

Public speakers

30 October 2020

OXFORDSHIRE

G R O W T H B O A R D

Questions

1. Michael Tyce on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire

The Arc is an organisational fiction. None of us in the Arc knew we were part of an Arc until we were told we were. We still have not been told what it is that is both common to all of us and unique to the Arc that makes it an entity we have to be part of.

The Arc is a totally manufactured concept, like the Midlands Engine, the Northern Powerhouse, and the various other imaginary tribes England has been divided up amongst. Despite the advertising ours is a rural County and the Arc is not a unique home of the white heat of technology. Indeed, the area usually referred to as England's Silicon Valley is the M4 corridor of Slough, Windsor, Maidenhead, Reading, Bracknell and Newbury.

Neither is the Economic Prospectus economic. It contains scant information on income and expenditure. It promises a return on investment of £4 for each £1 invested but does not say how much should be invested or how such staggering returns would be generated, or over what kind of time scale they might be achieved. It is all stall and no merchandise. It is just a vehicle to compete against the other Engines and Powerhouses for Government money in the Spending Review Beauty Contest.

One thing is certain though, that if the Prospectus is endorsed the Arc will acquire governance and structure. Arc governance would lead to the same outcomes as Planning for the Future and the new standard method would – the withering away of local autonomy and accountability and the imposition of central decisions. That is precisely why Bucks has quit.

As a sign of things to come the prospectus has been sent to Government without your endorsement and without consulting what the public feel about an Arc overstructure to “fulfil their true economic potential to deliver transformational economic growth”. In fact, we know this is not what the public want because the just published Oxfordshire Vision tells us they want an approach that *is more Oxfordshire-specific and reflective of local people's views*.

There are motherhood and apple pie sentiments in the Prospectus on climate change and protecting the countryside of course with which no-one can disagree. But we do not need an Arc structure to implement those, nor to engage in desirable cross border spatial planning. But endorsing the Prospectus endorses the principle of the Arc as an entity and is a long stride in the direction of an Arc governance body which will make Oxfordshire development decisions and make funding agreements over your heads as well as ours: and which can only drain further power from Local Authorities and voice from the people they represent.

Now, with Bucks, which is the fulcrum of the whole edifice, deciding to go their own way, the very thing that the Oxfordshire Vision says Oxfordshire people also want, there is an

obvious point at which to reconsider whether the Arc should be endorsed. We say it should not. The Arc is an artificial construct without democratic legitimacy, or rationale. It does nothing good for us that we could not do for ourselves and it will inevitably restrict Oxfordshire's ability to move forward the way we want.

It is another top down step when we should be moving towards bottom up. For whatever reason they made it, we suggest Bucks made the right call. **We ask you not to endorse the Arc or its Prospectus because of the certainty of what will follow.**