

STOP THE **ARC** **GROUP**
OX
CAM



Action Plan

Introduction

The 'Arc' is the concept of urbanising the area between Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge, which covers the five counties of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire, to create an English 'Silicon Valley'. The prospect has been evolving over a number of years and is supported by central government, expansionist local authorities, larger housebuilders, and domestic and foreign speculators¹.

The wrong plan, in the wrong place

The Arc vision is for 1.1 million new jobs, which might or might not need 1 million new houses and a reinstated East-West rail link from Cambridge to Oxford, to supposedly grow the regional economy by £163 billion by 2050². There is no need for such an overwhelming amount of development that risks devastating the greenbelt, natural environment and agricultural land that form the bedrock of residents' preferred way of life.

Despite the expected government investment being omitted from the most recent spending plans, including the Levelling Up White Paper, local authorities, developers and conflicted land-owning universities are determined to press ahead with what they believe to be a magic money tree.

The pressure for new towns and 'garden villages' comes from a repeated failure to plan the sustainable evolution of cities to suit changes in economic circumstances. Milton Keynes exists because of the failure to regenerate London in the 1960s and 70s, forcing the population to migrate and splintering their established communities. Milton Keynes' chequered success 50 years later is scant justification for the long-term human and environmental cost of disruption and destruction.

The drive to expand Banbury, Peterborough, St Neots, Northampton, Luton, Kettering, Bicester, Beaconsfield, Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes is part of the vision by Arc enthusiasts to create a single city region, bigger in size and population than Greater Manchester, the largest built-up area in the country. This illustrates the faults in planning that have allowed the process to be driven by

property developers exploiting their most profitable area in the country, irrespective of others' needs. This exploitation is attracting massive overseas investment from totalitarian regimes¹ that have been assessed by the security and intelligence services as representing a significant financial and security threat to our country.

This Action Plan is the core of STARC's campaign to target the seven Arc leaders' wards in the May 2022 local elections. It will be circulated to key decision makers – councillors, MPs, election candidates, council officers and staff, civil servants and others – to influence their behaviour and policies. It will be used to develop more material for voters and the wider general public, and will be shared with other stakeholders, including developers, environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (eNGOs) and other cause-based groups.

Aims of this Action Plan

The future of the controversial Ox-Cam development project lies in the hands of just over 40,000 voters in seven wards at the elections on May 5th. If just 1,900 vote against the seven members of the Arc leadership Group the project will be rejected. The result will be the lasting gratitude of millions of people, the conservation of wildlife, and the preservation of 250,000 acres of farmland.

STARC's Ten-point Action Plan contains bold but pragmatic approaches and policies for national and local government, and actions for STARC itself, to take forward in preference to the outdated and misconceived build-build-build and car-dependent strategies.

- 1 Stop the Arc project.
- 2 Demand the right for individuals to appeal to the Government against planning approvals.
- 3 Insist local housing needs are based on the latest ONS data and levelling-up policies.
- 4 Demand full infrastructure provision for health, education, transport and leisure for all new developments.
- 5 Mandate eco-friendly, less car-dependent housing to higher densities. Maximise the use of brownfield sites.
- 6 Build 10,000 social houses every year across the five counties.
- 7 Increase the powers of the Environment Agency and Ofwat to veto or modify plans that threaten sustainable water supplies, sewage treatment capacity, water-course quality, or that increase flood risks.
- 8 Demand immediate publication of the complete business case for the Bedford-to-Cambridge section of East-West Rail. Electrify the service from day one.
- 9 Make public transport affordable and coordinated. Minimise road investment except for safety improvements and environmental benefits.
- 10 Demand that Defra produces a national food security strategy and fundamentally overhauls the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy.

