



# Our vision

**STOP**THE**ARC**  
GROUP

# Stop the Arc Group



**Many people previously involved in promoting the Oxford-Cambridge Arc have recently declared the project dead. Instead, the original Arc leadership Group has been reformed as the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP).**

In public debate, people involved in the Partnership declare their priorities are simply to assist nature recovery, deliver biodiversity gains, to scope regional water and energy strategies, and make the area a showcase for the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. They say their plans have nothing to do with housebuilding. It all sounds very friendly.

But on its website, in its documentation, and in its secret meetings, the Partnership sets out its intention to make the region a world leader in business, to attract international trade and investment, and to double – no less – the region's economy by 2050.

Arc supporters talk much about how efficient and productive the regional economy already is. They want more. But how can you double the size of an already efficient economy without doubling the number of jobs it needs? And how can you double the number of jobs, without doubling the number of houses?

STARC has done its homework. We've checked the numbers, read the research, talked to the experts. We've examined the Partnership's claims and conduct. We conclude that the newly named Partnership is not as friendly as you might think. The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership has the same influence over planning and transport as the environment so the scope is entirely their decision.

**Until they prove otherwise, it's best to believe the OCP is nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing.**

**This document**  
 STARC says the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership's plans for the region are based on outdated build-build-build and car-dependent strategies. This document sets out six aims for national and local government policies, and actions for STARC itself, to take forward as better ways the benefit the region...

- Stop the ARC: the wrong plan in the wrong place
- Build the homes we need, not the developments they want
- Protect and enhance the natural environment
- Rethink Bedford-Cambridge railway (EWR)
- Ensure development has the necessary infrastructure
- Insist on public dialogue, not secret decision-making



## The wrong plan, in the wrong place

The Arc vision proposed growing the regional economy to an extraordinary £235 billion by 2030<sup>1</sup>

The project's supporters, through the then Arc Leadership Group, openly admitted that such growth would be driven by 1.1 million new jobs, and 1 million new homes.

There is no need for such an overwhelming amount of development. It would devastate the greenbelt, the natural environment and agricultural land that form the bedrock of residents' preferred way of life.

Confronted by overwhelming public opposition, and the withdrawal from the scheme by several key local authorities<sup>1</sup>, the Arc supporters have been forced to change their approach. Even the word 'Arc' has become toxic. The Arc Leadership Group is now

called the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership. It no longer speaks of 1.1 million jobs, or of 1 million homes. Challenged by STARC, it has even reduced its spectacular growth target to around £160 billion. But even that target cannot possibly be achieved without those 1.1 million jobs, and those 1 million new homes<sup>2</sup>.

Government support for the Arc may now have shifted from DLUHC to the new Department for Business and Trade. The government has now agreed limited funding to help the Ox-Cam Partnership take its case to market. With no money of its own, the government is keen to see the Arc built on the back of foreign investment. Egged-on by developers and landowners, the Partnership is shaping its pitch to investors from China, and the Middle East, presenting five English rural counties as ripe for picking. Even though five local authorities are not part of the project.



The 'Arc' is the concept of developing the area between Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge, which covers Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire, to create an English 'Silicon Valley'. The prospect is supported by central government, the land-owning universities, expansionist local authorities, larger housebuilders, and domestic and foreign speculators<sup>1</sup>.

The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership is a pan-regional partnership, covering five counties. But South Oxfordshire Council and Vale of White Horse Council have withdrawn. Buckinghamshire Council, Fenlands Council and East Cambridgeshire Council were never a part of the partnership. 'Pan-Regional' might be better described as 'Part-Regional'.

**What if...**

What if we could boost our nation's economy by placing new jobs and new homes where they're most wanted? What if the energy and ambition for the Arc could be channelled into true levelling-up? What if we could create the jobs we need and the homes we want, at the same time as protecting some of the country most productive agricultural land, and some of our most accessible countryside and landscapes?

