

POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably)

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To all Members of Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire's 5 District Councils, and Oxfordshire MPs

Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably

Oxfordshire is facing major threats to its environment and character: unprecedented housing growth, and the building of a new "Expressway" which will bring more traffic into the county, adding to congestion on local roads and increasing greenhouse gases and pollution.

We are a group of practising and retired senior transport and planning professionals and academics who have spent most of our careers working for Oxfordshire local authorities, the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University. We are not affiliated to any political party.

We are calling for a re-think of the current approach, particularly in the light of the acknowledged climate emergency, and for our elected representatives to develop a plan which involves:

- **scrapping the Expressway**, bringing forward investment in an electrified East-West rail, better managing existing infrastructure (including roads such as the A34), and investing in effective cycling and bus networks. This would be cheaper as well as more sustainable
- **critically examining the housing numbers** proposed, and advocating a changed approach which would ensure a greater proportion of new housing was built to meet local need and was located where it could be best served by public rather than private transport
- **an open, genuinely consultative approach**, which takes proper account of environmental factors (including adopting the Committee on Climate Change's carbon reduction target and doing more than paying lip service to the Government's 25-year environment plan)
- **pressing for changes to national planning, transport and housing policy** which could make this easier to achieve - some of this could be done simply and quickly, some would be longer term.

As professionals, we have become increasingly alarmed, firstly at the scale of development proposed for Oxfordshire over the coming years and some of the measures to facilitate it, secondly at the fundamental conflicts with declared national and local policies particularly in the light of the acknowledged climate crisis, and thirdly at the failure to hold any meaningful public consultation about the future.

One example of the worrying direction that future policy is taking is the proposed Oxford to Cambridge "Expressway". This is a road that appears to have neither a credible transport justification nor any significant public support; it would run counter to most national and local transport policies which purport to favour a move away from private road transport, and would be in direct conflict with the need urgently to reduce carbon emissions from transport. Moreover, it would be likely to facilitate development in areas which will be difficult if not impossible to serve by effective public transport or pedestrian or cycle routes, while adding yet more traffic onto

the A34 south of Oxford (already one of the most congested and dangerous roads in the country).

The character of Oxfordshire would be fundamentally changed by more than doubling the number of dwellings and the proposals for accommodating the movement of people and goods that would result. The historic protection of Oxford's setting is already at risk from proposed development in sensitive parts of the Green Belt around it, despite successive Secretaries of State (both Conservative and Labour) stressing its long-term importance. New housing is needed, but it needs to be the right kind of housing, in the right locations and available at the right price (for purchase or rent).

While we acknowledge the work that has been done on the Oxfordshire 2050 plan, it appears that the current agenda is being driven by central government and the (unelected) National Infrastructure Commission. From the outside, it seems that our financially hard-pressed councils may have been swayed by the promise of some money for infrastructure measures that might mitigate some of the worst impacts. However, the amount on offer to date is only a tiny fraction of the £10bn infrastructure shortfall already identified by the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

There has been little in the way of meaningful public consultation or involvement; in particular there is a pressing need to involve young people who will be most affected by the climate crisis.

At the following links you will find a critical examination of the proposed housing and development proposals, and a proposal for a sustainable transport strategy that would obviate the need for an Expressway. We would be delighted to discuss these with you if you would like further information.

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/bd80e4a3b732ad58a424140ee/files/fd3a100b-41ba-421e-9f44-81afb70425d8/Balancing_Oxfordshire_s_Growth_in_a_Climate_Change_Emergency.final.030619.01.doc
https://gallery.mailchimp.com/bd80e4a3b732ad58a424140ee/files/380bec5c-a506-49ba-9763-b5f5be34281e3/Oxford_to_Cambridge_Corridor_Alternative_Strategy.final.June19.02.docx

We call upon you as our elected representatives to have the courage to step back and take a fresh approach.

Yours faithfully,

POETS

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POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) are:

Katie Barrett, formerly planning policy manager at Vale of White Horse District Council, local plans officer at South Oxfordshire District Council, transport policy manager at Oxfordshire County Council

Bob Bixby, formerly transport planning course director, Oxford Brookes University

Chris Cousins, formerly head of sustainable development at Oxfordshire County Council

Noel Newson, formerly chief assistant engineer at Oxford City Council, group manager for sustainable transport at Oxfordshire County Council

Gill Oliver, formerly planning policy manager, South Oxfordshire District Council

Gordon Stokes, honorary visiting research associate at Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford

Ian Walker, formerly spatial planning manager at Oxfordshire County Council

Elizabeth Wilson, principal lecturer in environmental planning, Oxford Brookes University

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