The Economy

THREATS

The Arc, i.e. our five counties, is not the homogenous economic powerhouse its cheerleaders claim. Investing in the Midlands and North would produce 12% greater benefits (£183 billion p.a. over current output³) than in the five counties (£163 billion p.a.²). Even the National Infrastructure Commission's consultants concluded that there is 'very limited evidence for a single knowledge-based cluster', and that the area 'appears to be made up of three or possibly four distinct economic areas'⁴. Misguided investment in a non-existent one-economy entity is a threat to sustainable development in the region and to levelling up in under-performing areas in the rest of the country.

Further belying the one-economy myth is the fact that the only urbanisation is around road and rail links to and from London, which makes the region partly a dormitory. The proposed Ox-Cam Expressway (part of an outer M25) was intended to create east-west routes to underpin car-dependent sprawl, but the project was cancelled owing to its costs outweighing the benefits⁵.

Nor is the Arc the be-all and end-all of UK research that some claim. Outstanding science is undoubtedly carried out in clusters around Oxford and Cambridge⁶, but the future cost-effective and resource-efficient direction of research is institutional and international collaboration, not insular expansion⁷. To invest contrary to this momentum would be folly. Indeed, the Levelling Up White Paper⁸ includes a policy to move government funding for research and development, particularly medical, away from the South East and the five counties.

Other parts of the country already emulate the Arc's claimed qualities of research-intensive universities, scientific institutions and a skilled workforce but, unlike the Arc, they are not as short of housing and infrastructure. What they do have is brownfield land, housing and public transport to accommodate growth that their economies genuinely need and with the potential for a greater marginal return on investment and, of course, levelling up.

Harwell Campus is an excellent example of the spurious claim that the Arc is an economic reality. Harwell Campus (south Oxfordshire) is a success because it creates links across sectors, industries and companies within it and enables those links to have worldwide connectivity. Neither of these processes has anything to do with Harwell being located within the nebulous Arc, yet academics benefitting from its success perpetuate this myth.



Proponents of the Arc point to the potential to level up within this region. Their aim is clearly to extend the lead of already successful areas and hope for a trickle-down effect to the less-well off pockets, a strategy that has been discredited and dismissed, including by Boris Johnson who said, 'The Treasury has made a catastrophic mistake in the last 40 years in thinking that you can just hope that the whole of the UK is somehow going to benefit from London and the southeast.'

'If you care about levelling up,' said Professor Breznitz, the Munk chair of innovation studies at the University of Toronto and co-director of its Innovation Policy Lab, 'realise that this [the Silicon Valley model] is a bonanza for the very, very high skilled and the financiers. That does not offer good jobs for anyone else.' University spin-offs and start-ups 'create very little local employment' and 'are not anchors for local regional growth'.

Only one industry possesses the characteristic of being economically greater than the sum of its parts across the five counties. This is agriculture, which accounts for over 70% of land-take, mirroring the UK-wide proportion. Farming is not just a food production system: it is habitat management and species conservation; provision of leisure opportunities; landscape and scenery; and carbon sink services. Arc proponents never mention this, because this is the land they want to build on.



Solutions

- Stop the Arc as a government-supported aspiration and remove taxpayer funding from supportive bodies (e.g. the Arc Leadership Group).
- Maintain existing geographic boundaries between Local Economic Partnerships.
- Redirect resources to levelling up the rest of the country.
- Support well-paid, skilled, non-graduate employment opportunities.

Democracy

THREATS

The scale of the proposals, including 1 million new houses, would transform the five counties into one conurbation.

The Government's *Creating a vision for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc*¹⁸ ignores local democracy and communities across the five counties. It includes:

- A strategy for 'sustainable' and 'green' growth – **Imposed from Whitehall;**
- Plans for a new Growth Body to provide central, statutory economic leadership to direct decision-making for the region – **No role for existing Councils;**
- Incentives for local planning authorities to deliver new business and administration space – **To support 1 million new homes;**
- A strategy for regional infrastructure to spread growth to all parts of the five counties – **Obliterating the greenbelt with car-dependent 'garden villages' and cutting existing communities in half.**

An extraordinary feature of the project is the almost total secrecy with which key decisions have been taken, including the use of non-disclosure agreements⁹ to constrain local authority communications. The National Infrastructure Commission report² was never put before the public or parliament for approval. Big business and overseas investors, not elected representatives or resident communities, have been driving the project, and they have no interest in solving the housing affordability crisis. There has not been a single public meeting about any Arc development proposals by any Local Authority anywhere in the five counties, whilst international investors are eagerly courted¹.