**STARC says not only should we do that, we must.**

# The Economy



## THREATS

The Arc, i.e. our five counties, is not the homogenous economic powerhouse its cheerleaders claim. Investing in the Midlands and North would produce 12% greater benefits (£183 billion p.a. over current output<sup>3</sup>) than in the five counties (£163 billion p.a.<sup>3</sup>). Even the National Infrastructure Commission's consultants concluded that there is 'very limited evidence for a single knowledge-based cluster', and that the area 'appears to be made up of three or possibly four distinct economic areas'<sup>4</sup>. Misguided investment in a non-existent one-economy entity is a threat to sustainable development in the region and to levelling up in under-performing areas in the rest of the country.

Nor is the Arc the be-all and end-all of UK research that some claim. Outstanding science is undoubtedly carried out in clusters around Oxford and Cambridge<sup>5</sup>, but the future cost-effective and resource-efficient direction of research is institutional and international collaboration, not insular expansion<sup>6</sup>. To invest contrary to this momentum would be folly. Indeed, the Levelling Up White Paper<sup>7</sup> includes a policy to move government funding for research and development, particularly medical, away from the South East and the five counties.

Proponents of the Arc point to the potential to level up within this region. Their aim is clearly to extend the lead of already successful areas and hope for a trickle-down effect to the less-well off pockets, a strategy that has been discredited and dismissed<sup>8</sup>, including by Boris Johnson who said, 'The Treasury has made a catastrophic mistake in the last 40 years in thinking that you can just hope that the whole of the UK is somehow going to benefit from London and the southeast.'<sup>9</sup>

'If you care about levelling up,' said Professor Breznitz, the Munk chair of innovation studies at the University of Toronto and co-director of its Innovation Policy Lab, 'realise that this [the Silicon Valley model] is a bonanza for the very, very high skilled and the financiers. That does not offer good jobs for anyone else.' University spin-offs and start-ups 'create very little local employment' and 'are not anchors for local regional growth'.<sup>10</sup>

Only one industry possesses the characteristic of being economically greater than the sum of its parts across the five counties. This is agriculture, which accounts for over 70% of land-take<sup>11</sup>, mirroring the UK-wide proportion<sup>12</sup>. Farming is not just a food production system: it is habitat management and species conservation; provision of leisure opportunities; landscape and scenery; and carbon sink services. Arc proponents never mention this, because this is the land they want to build on.

## SOLUTIONS

- Redirect resources to levelling up the rest of the country.
- Maintain existing geographic boundaries between Local Economic Partnerships.
- Support well-paid, skilled, non-graduate employment opportunities.



Harwell Campus is an excellent example of the spurious claim that the Arc is an economic reality. Harwell Campus (south Oxfordshire) is a success because it creates links across sectors, industries and companies within it and enables those links to have worldwide connectivity. Neither of these processes has anything to do with Harwell being located within the so-called Arc.

## What if...

What if we could give new energy to every part of the five counties' mixed economy? What if we could support existing science and technology clusters, our service sectors, our logistics industry, and our food production? What if we could use our five counties to showcase a model ecosystem: a place with jobs, homes, infrastructure, services, natural environment and leisure, all in perfect and harmonious balance?

**STARC says it can be done.**



# Democracy



## THREATS

An extraordinary feature of the Arc project has been the complete absence of public meetings, and the almost total secrecy with which key decisions have been taken.

Members of the Arc Leadership Group admitted that secrecy was a part of their brief.

In response to challenges by STARC and others, the new Oxford-Cambridge Partnership has now created a website, and claimed that its meetings will all be virtual and publicly accessible, with agendas and papers published in advance. But most of the Shadow Board meetings held to date have been held in secret. The public has been able to view a recoding of one meeting.

## SOLUTIONS

- Press for all remaining local authorities across the five counties to reconsider their support for the Arc project and to follow the examples of Buckinghamshire Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Vale of White Horse Council, South Oxfordshire Council and Fenland District Council in withdrawing from the Oxford-Cambridge Partnership, previously the Arc Leadership Group.
- Publish the findings of the 2021 taxpayer-funded public consultation 'Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc spatial framework'.
- Demand the right for individuals to appeal to the Government against planning approvals.
- Hold local referendums on all developments over 1,000 houses.



