

Statement of OXFORD GREEN BELT NETWORK

For Matter 4, EMPLOYMENT, on Friday 17 July

Soundness

The Oxford Green Belt Network does not dispute Oxford's potential for economic growth and does not wish to see this harmed, but we feel bound to question whether the anticipated growth can be accommodated in Oxford. The emphasis we suggest should be shifted to economic prosperity and not growth for its own sake as appears to be the underlying philosophy of the Strategy.

Attention is rightly drawn in the Core Strategy to the city's leading role in science and knowledge-based industries, in manufacturing (BMW), education, health services, and as a regional and tourist focus. Over many years, successive plans for Oxford have recognized the need to divert some spin-off growth from these activities to other centres (e.g. the County's Country Towns Policy) thereby reducing the jobs/homes imbalance and at the same time limiting pressure on the historic environment. But we can find little recognition in the Core Strategy of the need to look at economic planning in this wider spatial context.

Our fear is that unless the employment situation is viewed in this broader context there will be continuing and unacceptable pressure on land, housing, roads and services in the city to the detriment of its built and natural environment, including the Green Belt. We would draw attention to the Strategy's "Key Challenge: protecting the built and natural environment" which acknowledges that development is able to prejudice the quality of this environment and that growth should respect the capacity of the city to absorb change if the city's character is not to be harmed. It is an old cliché, but the danger is one of trying to fit a quart into a pint pot.

The Questions

Balance between homes and jobs (1)

An imbalance between homes and jobs, i.e. a measure of inward commuting, is always likely to exist in the case of a county town such as Oxford which occupies such a dominant position within Oxfordshire. Policy should therefore include strategies aimed at diverting economic growth that does not need to be in Oxford to science and business parks and to urban centres beyond the Green Belt.

Land requirements and supply (2 & 3)

We have to question whether all the city anticipates can be accommodated without additional, and unacceptable, pressure on open spaces including the Green Belt.

Tourist trade (4)

There seems to be little analysis of the actual contribution the tourist trade makes and the policy aims are expressed in very general terms.