STARC's previous successes

The Arc is becoming increasingly toxic for politicians, following STARC's and others' successful 2021 local election campaigning. Four councillors, all members of the Arc Leadership Group, lost their seats when voters comprehensively rejected their support for excessive development. In Cambridgeshire, the Combined Authority Mayor and County Council Leader were ousted. In Oxfordshire, the Leader of the County Council was ejected with an unprecedented 49% turnout, while the Leader of West Northamptonshire also changed. This was quickly followed by voters in the Chesham and Amersham by-election resolutely expressing their distaste for the proposed pro-development planning reforms and HS2.

Buckinghamshire Council withdrew from the Arc Leadership Group in October 2020 on the grounds that it did not want its future decided by other authorities 'as far away as Corby and the Fenlands'¹⁰, and is pursuing its own growth agenda independent of Arc plans. In October 2021, South Oxford District Council asked Michael Gove to pause the Arc project based, it claimed, on 'an arbitrary geographic construct'¹¹, and in December 2021 the Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council, noting that 'Councils across the Arc have now been left in Limbo' asked her council officers to pause all Arc-specific work¹².

The government consultation last year¹³ claimed that developing excessively, enhancing nature and sustaining services were all easily compatible. Milton Keynes Council described the consultation as misleading: 'An uninformed audience could be forgiven to think that all of the focus areas listed could be achievable simultaneously.'¹⁴ STARC and others therefore launched our own consultation that attracted 4,200 respondents:

- Over 90% opposed and did not trust the concept of an Arc.
- The top three priorities were pollution (80%), environment (79%), and climate change (75%). The bottom three priorities were jobs (14%), growth (10%) and travel (6%).
- Only 3% said that unelected bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Boards should have a role, while just 1% said that property developers and landowners such as universities should have a role in planning development.
- Fewer than 6% believed that central government should have a role, while 66% were clear that local government and local referendums should decide on development.

Solutions

- Press for all local authorities across the five counties to reconsider their support for the Arc project and to follow the examples of Buckinghamshire Council and Fenland District Council¹⁵ in withdrawing from the Arc Leadership Group.
- Pursue a judicial review, with other groups, against further Arc 'progress' resulting from the 2021 consultation *Creating the vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc spatial framework*, on the grounds that Milton Keynes Council admitted that the consultation was misleading¹⁹.
- Continue with or return to statutory local democratic input for all local plans and planning applications.
- Demand the right for individuals to appeal to the Government against planning approvals.
- Hold local referendums on all developments over 1,000 houses.
- Include an explicit yes/no referendum question in any future rounds of Arc consultations.

Housing and Levelling-up

THREATS

The **National Planning Policy Framework**⁴¹ includes ‘a presumption in favour of sustainable development.’ This means in practise that if, for example, there is no Local Plan or relevant policy in place, a proposal is assumed to be sustainable unless proved otherwise. Many local authorities have struggled to update their plans because the Government keeps moving the goalposts. Developers, aided by planning inspectors, have taken advantage of policy vacuums to force through unsustainable projects.

The **Office for National Statistics (ONS)** forecast in 2018²¹ that Buckinghamshire would need 22,533 new houses by 2040, yet the Unitary Authority is planning for 55,000 – an excess of 32,400 – to be built, having calculated this ‘Local Housing Need’ by following government directives.

Too many houses

The UK birth rate is falling, with only immigration offsetting this and growth-predictions are constantly being downgraded. The accepted figure from ONS for a national housing need is growth of 16% over the next 30 years¹⁶. The 1 million new houses proposed by the National Infrastructure Commission for the five counties would see the region grow by 66%¹⁷, vastly in excess of local needs.