## STARC's previous successes

With increasing public resistance to the ARC , the project has turned toxic for local authorities and politicians.

The government consultation in 2021<sup>13</sup> claimed that developing excessively, enhancing nature and sustaining services were all easily compatible. Even Milton Keynes Council described the consultation as misleading: 'An uninformed audience could be forgiven to think that all of the focus areas listed could be achievable simultaneously.'<sup>14</sup> The government has repeatedly refused to publish the findings of that consultation (ref). In 2022 STARC undertook a parallel consultation. Of 4,200 respondents, over 90% opposed and did not trust the concept of an Arc.

**In 2023, STARC again tested public opinion on the Arc...**



90% of respondents still opposed the Arc.



Those who think the Arc will increase inequality have risen from 53% to 75%.



Those who think food security is a concern have risen from 34% to 51%



Those who want a referendum on housing targets have risen from 65% to 72%.

## What if...

What if we could create places shaped for local people, by local people? What if we could use the locally-based planning processes we already have, to trump development diktats? What if local government at every level, across all five counties, said 'no more top-down planning'?

**STARC says that's the only way to create successful communities, able to thrive and flourish without having growth forced upon them.**

# Housing and Levelling-up



## THREATS

### Too many houses

The accepted figure from ONS for a national housing need is growth of 16% over the next 30 years<sup>15</sup>. The 1 million new houses proposed by the National Infrastructure Commission for the five counties would see the region grow by 66%<sup>16</sup>, vastly in excess of local needs.

In December 2022 the government backed away from its official target of 300,000 new houses a year. Yet there has been no change in the development visions of many local authorities and developers. 57,000 new houses are planned for Greater Cambridge, more than doubling its current size, and far in excess of the now abandoned government target. Greater Cambridge's proposed annual building rate would achieve their share of the 1 million houses by 2050.

### Houses in the wrong places

Property developers maximise profits by building on greenfield and agricultural land outside towns and villages. The resultant urban sprawl is land-costly, damaging to the environment and often lacks soul. Brownfield development<sup>17</sup> can offer high-density, appealing housing adjacent to existing infrastructure.

### The wrong houses

Established models of development have consistently failed to deliver higher density housing that is affordable, because there are no incentives for the developers to build them. Houses are being built as investments. We called for, and now welcome, the Competition and Markets Authority investigation into the failing housing market.

### Incompatibility with levelling up

The five counties are already comparatively wealthy and have full employment and high levels of foreign investment in property<sup>18</sup>. The Arc-concept of channelling finance, planning incentives and government support into the region is self-evidently incompatible with levelling up. Cambridge City Council is allowing as many as 25% of homes on its jointly owned developments to be purchased by overseas investors<sup>19</sup>.

Supporting excessive growth in the five counties not only contradicts levelling up, but most of the proposed development would be on greenfield (often greenbelt) sites.

The National Planning Policy Framework<sup>20</sup> includes 'a presumption in favour of sustainable development.' This means in practise that a proposal is assumed to be sustainable unless proved otherwise. Developers, aided by planning inspectors, have taken advantage of this to force through unsustainable projects.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecast in 2018<sup>21</sup> that Buckinghamshire would need 22,533 new houses by 2040, yet the Unitary Authority is planning for 55,000 – an excess of 32,400 – to be built, having calculated this 'Local Housing Need' by following government directives.

**The Oxford-Cambridge Partnership admits it has no spatial strategy. Without such a strategy, and without central government support, widespread housebuilding can only worsen the existing inadequacies that beset the region's healthcare, education and transport.**

**To solve the problem, the government may use the coming Levelling Up legislation to drive a spatial strategy, in a return to top-down planning.**

## SOLUTIONS

- Insist local housing needs are based on the latest ONS data and levelling-up policies.
- Replace the 'presumption' that planning applications are sustainable with a presumption that they are unsustainable unless proved otherwise.
- Mandate eco-friendly, less car-dependent housing to higher densities. Maximise use of brownfield sites.
- Build 10,000 social homes every year across the five counties.
- Ban developers from reducing agreed proportions of affordable homes because they claim they are no longer viable.
- Pursue a judicial review, with other groups, of house-building targets.

