

# CPRE Oxfordshire address to Oxfordshire County Council Meeting, 8 Sept 2015

The Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England is an entirely locally run and supported charity, which exists to protect and promote the Oxfordshire countryside.

**We call on Council members *not* to give your approval to the Local Transport Plan, until the proposed remote Park & Ride strategy is dropped.**

This is because?

- a) The strategy itself is fundamentally flawed.
- b) The specific sites proposed are inappropriate and would cause severe detrimental impact to the Oxford Green Belt, in contravention of national planning policy.
- c) Proper research should be conducted first, not as a retrospective act of self-justification.

## **1. The strategy itself is fundamentally flawed.**

The remote Park & Ride strategy is based on a growth policy which seeks to bring more and more people into the inherently small city of Oxford. This is a fundamentally misguided approach and risks undermining the sustainability of the broader region in favour of continued expansion of Oxford. CPRE questions the exaggerated growth figures being driven by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. However, the focus should be on diverting any required growth elsewhere in the County, or further afield, thereby easing the pressure on the City.

But even if the case for outer park & rides were accepted, there is no logic in locating them in the countryside, away from major urban areas. This will do nothing to reduce the number of car journeys or get people out of their cars. It will merely move congestion to smaller roads and rural communities.

## **2. The specific sites proposed are inappropriate and would cause severe detrimental impact to the Oxford Green Belt, in contravention of national planning policy.**

Six of the proposed sites are within the Oxford Green Belt. This policy would undermine the openness and permanence of the Green Belt, and encroach upon the countryside. There appears to be no consideration given to the cumulative effect on the Green Belt, not just of the sites themselves but of the increased traffic and congestion, although the Strategic Environmental Assessment does note the risk of increased noise pollution.

We are particularly concerned about the Lodge Hill area of the A34 and the proposals for a freight service area/lorry park, a Park & Ride and a 1,000 house development – together these would represent a thorough extermination of the Green Belt in this area (a Green Belt that separates two separate, very different, ancient historic towns), as well as a potential threat to Cothill Fen Special Area of Conservation. How can this possibly tally with David Cameron and George Osborne's statement in July that *'We will always protect the green belt and make sure planning decisions are made by local people.'*

Research conducted by CPRE Oxfordshire earlier this year showed that 76% of local people wanted to see the Oxford Green Belt protected. So where is the County's mandate for these proposals?

### **3. Proper research should be conducted first, not as a retrospective act of self-justification.**

We recognise that the Plan now states that specific schemes within this strategy will be subject to further investigation through a Park & Ride Study.

In Alice in Wonderland, the Queen of Hearts announces 'sentence first, verdict afterwards'. In the real world, surely the evidence must come first?

However, the County is asking you to approve a strategy *today* on the basis that it will gather the evidence to support it *tomorrow*.

There is no indication that the proposed Park & Ride study will consider alternative sites. Meanwhile, the actual sites have already been identified and time and money has been spent on developing the initial business cases.

In July, we asked Cabinet what assurances it could give us that the Park & Ride Study would be an open and thorough look at all the options, not just assessing the options that it has already decided upon, but there was no response.

So, when voting on LTP4, you should be aware that:

- There is no current evidence base to support the proposed Park & Ride Strategy
- Voting to accept the strategy in principle may in practice also mean voting to accept the identified sites.

**We therefore urge members *not* to give your approval to the Local Transport Plan, until the proposed remote Park & Ride strategy is dropped.**