Houses in the wrong places

Property developers maximise profits by building on greenfield and agricultural land outside towns and villages. The resultant urban sprawl is land-costly, damaging to the environment and often lacks soul. Brownfield development¹⁸ can offer high-density, appealing housing adjacent to existing infrastructure.

The wrong houses

Established models of development have consistently failed to deliver higher density housing that is affordable, because there are no incentives for the developers to build them.

This translates to the type of development already seen across the area with low-density, inadequately insulated, semi-detached dwellings. Developments such as the Stirling-Prize winning Goldsmiths Street in Norwich prove that high-density, zero-carbon social housing (83 units per hectare) is feasible and appealing¹⁹.

Incompatible with levelling up

The levelling-up agenda sets out to equalise wealth, opportunities and growth between affluent and less well-resourced areas across the nation.

The five counties are already comparatively wealthy and have full employment and high levels of foreign investment in property²⁰. The Arc-concept of channelling finance, planning incentives and government support into the region is self-evidently incompatible with levelling up. Despite the acute housing shortage and admitting that ‘Mass purchasing by international investors can be very problematic in this city,’ Cambridge City Council is allowing as many as 25% of homes on its jointly owned developments to be purchased by overseas investors²¹. The South East is ‘overheated’, as the Prime Minister has admitted, and the Arc will further fuel this inequality and house-price inflation. Handing over land to developers within this ‘broken homes’²² paradigm will not reduce prices or address the need for affordable housing.

Supporting excessive growth in the five counties not only contradicts levelling up, but most of the proposed development would be on greenfield (often greenbelt) sites.

Ironically, the White Paper talks of building ‘pride in place’ in urban areas, but sadly talks little about rural areas where there is often considerable pride, alongside a sense of identity and satisfaction with the locality. It is difficult to envisage how converting treasured landscapes into urban sprawl could possibly increase satisfaction levels and enhance ‘pride in place’

The country needs levelling up. The Arc-concept is incompatible with, and diverts resources away from, national priorities. It must be stopped.

*Broken Homes: Britain's Housing Crisis: Faults, Factoids and Fixes*²⁶, dissects Britain's broken housing market and the disregard by planners, designers and builders for those who occupy new houses. The authors critique decades of failed attempts by the state to boost supply and show how the current model of housebuilding does not reduce the price of new houses, nor build enough affordable or social housing.

Between 2006 and 2017, **brownfield development** nationwide decreased by 38% while greenfield usage increased by 148%. Current brownfield availability stands at 21,566 sites covering 26,256 hectares, sufficient for 1.3 million houses. Although such sites are available across all regions, they are prevalent in the North West, Yorkshire, Humber and West Midlands²³.

Solutions

- Insist local housing needs are based on the latest ONS data and levelling-up policies.
- Replace the ‘presumption’ that planning applications are sustainable (see box) with a presumption that they are unsustainable unless proved otherwise.
- Mandate eco-friendly, less car-dependent housing to

higher densities. Maximise use of brownfield sites.

- Build 10,000²³ social homes every year across the five counties.

Ban developers from renegotiating agreed proportions of affordable homes because they claim they are no longer viable.

- Extend the ‘pride in place’ concept in the Levelling Up White Paper to rural areas, and enforce legislation for the protection of aesthetic, heritage and archaeology assets.
- Pursue a judicial review, with other groups, of housebuilding targets.

Services



Photo: Danny Yee

One-million new houses in the five counties is equivalent to building nine towns the size of Milton Keynes, or more than 17 Oxfords or 18 Cambridges. It has taken 50 years to grow the one Milton Keynes to its present-day size, yet development of the Arc is scheduled to take half that time.

THREATS

Water and Sewage

There is not enough water for the massive developments proposed. All existing water sources in the region are already at capacity and some estimates put the demand for water in England exceeding supply by up to 3.1 billion litres per day by the 2050s²⁴. Already in Cambridge, the Chilterns and elsewhere, chalk streams are failing due to over-extraction.