Broken Homes: Britain's Housing Crisis: Faults, Factoids and Fixes<sup>22</sup>, dissects Britain's broken housing market. The authors evidence decades of failed attempts by the state to boost supply and show how the current model of housebuilding does not reduce the price of new houses, nor build enough affordable or social housing.



## What if...

What if we had enough homes, at prices young people could afford to rent or buy? What if those homes were built where they were most needed?

**STARC says we must build enough of the right kind of homes, in the right places, and we must start now.**

# Services



One-million new houses in the five counties is equivalent to building nine towns the size of Milton Keynes, or more than 17 Oxfords or 18 Cambridges. It has taken 50 years to grow the one Milton Keynes to its present-day size, yet development of the Arc is scheduled to take half that time.

## THREATS

### Water and Sewage

There is not enough water for the massive developments proposed. All existing water sources in the region are already at capacity and some estimates put the demand for water in England exceeding supply by up to 3.1 billion litres per day by the 2050s<sup>23</sup>. Already in Cambridge, the Chilterns and elsewhere, chalk streams are failing due to over-extraction.

Last year saw the driest, hottest conditions ever in our region, resulting in Thames Water instigating a hosepipe ban and Anglian pumping water from boreholes into rivers. The heavy autumn and winter rainfall exacerbated the long-standing problem of raw sewage spills from inadequate treatment plants into watercourses.

The water industry is pressing Government to 'streamline the planning process' to facilitate the construction of new reservoirs in Oxfordshire, the Fens and South Lincolnshire to cope with the Arc, and Greater Cambridge is calling for desalination plants. The reservoirs would result in the loss of over 17km<sup>2</sup> of productive farmland and blight numerous villages. In addition, a proposed Severn-to-Thames transfer would redirect water from Lake Vyrnwy in Wales, reducing the resilience of Manchester and Liverpool to droughts.

Raw sewage spills into watercourses from already over-burdened treatment plants will worsen as more homes and roadways are connected to the sewer network. Expanded and additional treatment plants would see the loss of yet more greenfield areas.

The leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, Bridget Smith, claimed recently that the next Local Plan to 2041 was undeliverable without additional water supplies. Beyond then, several desalination plants are needed. Current water and sewage systems cannot sustain current development. So why further expand the Arc with destructive and unsustainable reservoirs, plants and pipelines?

### Health

Provision of health services, especially GP surgeries, has persistently failed to match large-scale housing development. Nine new Milton Keynes will each require completely new district general hospitals at a cost of at least £680m (2020) plus VAT, fees and equipment. The existing plan is for only two partial new-builds for all of the five counties: a new women and children's hospital in Milton Keynes and a new cancer hospital at Addenbrooke's<sup>24</sup>.

Of the 40 new hospitals promised in 2020, only seven have been started. Only one will be completed by 2025.

### Education

Nine new Milton Keynes will need about 1,000 new schools across the five counties by 2050, yet there is a consistent failure to prove the investment required. In 2023 it will have taken 14 years since the initial approval for Milton Keynes to open a single new primary school (at Calverton Green). In Cambridgeshire, despite a record increase in the schools' budget '... there's still a long way to go until Cambridgeshire is fairly funded'<sup>25</sup>. In the Northampton area, secondary schools are overcrowded but the Local Authority has no capital allocation to build a new school. Where are the 1,000 new schools going to come from?

## SOLUTIONS

- Increase the powers of the Environment Agency and Ofwat to veto or modify plans that threaten sustainable water supplies, sewage treatment capacity, water-course quality, or that increase flood risks. Cover flood damage in new-build house guarantees.
- Remove the automatic right of developers and highway authorities to connect to sewers .
- Make water companies statutory consultees on planning applications, not just local plans.
- Refuse all planning applications without full provision for health, education, transport, water/ sewage and leisure services.



