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Local people need a say in plans for ‘Britain’s Silicon Valley’

Concern over top-down approach to Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has questioned proposals to create a ‘Silicon Valley’ spanning Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford [1].

In its response to a consultation on the plans, CPRE raised concerns that the Government will be imposing major development on a large and diverse area of the country [2]. This approach contradicts the stated aim of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to make sure that local planning authorities would not be bound by ‘top-down targets’ [3].

The NIC is consulting on plans to ‘unlock growth, jobs and housing’ in the area over the next 30 years [4]. It recommends that local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and national delivery areas across the area work together across administrative borders to create a strategic plan for the area.

CPRE is supportive of strategic planning to deliver regeneration, development and new infrastructure, but argues that the process should begin with communities identifying their local needs. CPRE’s response notes that the proposed approach risks a ‘democratic deficit’, with prominent roles given to bodies that are not accountable to the electorate.

“The biggest concern is the possibility of massive ribbon development that will stretch the 120km corridor. We have already seen developer proposals for major ribbon development to the south of Milton Keynes, extending well outside the new town itself, swallowing up villages and quality agricultural land,” commented Louise Hartley, CPRE Buckinghamshire Branch Manager.

“There has been a serious lack of engagement with local communities and the voluntary sector in the NIC’s proposals to date. This needs to change going forward to ensure that the proposals align with the needs of local people and minimise damage to the countryside.”

ENDS

Notes for editors

[1] Sir John Armitt: “To succeed in the global economy, the UK must build on its strengths. The corridor connecting Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford could be Britain’s Silicon Valley.” [National](#)

[Infrastructure Commission press release](#), November 2016.

[2] The [response](#) to the NIC Paper on [Strategic Planning and Governance for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor](#) was submitted by CPRE's Oxford-Cambridge Working Group, with input from its local branches in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, and its South East and East of England regional groups.

[3] [Strategic Planning in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor](#), NIC, March 2017. (Paragraph 32)

[4] The [National Infrastructure Commission](#) (NIC) is a body set up by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to carry out independent assessments of the UK's long-term infrastructure needs. In March 2016, the Chancellor [asked the NIC](#) to 'make recommendations [to government] to maximize the potential of the Cambridge - Milton Keynes - Oxford corridor as a single, knowledge intensive cluster that competes on the global stage, whilst protecting the area's high quality environment and securing the homes and job the area needs'.

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