



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

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CPRE Bedfordshire Statement to EEH, Strategic Transport Leadership Board Meeting, Buckingham. 15 July 2022

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

My name is Gerry Sansom - I represent CPRE Bedfordshire the Countryside Charity.

I am taking the opportunity to make this statement to the Strategic Transport Leadership Board in order to outline CPRE's position and that of our Town & Parish Council members, regarding development across the Oxford – Cambridge Arc and the development of East West Rail, a subject which features on your Agenda this morning.

I expect that this statement will take approximately 5 minutes of your time.

First though an introduction to the current environmental background against which decisions regarding development across the Ox – Cam Arc are taken:

- **It is now recognised by the UN and others that the UK is now one of the most nature depleted countries on the planet.**
- **Bird and insect populations have declined by around 70% since the 1970's and this decline continues at pace!**
- **The humble Starling at one time a commonly seen bird across the UK is now on the RSPB "red list".**
- **Climate Change is upon us and an example of what we will experience is with us today – abnormally high temperatures and potential drought.**
- **The Oxford - Cambridge Arc is an area with serious water supply issues.**
- **Our Sewage System is in crisis and unable to support the current housing stock let alone any substantial housing increase.**

A very serious situation I'm sure you'll all agree and yet despite this, major decisions are being taken about development across the Oxford – Cambridge Arc in the absence of any detailed Environmental Impact Assessments.

Today, you will be discussing the “**East West Rail Strategic Narrative**” - as far as we can see, there is no accompanying Environmental Assessment to this very important document.

CPRE strongly supports East West Rail but we see it as a means of providing a sustainable transport option for existing communities across the Arc, reducing carbon emissions and congestion on the road network together with a significant reduction in road freight journeys.

We do not see East West Rail as a means of urbanising the entire Oxford-Cambridge Arc causing immense environmental destruction.

One of the key features of the **East/West Rail Narrative** is that East West Rail will:

Support Substantial Sustainable Housing Growth

The Narrative states that:

“The National Infrastructure Commission has been clear that currently the supply of housing in the region does not meet demand, and describe the situation as rapidly reaching a ‘crisis point’.

It goes on to say:

“Related to supply issues, house prices in parts of the region have become unaffordable for most of the population.....”

The solution therefore, according to the report is additional housing to offset the shortage – fair enough! – additional housing could, without any further change solve the problem.

BUT, at the same time, according to the E/W Rail Narrative, the strategy is to encourage a huge growth of businesses into the OX- Cam Arc bringing with them even more population growth.

The result of course, of encouraging even more businesses to relocate to the Arc, will be to create a massive upward vicious circle of increasing population growth, leading to further increases in housing prices, leading to local people being priced out of the market, leading to more housing development etc. etc. and on and on it goes.

The only people that will benefit from this strategy are landowners and developers who will be rubbing their hands with glee as land and house prices massively escalate.

This is precisely the strategy which was promoted by **CBRE**, the massive American land and property speculator. CBRE was given the stage by England's Economic Heartland at the launch of your Transport Strategy a couple of years back.

It is the CBRE strategy which has made the US Silicon Valley into one of the most expensive places to live in the US and it's what will happen across the Oxford Cambridge Arc if this unsustainable housing growth strategy is followed by England's Economic Heartland and East/West Rail.

We were very hopeful when England's Economic Heartland and the Transport Forum, now the Transport Leadership Group, was formed, that developments would be based on environmentally sustainable strategies.

Our confidence was shaken when the **New A6 – M1 Link Road was agreed** - the road that will slice through the Bedfordshire Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – 1 of just 30 such AONB's in England – adversely impacting 2 hugely important ancient woodlands planted prior to 1600, rich in biodiversity.

An example, we say, of Environmental Vandalism!

We very much hope that this Leadership Board will indeed be "Leaders" and take the opportunity to change direction.

CPRE believes that a more sensible way forward would be to:

- **Develop a National Industrial and Housing Development Strategy which encourages a more equitable spread of development and population growth across the country.**
- **Prioritise areas that are most in need of job creation, not contribute to the overdevelopment of the already overheated South and South East**

Thank you for your time this morning.

G Sansom CPRE Bedfordshire

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