

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report September 2021

Major planning issues currently loom large on the Council agenda, with consultations on the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the Oxfordshire 2050 plan, and the Cherwell 2040 Local Plan. All of these have large-scale implications for Kidlington and its surroundings.

The Arc, readers will remember, is the major government economic development scheme for the counties stretching from Oxford to Cambridge, originally associated with the apparently defunct East-West Expressway. The present consultation (<https://placebuilder.io/futureofthearc/>) is vague about numbers, but those previously associated with the scheme envisaged a million new dwellings across the counties, and doubling the population of Oxfordshire. The Council is by no means against growth, but we believe growth on the scale apparently envisaged for this region is incompatible with national levelling-up policies, and does not take sufficient account of a number of other critical factors: changing work conditions post-Covid, the potential of IT, the already excessive pressure on transport infrastructure, the need to protect the environment and the Green Belt, the challenge of the climate emergency.

Many of these objections also apply to the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan (<https://oxfordshireplan.org/>), which is strongly growth-led. We would like to see greater emphasis on social, economic and environmental well-being as much as on growth. We are concerned about the continuing threat to the Green Belt posed by Oxford City's unmet housing need. We would like to see stronger provision for affordable housing, and more attention to the problems of traffic congestion.

The Cherwell 2040 plan (<https://letstalk.cherwell.gov.uk/>) poses a number of significant questions specifically about Kidlington. The answers are not all clear cut. Do we need a policy to control the redevelopment of houses or plots into flats? There are arguments against this, but it may be a price for preserving the Green Belt around us. Do we want a Green Belt review to accommodate employment as opposed to housing needs? Given low unemployment in the area, we might want to say no to this. Do we want to prevent the conversion of village centre retail and leisure premises to housing? Perhaps within limits: more residents in the centre would also increase business activity.

On two questions the Council has long-held views. Do we want to maintain and protect the existing village centre? Yes, but we also need more: a clearer and stronger design framework for planning that will help to make the centre an even better place. Do we want to investigate expanding the centre to include Exeter Close? Again, yes. We are planning an extensive redevelopment of Exeter Close to include a new civic centre, and probably commercial premises as well. We also want the Oxford Road at this point to become less of a road and more an extension of the High Street, with enhanced shopping and other facilities, and a 20-mph speed limit: compare the London Road in the centre of Headington.

The Cherwell consultation does not include an option for further housing development on the Green Belt around Kidlington, but that does not mean that it will not happen: it is a matter for the Oxfordshire plan.

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