordshire district councillor Tim Bearder said last month: “The quantum of growth was there at the beginning and it was a million houses. Because that was politically sensitive they have taken that bit out and left

everything else around it.

“The infrastructure is all the same, exactly as it was designed for a million houses and yet they will not give us that figure now. I hope Gove in his new position will be honest with the people of South Oxfordshire on what the quantum of growth will actually be.”

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Our 157th year

The people have spoken on contentious Arc growth plans

THE decision to hold the COP26 climate conference on our shores has succeeded, where any number of acts of nuisance failed, in galvanising public opinion on the urgent need to tackle the climate emergency.

The sight of more than 3,000 people braving the murky weather last Saturday to join a remarkably well-coordinated international day of action to demand tough action on tackling the crisis was humbling indeed.

Good-natured the march and rally might have been, but those those taking part were defiant, passionate and angry at what they see as a lack of concrete action so far.

And they were not acting alone. It has become increasingly obvious that we are in the midst of a climate catastrophe and need to do something now. Growth for growth's sake is no longer seen as an overarching goal; sustainability and respect for wildlife and the environment are key.

Against that background, plans to transform a swathe of south-central England and East Anglia into a contiguous growth zone could appear dangerously out of date – and hideously out of touch.

Proposals to carve an environmentally-disastrous expressway through the county might have been parked for now, but work continues apace on plans to create a growth arc between here and Cambridge. This would see more houses, office, research and manufacturing facilities and transport infrastructure filling in the ever-diminishing wedges of countryside between our towns and villages and the destruction of vast areas of countryside which are vital for absorbing carbon and providing habitats for our beleaguered wildlife.

One does not need to be an expert (though experts, such as Oxford's POETS group concur) to see that rampant development – no matter how green and fluffy the packaging – would be a catastrophe for our attempts to limit climate change.

Along with the implications for pollution and flooding, there is a very real fear that the very thing that communities love about this part of the world is being lost.

A survey gauging public opinion shows 90 per cent oppose plans for the arc.

That is a categorical rejection of a scheme which people feel is being imposed from above.

We hope that the results are taken seriously and acted upon.

Not only is the environment, and our attempts to tackle the climate emergency at stake here, so is the very notion of democracy.