

Oxfordshire Strategic Vision Consultation

Consultation response, by Planning Oxfordshire's
Environment and Transport Sustainably (POETS)

January 2021

POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) is a group of senior planning, environment and transport professionals and academics focussed primarily on planning and transport in Oxfordshire.

For more information go to www.poetsplanningoxon.uk

1. This is a very brief response to your consultation.
2. We are pleased that you are looking across the County – and with a long-term view to 2050.
3. We welcome many of the aspirations you set out.
4. However, we are very disappointed with the overall approach. POETS believes it reads more like a public relations pitch rather than a serious attempt to address the many problems that are piling up on Oxfordshire. In the real world, choices have to be made.
5. The first – and frankly risible - claim that ‘we will be the first generation to leave Oxfordshire’s natural environment in a better state than that in which we found it’ rather sets the tone of much of the rest.
6. POETS has produced a range of papers and responses on issues which need to be confronted in the County. These include ‘A Vision for Oxfordshire’ (April 2020) <https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-a-vision-for-oxfordshire-050420.pdf> and a ‘Democratic Deficit report’ (December 2019) https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets_democratic_deficit_report_081219.pdf (for which an update is in preparation). The issues in these and other papers are complex, but are not properly addressed in your consultations so far.
7. For instance, we have a climate emergency, current pandemic and public health crises, huge inequalities within Oxfordshire and between regions - underlain by a lack of accountability for decision making, locally and nationally. Currently, we have housing proposals poorly matched to real need or zero carbon imperatives, together with transport practice still stuck in the last millennium and divorced from stated policy and funding, yet with unfillable gaps in the infrastructure (in its widest sense) supporting it.
8. It is simply not tenable for you to assert a nebulous concept of ‘good growth’ ie that by implication there is a magic algorithm by which economic growth can trump or mitigate other outcomes. The concept is disingenuous; growth comes with downsides – here, not least because government uses its fiscal controls to coerce more development than Oxfordshire needs or can sensibly accommodate.
9. We hope that you will be more transparent in setting out the real choices that have to be made, and begin to address the real challenges that face Oxfordshire; not least the issues that we have raised in our range of papers.
10. We note that your recent ‘Open Thought’ engagement attracted only 300 responses (and from only 117 organisations or individuals). That suggests an urgent need to rethink how you engage. The recent citizens’ assemblies on climate change reporting at national level to six Parliamentary select committees and at local level to Oxford City Council might be a more fruitful way forward. This applies particularly in terms of engaging more young people who will constitute a large proportion of those most affected by the policies being considered now.
11. In passing we should mention that the ‘drop down’ format of this current consultation probably doesn’t help achieve an integrated approach, and that the rigid pro-forma questionnaire positively discourages it.
12. We look forward to you addressing the POETS Papers; we are of course willing to engage with you across a table when conditions allow, or virtually if they don’t.