## What if...

What if we could create communities that had all the services they need, on their doorsteps: the schools, the doctors' surgeries, the hospitals, all close to hand? What if those communities had the water and sewage facilities they need, without risk to the environment or other communities? What if we could live without fear of flooding.

**STARC says these should be rights, not pipedreams.**

# Transport



## THREATS

### Rail

The government has confirmed its support for the East-West Railway (EWR) extension from Bedford to Cambridge, at a cost of £5 billion. The average UK railway needs huge financial support<sup>26</sup>. East-West Rail will be a below-average railway, because it connects no large cities, and competes poorly with road travel on cost and journey times. The government is supporting the link to Cambridge, hoping it will enable more high-salary jobs, and thus more tax receipts. But job-creation means large-scale housing developments. Around the new stations at Cambourne and Tempsford, for example, 50,000 new houses have been predicted.

East-West Rail will run for an indefinite period with diesel trains, which is incompatible with carbon neutrality and the green agenda.

OCP have not invited EWR to join their organisation, despite the railway being the biggest infrastructure project with the largest budget for environmental repair in the Arc. This appears to be because, while the Chair of OCP has said its project has nothing to do with housing, EWR have confirmed that a key part of their business is indeed based on significant additional houses – 95,000 in total, but over 95% will be for road users.

### Roads

The Government's Road Investment Strategies (to take effect from 2025) are being informed by England's Economic Heartland (the sub-national transport body for the region) which says, 'The Government has scrapped the Oxford – Milton Keynes Expressway. However there remains a need

to invest in our existing road network if we are to enable new housing and economic growth to be delivered.' From Swindon to Peterborough, via Oxford and Milton Keynes, EEH's ambitions include 'a seamless integrated network with transport users at its heart'. Building new roads encourages more vehicles, including freight, onto roads for longer distances and discourages a shift to other forms of transport. Allowing developers to build on out-of-town greenfield sites will further increase car-use, congestion and pollution.

According to some, we have already reached 'peak car'<sup>27</sup>. Continuing to encourage car-use risks the success of the progression towards fewer cars, such as the '15-minute neighbourhood' model<sup>28</sup> and the Greater Cambridge Greenways network<sup>29</sup> (right).

### Bus Services

Bus services in many rural areas are infrequent, or non-existent, which discourages people from leaving their cars at home. Those without a car find travel and connectivity unreliable, time-consuming and stressful. Developing the five counties as proposed will not solve these problems.

### Walking and Cycling

Active travel is the healthiest and most environmentally friendly mode of travel, but is often second-best to cars because of distances and time factors. The dispersed pattern of development proposed for the Arc, encouraging out-of-town greenfield developments and longer distance travel, is not conducive to walking and cycling.

## SOLUTIONS

- Demand immediate publication of the business case for the Bedford-to-Cambridge section of East-West Rail. Electrify the service from day one.
- Increase rail freight capacity.
- Undertake feasibility studies for the electrification of East-West Rail.
- Undertake feasibility studies for reopening abandoned rail lines, e.g. Cowley.
- Make public transport affordable and coordinated. Minimise road investment except for safety improvements and environmental benefits.
- Implement the CPRE recommendation for a minimum hourly bus service for all rural communities.



Greater Cambridge Greenways, a good example of a project to encourage active travel, is a network of 12 off-road pathways into the city centre. There is also a new cycleway connecting the north of the city to the south: again, without going on roads.



## What if...

What if people in new communities had all that they need for daily life within a fifteen-minute walk? What if they could make longer trips easily by bicycle, or bus or tram? What if they could reach almost anywhere in the country by electric train, without having to go to London first?

**STARC says these aims are widely shared. But we can no longer delay turning these good intentions into real practical actions.**



Consultation for Oxfordshire County Council's most-expensive biggest-ever road building project has now closed. On the route of the now-dead Ox-Cam Expressway between Milton and Clifton Hampden, CPRE has described the new arterial road as the beginning of 'the Expressway by stealth'.