A range of large water infrastructure options has been proposed to meet future challenges, but these options come with unacceptable consequences. For example: the proposed Abingdon reservoir (the size of 2,500 football pitches) would destroy huge tracts of productive farmland²⁵; and the proposed Severn-to-Thames transfer would require redirection of water from Lake Vyrnwy in Wales, reducing the resilience of Manchester and Liverpool to droughts²⁶.

Anglian Water discharged raw sewage into the Cam valley chalk streams 156 times in 2020 – mostly at Melbourn and Haslingfield in South Cambridgeshire – according to research by Friends of the Cam, based on data from the Environment Agency²⁷.

The leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, Bridget Smith, claimed recently²⁸ that ‘the Arc was the only game in town’ to remedy the serious shortfalls in the *current* water provision in Cambridge, which is already damaging the River Cam and the aquifer. So, the only solution to underfunded and damaging development is *more* development? Observers will quickly recognise this as an unsustainable ‘Ponzi-style’ scheme to defraud taxpayers and the environment. The scheme would collapse before the last acre was concreted over.



Solutions

- Increase the powers of the Environment Agency and Ofwat to veto or modify plans that threaten sustainable water supplies, sewage treatment capacity, water-course quality, or that increase flood risks.
- Cover flood damage in new-build house guarantees.
- Legislate for all new-builds to comply with minimum water-consumption standards.
- Demand full infrastructure provision for health, education, transport and leisure for all new developments.

Health

Provision of health services, especially GP surgeries, has persistently failed to match large-scale housing development. Nine new Milton Keynes will each require completely new district general hospitals at a cost of at least £680m (2020) plus VAT, fees and equipment. The existing plan is for only two partial new-builds for all of the five counties: a new women and children’s hospital in Milton Keynes and a new cancer hospital at Addenbrooke’s²⁹. All 40 of the ‘new’ English hospitals are unlikely to be completed before 2030, are not fully funded and have ‘red’ project ratings.

Education

Nine new Milton Keynes will need about 1,000 new schools across the five counties by 2050, yet there is a consistent failure to prove the investment required. In 2023 it will have taken 14 years since the initial approval for Milton Keynes to open a single new primary school (at Calverton Green). In Cambridgeshire, despite a record increase in the schools’ budget ‘...there’s still a long way to go until Cambridgeshire is fairly funded’³⁰. In the Northampton area, secondary schools are overcrowded but the Local Authority has no capital allocation to build a new school. Where are the 1,000 new schools going to come from?



Transport



THREATS



Rail

Most of the Arc's railways are radial routes from London. Connections within the five counties are few, and the only improvement yet proposed is East-West Rail from Cambridge to Oxford. However, the proposed new Bedford-to-Cambridge section is problematic in terms of environmental impact, residential amenity and reported high cost. No business case has yet been published. The future of the section is now in doubt, but the uncertainty continues to blight thousands of residents and waste public funds. If an acceptable business case can be demonstrated, then public consultations should be restaged because the previous ones were flawed.

East-West Rail is not being electrified and will run for an indefinite period with diesel trains, which is incompatible with carbon neutrality and the green agenda.

There is too little in the East-West Rail proposals about ensuring proper connectivity with other rail routes to ensure necessary links to the rest of the country.

There are other disused rail alignments in the five counties with little government support for reviving any of them.

Roads

The Government's Road Investment Strategies (RIS2, and RIS3 to take effect from 2025) are being informed by England's Economic Heartland Transport Strategy (EEHTS)³¹. EEH (the sub-national transport body for the region that includes the five counties) talks long on modal shift and net-zero road (and rail) travel but then says, 'The Government has scrapped the Oxford – Milton Keynes Expressway. However there remains a need to invest in our existing road network if we are to enable new housing and economic growth to be delivered.' In other words, the Ox-Cam Expressway from Oxford to the M1 is dead, but 'Son of Expressway' is champing at the bit.

