**LEICESTER & LEICESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN: SOME QUESTIONS**

**CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) Leicestershire**

<http://www.cpreleicestershire.org.uk/>

**Public meeting**

**Great Glen Village hall**

**20 February 2018**

The response deadline is **5 April 2018**. Everyone is urged to respond and to encourage others e.g. local councils, MPs. CPRE’s response will be published on its website.

The plan

<http://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/the-plan/stage-two/draft-plan/>

Exhibitions

<http://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/the-plan/stage-two/draft-plan/consultation-events/>

Response form

<http://www.llstrategicgrowthplan.org.uk/the-plan/stage-two/how-to-comment/>

Email

strategic.growthplan@leics.gov.uk

The Partnership

<https://www.llep.org.uk/about-us/governance-of-the-llep/>

**Present** 60 members of the public [approx.]

**Speakers**

Richard Windley, Chair, CPRE Leicestershire

Tony Stott, Acting Chair, CPRE East Mids Region; Editor, CPRE Leics Newsletter & website

Paul Miner, Planning Campaigns Manager, CPRE HQ

Gerald Kells, Consultant to CPRE Leicestershire

Simon Galton, County Councillor, Launde division & Chair, Leics CC Scrutiny Commission

**Purpose**

To explain the ideas and processes behind the plan; and to take questions. A background paper supplied in advance and on the day [*Appendix* 1] outlined:

* the plan and its creators;
* why it matters;
* its proposals;
* actions planned by CPRE Leicestershire; and
* the group’s concerns;
* actions for the public

**Introduction**

Richard Windley welcomed attendees and explained that CPRE is a volunteer organisation that aims to

* promote and enhance Leicestershire countryside;
* achieve a more sustainable approach to any development; and
* defend the countryside against inappropriate felons.

**Key points from the meeting**

CPRE should challenge

* demographic and housing figures
* documentation on transport plans, landscape, environment
* consultation processes
* the case for a new road
* belief that countryside is a constraint rather than an asset
* the fact that the plan is a choice

**CPRE concerns – Tony Stott**

1. It is publicised as a long-term, high-level plan to 2050 – a framework for county district Local Development Plans to follow. It claims to be driven by national and regional policy, but is effectively a bidding document aiming to shape areas of the county. It appears to consider that there is an inexhaustible supply of countryside to build on.
2. Its focus is narrow, unbalanced and based on economic development, road building and greenfield land development.
3. Key documents are not available e.g. transport assessments, and issues of tranquillity, landscape, climate change, where housing development might fit in the countryside, or future pollution levels. There is nothing on the environment, historical assets, nature nor a strategy for enhancing green infrastructure. Even the exact route of the proposed Eastern by-pass is not provided, or its impact on the A46 and local roads.
4. It does not address what is viewed as valued countryside e.g. High Leicestershire. The county has no *designated* green belts or areas of outstanding natural beauty – all of the county countryside is therefore vulnerable.
5. The growth plan process has offered limited opportunities for consultation. An examination in public with an inspector was rejected as too expensive. CPRE sent a paper to the County Scrutiny Commission but feel that ‘consultation’ might be a tick box exercise. Views need to be expressed.

**Strategic plans – Paul Miner**

1. Nationally, CPRE examines and comments on strategic plans like this one. There are similar challenges in other plans.
2. There is an undue emphasis on the 5-year supply of housing policy, which leaves villages under siege. Actions considered by Government include allowing local planning authorities to limit planning permissions to one year so as to get development done, but would remain under pressure to get enough affordable housing built.
3. Housing number targets are hard to predict – there are efforts to develop a consistent formula for this, which could help to reduce challenges to the numbers from developers, and the number of their appeals against planning decisions.
4. Recent public criticism of big builders’ profits and practices are being heard e.g. on land banking. There are now 20% more un-developed sites with planning permission than existed 10 years ago. Housing cannot be left to big builders alone. There is some evidence that the tide is turning.
5. The plan is not statutory. Therefore, it should be properly assessed by a sustainability appraisal – this is a debate being held in other parts of the country e.g. the Mayor in greater Manchester has criticised housing figures for his region and is focused on regeneration and using brownfield land before green fields.
6. The Leicestershire plan is really a bidding document. The panel wants a new road to relieve city congestion. Roads are very expensive and trunk roads are funded nationally. It is not clear what the benefits would be here. It is not clear what the alternatives might be e.g. railway electrification was seen as a priority within the county, but rejected by Government.
7. Government is however looking at the wider picture e.g. Michael Gove has commissioned a 25-year environmental plan that will include a review of protected landscapes <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

[NB: Leicestershire has none of these].

**CPRE’s response – Gerald Kells**

1. Government and other demographic forecasts are wrong. These need to be challenged. In 35 years how do we know how many people are likely to come into the country? The best way
2. The economics are also wrong. These too need to be challenged.
3. Leicester City says it has no more housing land. Challenge this – anticipate changes e.g. to retail.
4. The proposed road is being promoted as a road to deliver housing and reduce A46 to M1 traffic, but housing will fill up the road with local traffic. There is no plan for public transport. it is therefore not sustainable. Without a transport assessment before the consultation ends, there is no opportunity to study what happens when people leave the proposed new road. The alternative is to concentrate housing where it is sustainable. There are two audiences for these arguments – the local authorities and the Department for Transport, and the latter needs to be aware of local concerns.
5. Logistics quoted are based on earlier studies and some development has already been done, so the 470 hectares cited in the plan is actually only 268. Areas like High Leicestershire are not constraints but assets.

**A local perspective – Simon Galton**

1. For 40 years local plans have recognised the problem of a lack of infrastructure e.g. access to the M1. This plan turns everything on its head by citing very high housing figures that its authors consider will make the proposed road essential. It is a choice not a strategy. The duty to co-operate means that housing targets have to be shared around the districts, doubling some in size.
2. The Midlands Engine sees the plan as a way to create a bypass for the Birmingham box. However, this is not in the gift of either Leicester or Leicestershire councils. A new road requires Government approval and funding. Therefore, the proposed Eastern bypass would have to compete with other proposed schemes across the UK, and might lose. If so, the area could end up with the higher housing figures but not the road.

**Points from the floor**

1. The proposed road route is not clear
2. Its technical status is not clear – will it be a true expressway with local roads crossing under or over it; how many lanes will it have; will there be any real benefits from it to balance costs; who will gain from it; will congestion reduce or increase – there is no evidence that a new route does anything other than generate more journeys, more traffic, more congestion down the line.
3. Pressure is from the city, which doesn’t want the housing but the commercial business generated by the road.
4. How likely is it that the plan will be supported by all of the district councils e.g. if one uses its veto?
5. City development includes e.g. student housing blocks that lie empty – why was the money spent on these?
6. Paradox is that some districts are keen to have the road so they can grow, whilst others would prefer not to have the road because of its impact on the countryside.
7. Is there another opportunity to be consulted when the missing documents are made available?