# Countryside, leisure, agriculture



The five counties host some of England's most attractive and productive countryside, including farmland for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, but the development needed to support the Arc's growth ambitions will dramatically reduce our natural environment. Housebuilding, places of work, community infrastructure and road networks will obliterate some 100,000 hectares (almost 250,000 acres) of land currently in use for productive agriculture and public spaces<sup>30</sup>.

## THREATS

### Countryside

The 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>31</sup> (see box under Housing and Levelling up) means that under many circumstances, a development proposal is assumed to be sustainable unless proved otherwise.

The NPPF mitigation hierarchy<sup>32</sup>, which claims to prioritise the avoidance of harm to biodiversity (avoid, mitigate, compensate, refuse) is merely a gesture. It is not adequately enforced. The 'Environmental Principles' propounded by the Arc Environment Group<sup>33</sup> are little more than aspirations. There is no action plan, road map, or strategic assessments for the environment or the economy. They have been adopted or endorsed by all five-county local authorities, but there is no evidence that any development has been curtailed or modified by these principles. South Cambridgeshire Council has said "As high level principles endorsed by the Council, in themselves the Arc Environment Principles have little planning weight, and as such we do not consider that it would be appropriate or practicable to try to assess applications against the Principles in addition to the existing policy framework." They are so nebulous they cannot even be labelled as greenwashing.

Government policy promotes the idea that it is beneficial to destroy biodiversity on one site as long

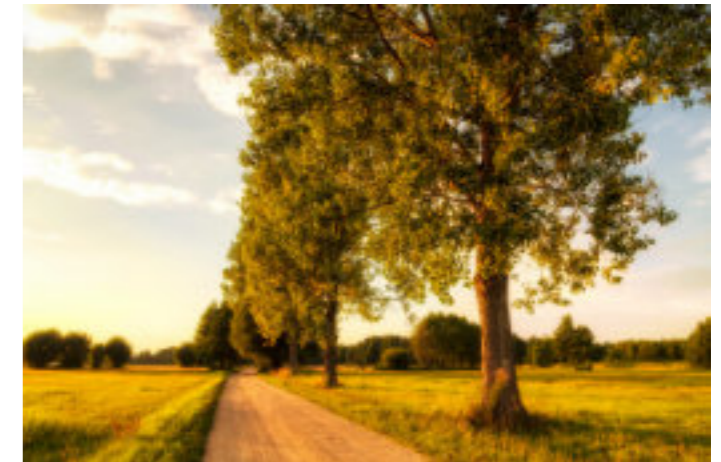


as it is enhanced 'to a greater extent' elsewhere, even if the habitats and species are very different. In other words, destroying a protected wetland in Oxfordshire to build a sports arena could be approved if some trees are planted in Bedfordshire.

This policy is part of the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy (BNG)<sup>34</sup>. An algorithm estimates the pre- and post-development biodiversity of a site, plus the value of any compensatory enhancements elsewhere and, providing there is a 'net gain' in biodiversity of just 10%, the proposed development is deemed to be environmentally acceptable.

More sinister is the introduction of 'biodiversity units' that value biodiversity in monetary terms rather than as unique living beings, dragging the natural world into the market-based economy so that it can be traded to facilitate even more development. In other words, BNG encourages the destruction of nature by trading present-day losses for uncertain future gains. For example, 850,000

**Current brownfield availability stands at 21,566 sites covering 26,256 hectares, sufficient for 1.3 million houses. Although such sites are available across all regions, they are prevalent in the North West, Yorkshire, Humber and West Midlands<sup>17</sup>.**



trees were planted, at taxpayer cost, to offset the environmental damage caused by the A14 upgrade in Cambridgeshire. 500,000 of them died. The taxpayer will meet the additional £2.9m cost of replacing them<sup>35</sup>.

Formulating the strategy and metric involved an unacceptable degree of subjectivity, and with ecology consultants being hired and paid for by developers ('he who pays the piper calls the tune'), land can too easily be assessed as being nature-depleted and ripe for development<sup>36</sup>.