Building new roads and alleviating pinch points per the EEHTS and RISs encourages more vehicles, including freight, onto roads for longer distances and discourages a shift to other forms of transport. Allowing developers to build their more profitable 'boutique housing' on out-of-town greenfield sites ('cow-pat' development) will further increase car-use, congestion and pollution.

According to some, we have already reached 'peak car'³². Continuing to strategise for and encourage car-use risks the success of the natural and sustainable progression towards fewer cars such as the 'fifteen-minute neighbourhood' model³³ and the Greater Cambridge Greenways network³⁴ (see box).

Bus Services

Bus services in many rural areas are infrequent, patchy or non-existent, which discourages people from leaving their cars at home. Those without a car find travel and connectivity unreliable, time-consuming and stressful. Developing the five counties as proposed will not solve these problems.

Walking and Cycling

Active travel is the healthiest and most environmentally friendly mode of travel, but often plays second fiddle to motor vehicles because of distances and time factors. The dispersed pattern of development proposed for the Arc, encouraging out-of-town greenfield developments and longer distance travel, is therefore not conducive to walking and cycling



Greater Cambridge Greenways, a good example of a project to encourage active travel, is a network of 12 off-road pathways into the city centre. There is also a new cycleway connecting the north of the city to the south: again, without going on roads.

Solutions

- Build new housing estates and volume-employment facilities only where there is easy access to mass transit systems and the opportunity to construct connecting cycleways and footpaths.
- Demand immediate publication of the business case for the Bedford-to-Cambridge section of East-West Rail. Electrify the service from day one.

- Develop proper connectivity with rail routes, including upgrades, to ensure links to the rest of the country from all five counties.
- Increase rail freight capacity.
- Undertake feasibility studies for the electrification of rail lines.
- Undertake feasibility studies for reopening

- abandoned rail lines, e.g. Cowley.
- Make public transport affordable and coordinated. Minimise road investment except for safety improvements and environmental benefits.
- Implement the CPRE recommendation for a minimum hourly bus service for all rural communities.

Countryside, Agriculture and Leisure

THREATS

Countryside

Planning and environment policies and principles fall short of being compatible. The 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' in the National Planning Policy Framework³⁶ (see box under Housing and Levelling up) means that under many circumstances, a development proposal is assumed to be sustainable unless proved otherwise. Because of the appeals process being weighted in favour of development, local decision-makers are forced to assess planning proposals through rose-tinted spectacles.

The NPPF mitigation hierarchy³⁷, which claims to prioritise the avoidance of harm to biodiversity (avoid, mitigate, compensate, refuse) is merely a gesture because it is not adequately enforced. 'Environmental Principles' propounded by Cllr Bridget Smith and the Arc Environment Group³⁸ are just principles, aspirations maybe, but nothing more. There is no action plan, road map, or strategic assessments for the environment or the economy. They have been adopted or endorsed by all five-county local authorities, but there is no evidence that any development has been

The five counties host some glorious English countryside that must be protected, including farmland for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, but the proposed Arc over-development will dramatically diminish our natural environment. Housebuilding, places of work, community infrastructure and road networks will obliterate some 100,000 hectares (almost 250,000 acres) of land currently in use for productive agriculture and public spaces³⁵.



curtailed or modified by these principles. They are so nebulous they cannot even be labelled as greenwashing.

Government policy promotes the idea that it is beneficial to destroy biodiversity (i.e. nature) on one site as long as it is enhanced 'to a greater extent' elsewhere, even if the habitats and species are very different. In other words, destroying a protected wetland in Oxfordshire to build a sports arena could be approved if some trees are planted in Bedfordshire.

This policy is part of the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy (BNG)³⁹. An algorithm estimates the pre- and post-development biodiversity of a site, plus the value of any compensatory enhancements elsewhere and, providing there is a 'net gain' in biodiversity of just 10%, the proposed development is deemed to be environmentally acceptable.

