



Oxford Green Belt Network

**Chairman: Michael Tyce,
e-mail: chairman@oxfordgreenbelt.net**

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Amy Tulloch
Cabinet Office
By E-Mail

Dear Amy Tulloch

CONCERNS RE OXFORD CITY DEAL

The Oxford Green Belt Network exists to protect the whole of the Green Belt around Oxford to ensure that it continues to perform its functions of preserving the setting of the City, and the character of the surrounding land and individual settlements. The Green Belt performs an important “quality of life” function, but is also a key economic driver in that the character and setting of Oxford, and its surrounding villages, is an important incentive for high value businesses, their owners and staff.

The “City Deal” proposal involves creating a “Greater Oxford” City Region spreading out widely beyond the City’s administrative borders, and encompasses the whole of the Green Belt.

In a City Deal the Government provides funding and enhanced decision making powers with the aim that development will be exponentially increased, and of empowering local communities.

We are concerned that the proposed governance for the Oxford City Deal will in fact disempower local communities; and that inappropriate development will occur without democratic control, harmful to the Green Belt and the wider countryside.

1. The governance proposal is to create a Board consisting of the City and the University (who as major landowners in the Green Belt and beyond might certainly be considered to have a direct interest), other major players within the City, and the various District Councils whose land would be within the “City Region”.

This (unelected) Board will have “*the power to take binding decisions across the (elected) Local Authorities*”. Although the Local Authorities are represented on the Board they would be outnumbered by the City and the other members, both individually and as a whole.

This amounts to passing control of a large swathe of Oxfordshire, and its residents, from the control of elected Councils to an unelected and unaccountable “quango”, thereby disempowering local communities.

There has been no public consultation, or even awareness, of this scheme, despite it apparently having been worked on for months prior to its submission to Government. Neither is it apparent that there has been any formal consultation with the various Councils own Committees on the transfer of powers involved.

Consequently, on the face of it, large parts of Oxfordshire are to find themselves moving from governance by an elected Council to governance by the Board, and democratic rights removed or at least impaired, with no opportunity to make views known.

The transfers of powers and accountability apparently intended should not occur without formal and binding consultation with and approval by the residents concerned, and formal approval by Full Council of each of the Authorities concerned.

2. The City Deal refers to a considerable amount of development which is not at the moment in any approved or emerging core strategies – extension of science parks, another 8000 houses and so on - and infers a great deal more. It is not clear how this would be progressed. In the normal way applications would be made to, and determined by, relevant Local Authorities with full public involvement, and full powers of permission or refusal.

Here the development proposals would effectively be made by a City Deal Board which itself would have the power to “*take binding decisions across Local Authorities*”. It is not clear whether the public would have any say in these developments at all, which on the face of it could be decided by a majority vote of the Board, even if the relevant Local Authority was strongly opposed.

It should be made explicit that all developments will continue to be applied for to the relevant Local Authority and determined by that Authority alone.

3. The document does not mention the Green Belt at all even though the Green Belt comprises a large part of the land area of the extended City Region and is (or should be) a major constraint. This is a major omission in a document to Government. Further the City Deal proposes developments, such as extending the Magdalen Science Park, which could only be into the Green Belt, without mentioning the Green Belt constraints reconfirmed in the National Planning Policy Framework. This is a matter of concern, not least because the City’s ambitions to extend across Green Belt land outside its control are well known and documented.

It should be made explicit that there is no intention, or license, to review the Green Belt beyond the very limited reviews already in the City’s and other relevant core strategies, or, if there is such an intention, to define exactly what that intention is, and provide assurances that it would be subject to a Public Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Tyce
Chairman Oxford Green Belt Network.