Scientists and academics have shown that BNG is, at best, unproven. Despite two-thirds of the world's biodiversity offsets being applied in forested ecosystems, none of the study areas demonstrated successful outcomes for forested habitats or species<sup>37</sup>. Even when gains can be established, they 'fall within a governance gap whereby they risk being unenforceable'.<sup>38</sup> The conclusion is that BNG as it stands is 'gameable' and not fit for purpose.

## What if...

What if the cost of food had greater protection from the effects of politics, economics, climate and wars in far-away countries? We could plan and budget with greater certainty, support our domestic economy, and reduce the carbon cost of our daily food.

**STARC says all this is possible, if we simply revalue our productive landscape, and reinstate food security as a national priority.**





### Agriculture

In 2020, 71% of UK land was dedicated to agricultural production. All the region's agriculture faces a number of long and short-term risks, including soil degradation, drought and flooding, diseases, risks to fuel and fertiliser supplies, and changing labour markets. In the long term, climate change impacts are likely to have a negative effect on the proportion of high-grade arable farmland in the UK.

In 1988, the UK produced two-thirds of all the food it consumed. In 2021, the figure had fallen to 58%. In 2021 the Government's Food Security Report maintained that all was well; that responsibility for food security lies with the private sector, and the government's role is merely to support and enable.

The area of land that would be taken by development in the Arc is equivalent to around 1,100 average-size English farms<sup>39</sup>. The loss of agricultural land will obviously lead to a significant reduction in food production and supply-chain employment<sup>40</sup>. This conflicts with all green agendas and sustainability considerations.

Even without the threat posed by the Arc, the industry is struggling. Measures to stimulate good environmental husbandry through agriculture so far offer unattractive returns. The economics of the emerging schemes are likely to fall short of providing adequate support for productive agriculture, and will be insufficient to deliver significant positive impacts for the natural environment, further damaging farmland<sup>41</sup>.

### Leisure

Open spaces are of unique value to leisure and well-being<sup>42</sup>. Large scale open landscapes offer a necessary respite from modern urban environments, and leisure activities in the countryside are a positive contrast to those in towns and cities – witness the popularity of such open spaces as our National Parks, Country Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trust estates.

The Arc directly threatens our countryside and other open spaces, so is a threat to our leisure activities, health and wellbeing. Too many developments sacrifice green spaces for more roads and car parking and fail to plan for easy walking and cycling access to the open countryside, marooning new communities. Uninterrupted views, tranquillity, and night skies unpolluted by urban light are as threatened as our climate and biodiversity.

The Government's 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment<sup>43</sup> emphasises the need to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing as a key goal. The Plan says, 'Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together.' However, the national planning rulebook – the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>44</sup> – does not reflect the 25 Year Plan which, to all intents and purposes, makes it ineffective.



## SOLUTIONS

- Strictly invoke the NPPF biodiversity mitigation hierarchy.
- Demand that Defra fundamentally overhauls the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy to: mandate like-for-like habitat replacements and enhancements; increase the net-gain percentage and disallow commercial exemptions; introduce an appeals process to challenge 'dubious' ecology assessments; impose effective governance and accountability.
- Prioritise identification, protection and enhancement of wildlife areas.
- Reduce the threshold for Environmental Impact Assessments from 150 homes<sup>54</sup> to 10 (i.e. for major developments as defined by the NPPF).
- Strengthen environmental provisions in the NPPF in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan through Planning Policy Guidance notes and/or written ministerial statements.
- Hold government to its pledge to set food security targets, and apply a statutory duty to report on annual food production levels.

## What if...

What if attractive, productive landscape could be truly protected from development? We could reverse the decline in food security, ensure a green countryside was within easy reach of everyone, accelerate progress towards Net Zero, and enhance our collective well-being.

**STARC says we can do this - with a first step that condemns commercial trade in notional values of plant and animal life.**

# Climate change



## THREATS

Development of the five counties on the scale proposed is incompatible with carbon neutrality and local and national decarbonising targets.