More sinister is the introduction of 'biodiversity units' that value biodiversity in monetary terms rather than as unique living beings, dragging the natural world into the market-based economy so that it can be

hawked and traded to facilitate even more development. In other words, BNG encourages the destruction of nature by trading present-day losses for uncertain and distant future gains. For example, over 40,000 trees were planted to offset the environmental damage caused by the A14 upgrade in Cambridgeshire, but 94% of them died⁴⁰.

Formulating the strategy and metric involved an unacceptable degree of subjectivity, and with ecology consultants being hired and paid for by developers ('he who pays the piper calls the tune'), land can too easily be assessed as being nature-depleted and ripe for development⁴¹.

Scientists and academics have shown that BNG is, at best, unproven nationally and globally. Despite two-thirds of the world's biodiversity offsets being applied in forested ecosystems, none of the study areas demonstrated successful outcomes for forested habitats or species⁴². Even when gains can be established, they 'fall within a governance gap whereby they risk being unenforceable'.⁴³ The conclusion is that BNG as it stands is 'gameable' and not fit for purpose.





Agriculture

In 2020, 71% of UK land was dedicated to agricultural production. All the region's agriculture faces a number of long and short-term risks, including soil degradation, drought and flooding, diseases, risks to fuel and fertiliser supplies, and changing labour markets. In the long term, climate change impacts are likely to have a negative effect on the proportion of high-grade arable farmland in the UK. There is an increasing public awareness of the threats to UK food security. The 2021 STARC Survey showed that 35% of people rated food security amongst their top priorities for themselves and future generations, a percentage that is anticipated to have increased because of the war in Ukraine.

The area of land that would be taken by development in the Arc is equivalent to around 1,000 average-size English farms⁴⁴. The loss of agricultural land will obviously lead to a significant reduction in food production and supply-chain employment⁴⁵. This conflicts with all green agendas and sustainability considerations.

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Even without the threat posed by the Arc, the industry is struggling. Measures to stimulate good environmental husbandry through agriculture (e.g. the Environmental Land Management Scheme or 'public money for public goods') are only generalised ambitions, with indications that payments will deliver minimal returns from farmers' investments. All that is known of the economics of the yet-to-be agreed schemes is that they are likely to fall short of providing adequate support for productive agriculture, and will be insufficient to deliver significant positive impacts for the natural environment, further damaging farmland⁴⁶.

Leisure

Open spaces are of unique value to leisure and well-being⁴⁷. Large scale open landscapes offer a necessary respite from modern urban environments, and leisure activities in the countryside are a positive contrast to those in towns and cities – witness the popularity of such open spaces as our National Parks, Country Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trust estates.

The Arc directly threatens our countryside and other open spaces, so is a threat to our leisure activities, health and wellbeing. Too many developments sacrifice green spaces for more roads and car parking and fail to plan for easy walking and cycling access to the open countryside, marooning new communities. Uninterrupted views, tranquillity, and night skies unpolluted by urban light are as threatened as our climate and biodiversity.

The Government's *25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*⁴⁸ emphasises the need to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing as a key goal. The Plan says, 'Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together.' However, the national planning rulebook – the National Planning Policy Framework⁴¹ – does not reflect the 25 Year Plan which, to all intents and purposes, makes it ineffective.



Solutions

- Demand that Defra produces a national food security strategy that includes the identification of productive agricultural land that is then protected from development.
- Strictly invoke the NPPF biodiversity mitigation hierarchy.
- Demand that Defra fundamentally overhauls the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy to: mandate like-for-like habitat replacements and enhancements; increase the net-gain percentage and disallow commercial exemptions; introduce an appeals process to challenge 'dubious' ecology assessments; impose effective governance and accountability.
- Prioritise identification, protection and enhancement of wildlife areas.
- Reduce the threshold for Environmental Impact Assessments from 150 homes⁴⁹ to 10 (i.e. for major developments as defined by the NPPF⁴⁵).
- Strengthen environmental provisions in the NPPF in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan through Planning Policy Guidance notes and/or written ministerial statements⁵⁰.

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Climate Change

THREATS

Development of the five counties on the scale proposed is incompatible with carbon neutrality and local and national decarbonising targets.

UK housing stock emits excessive carbon dioxide (CO₂) during manufacture and construction; 1 million new houses will only add to the problem. Housing insulation is poor and development, both domestic and commercial, continues across the five counties without adequate provision for low-carbon heating or high-level insulation.

Road transport is the largest sector for greenhouse gas emissions, producing about 25% of the UK's total emissions in 2019⁵¹. England's Economic Heartland – the region (and sub-national transport authority) that includes the five counties – accounts for approximately 40% of the UK's emissions from surface transport⁵². EEH is aiming to decarbonise the region's transport, relying heavily on reducing the need to travel and shifting to public transport, mass rapid transit and active travel. Various local authorities such as Oxford have set targets that require substantial reductions in car journeys. Such aspirations are incompatible with sprawling development on the scale contemplated for the Arc.

Renewable energy policies across the five counties can be damaging. For example, farmland is being lost to solar panels that should be installed or retro-fitted on large commercial roofs. The increasing demand for electric vehicles will outstrip the production and local distribution of green energy.

The five counties' stagnating recycling rates⁵³ and penchant for waste incinerators⁵⁴ are impeding progress towards net zero. Indeed, national waste emissions have risen since 2014⁵⁵.

Solutions

■ Require all new houses to be low-carbon via a Code for Sustainable Homes level 6 or equivalent⁵⁶, and retro-fit existing housing stock to reduce carbon emissions.

■ Minimise new roads and road 'improvements', increase investment in public transport, and add safe cycling and walking routes to reduce car-use by up to 60% by 2050.

■ Refuse proposals for new developments without adequate sustainable travel options.

■ Support renewable energy production across the five counties without the loss of productive agricultural land, and improve distribution to meet increased green energy production.

■ Introduce a moratorium on the construction of waste incinerators and overhaul waste management services to focus on local reuse and recycling.

■ Require Local Authority Local Plans to promote natural carbon sinks, such as trees and floodplain meadows, and disinvest from high-carbon technologies.

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Target Wards

These are the Members of the Arc Leadership Group whose defeat by voters is likely to lead to the cancellation of the Arc.

Name	Council	Ward	Party	Majority	Electorate
Susan Brown	Oxford City	Churchill	Labour	439	4,773
Wayne Fitzgerald	Peterborough	Peterborough West	Conservative	607	4,210
Ryan Fuller	Huntingdonshire	St Ives West	Conservative	262	2,307
Peter Marland	Milton Keynes	Wolverton	Labour	727	11,198
Anna Smith	Cambridge City	Coleridge	Labour	406	7,166
Bridget Smith	South Cambs	Gamlingay	Lib Dem	104	3,190
Barry Wood	Cherwell	Fringford & Hayfords	Conservative	1,091	6,927
			TOTALS	3,636	39,762

Stop the Arc Group

The Stop the Arc Group began life in March, 2018, as the No Expressway Group, a non-political community group. The group was formed to fight the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway that threatened to destroy the environment and its inhabitants. The Ox-Cam Expressway was officially cancelled in March 2021. But the threat of over-development has not gone away, and all other plans for the Arc are still in play. There was no need for the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway, and no need for the over-inflated housing targets still associated with the Ox-Cam Arc plans. We will actively campaign against them, and support other organisations with the same objectives. Our environment is a national asset which should be protected for all of us, our health and well-being. This is a national, not just a local, issue.

In 2021 we changed our campaign name to reflect this new reality. We are now a community benefit society, Stop the Arc Group.

We support 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.

We will fight to protect our 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.

We believe we are strongest when we share information and work with other groups, and that local groups are most effective at mobilising their local communities. We have strong links with groups and Parish Councils from Oxford to Cambridge. We share information and engage with CPRE, BBOWT, RSPB and the Buckinghamshire Environment Action Group (BEAG) and others.

Contact: stopthearc@gmail.com

www.stopthearc.org



Stop The Arc Group



@no_expressway

Stop The Arc Group Ltd is a Community Benefit Society No. 8806