UK housing stock emits excessive carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) during manufacture and construction; 1 million new houses will only add to the problem. Housing insulation is poor and development continues across the five counties without adequate provision for low-carbon heating or high-level insulation.

England's Economic Heartland – the transport authority for the region including the five counties – says transport carbon emissions per capita, between Oxford and Milton Keynes, are already higher than the national average. In the Oxford-Northampton-Peterborough corridor, total carbon emissions per capita account for two-thirds of all carbon emission across the entire EEH region.

Air quality is so poor in some parts of the Arc that Air Quality Management Areas have been formed not just in its cities, but also in its towns and villages.

EEH says 'even with viable sustainable transport options being made available, the region will continue to have a majority of its trips made by road.'

Local authorities such as Oxford and Cambridge have set targets that require substantial reductions in car journeys. Such aspirations are incompatible with sprawling development on the scale contemplated for the Arc.

## SOLUTIONS

- Require all new houses to be low-carbon via a Code for Sustainable Homes level 6 or equivalent, and retro-fit existing housing stock to reduce carbon emissions.
- Minimise new roads and road 'improvements', increase investment in public transport, and add safe cycling and walking routes to reduce car-use by up to 60% by 2050.
- Refuse proposals for new developments without adequate sustainable travel options.
- Support renewable energy production across the five counties without the loss of productive agricultural land, and improve distribution to meet increased green energy production.
- Require Local Authority Plans to promote natural carbon sinks, such as trees and floodplain meadows, and disinvest from high-carbon technologies.

## What if...

What if we could play a real part in protecting and preserving our climate for our children and grandchildren? What if we really could help to halt, even reverse, the damage being done to our planet by our carbon emissions?

**STARC says it is in our power to do those things. If planners and developers insist on negotiating their way around and out of their decarbonising responsibilities, it is up to us to make them change.**

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## The 2023 Elections

**In the local elections STARC drew voters' attention to those Council Leaders who participate in the Arc Leadership Group or Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) , irrespective of their political leaning.**

The LibDem mayor of Bedford, a supporter of the most damaging option for East West Rail, lost to his Conservative opponent. The outspoken Chairman of the Shadow Board has been ejected by the voters of Cherwell. Central Beds' largest group is now the Independents.

In a wide field in the Mid-Beds by-election, no candidate dared challenge the big issue of the Arc. Except Labour candidate Alistair Strathern who took winning votes by questioning his own party's proposals for 'building big' and stating he will oppose development without infrastructure.

**The OCP's plan, and that for the East West Rail Bedford-Cambridge link are mutually dependent, each justifying the other, without any proven foundation.**

**Pressing ahead in spite of demands for sight of a business case, EWR is now the subject of an NAO investigation. The investigation also covers the changed context post covid and incoherent cross-government decisions. There are now three separate plans for the same jobs in Cambridge.**

Stop the Arc Group is a non-political community group. The group actively campaigns against the threat of over-development posed to five rural counties by the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Arc. STARC supports other organisations with the same objectives.

Our environment is a national asset which should be protected for all of us, our health and well-being. We support new housing of the right kind and in the right location, but ambitions for the Arc will depend on proposed growth in Oxfordshire of more than 100%, of 66% in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, of 74% in Northamptonshire and 81% in Cambridgeshire.



We will fight to protect our countryside and its wildlife for the health and enjoyment of all future generations, and strive to educate people about the threats to our countryside posed by the proposed Ox-Cam Arc developments.

We believe we are strongest when we share information and work with other groups, and that local groups are most effective at mobilising their local communities. We have strong links with groups and Parish Councils from Oxford to Cambridge. We share information and engage with CPRE, BBOWT, RSPB and the Buckinghamshire Environment Action Group (BEAG) and others.

# STOP THE ARC GROUP

[www.stopthearc.org](http://www.stopthearc.org)

Contact [stopthearc@gmail.com](mailto:stopthearc@gmail.com)

 Stop The Arc Group  
 @no\_expressway

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