



Buckinghamshire Growth Board
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
economicgrowth.regen@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
By e-mail only

1 October 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Strategic Vision for Buckinghamshire to 2050 – September 2021
Chiltern Society Comments**

The Chiltern Society has been forwarded a copy of your draft Strategic Vision Statement by a colleague, and we have been told that it is out for consultation until 1 October 2021. The following are some initial comments on the draft. We would like the opportunity to comment further as the Vision develops.

The Chiltern Society is a charitable body with nearly 7000 members. We campaign for the conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns National Character Area, which includes the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and part of the London Green Belt. We actively engage in the planning system through a network of voluntary planning field officers and co-ordinators.

The Society is actively involved in biodiversity in the Chilterns, owning and managing its own sites and working on projects to conserve and enhance biodiversity. We have recently published our own Manifesto for Chilterns Wildlife to support the implementation of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan.

<https://chilternsociety.org.uk/chiltern-manifesto/>

We have reviewed the consultation on the draft Vision and consider that the following are the key issues in relation to the Chilterns –

1. The Vision needs to give more emphasis to addressing nature recovery. We are experiencing an unprecedented decline in species and habitats across the country and only a step change in our approach to managing the countryside will help to meet the biodiversity targets being developed by the Government. The plan makes several references to protecting and enhancing the environment and to nature recovery and biodiversity net gain. Whilst these are welcomed, there needs to be a more co-ordinated and pro-active approach, and this will need a fresh look at how land is used and managed across the county. This should be recognised as a key initiative in the Vision statement. The Growth Board should commit to working with the Nature Partnership, statutory bodies and third sector organisations to co-ordinate delivery.
2. The rare and precious Chalk Streams (two of which feed London) are just being recognised internationally and should receive more protection from local/county government. The Vision needs to address water quality and water resource issues, including the impacts of over-abstraction on these Chalk Streams.
3. In a similar way to nature recovery, there needs to be a much greater emphasis on climate change. Given the 30-year timescale of the Vision, there will be significant changes to the climate unless drastic action is taken. The Vision is worded to promote growth, seemingly at all costs. The Vision should be looking to future scenarios where the focus is on sustainability principles and development is within the carrying capacity of the environment. Particular areas where more vision is needed are in relation to alternative energy, digitisation, addressing the need for travel and considering alternative working patterns. Innovation is required if we are to be carbon neutral by 2050.

4. Whilst the Vision mentions the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) it gives insufficient emphasis to its conservation and enhancement. It is one of the major assets of the county and has been recommended in the Glover Review for consideration as a new National Park. If the county is to grow, as proposed by the Vision, the Growth Board needs to consider how major development can be accommodated away from the AONB and its immediate setting.
5. Similarly to the AONB, much of the south of the county is designated as Green Belt. This needs to be recognised in the Vision as a major constraint on development in the county. Under national planning policy, these areas are expected to remain open and be permanent. Again, development should be directed away from these areas. Whilst the Green Belt is not in itself an environmental designation, there is scope through the Vision to promote it as a 'nature belt' by providing incentives for nature recovery and enhancement in these areas.
6. In relation to housing development, the vision fails to recognise the size of Chesham as the 3rd largest conurbation in Bucks. It is home of Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company of volunteers which is advocating denser building in town centres to remove pressure on the countryside which is under extreme pressure and surrounded by Green Belt and AONB. It should not be assumed that housing provision means taking swathes of virgin land.
7. The Vision also fails to recognise the pressure for new housing in the southern part of Buckinghamshire, related to the future expansion of Slough.
8. We are pleased to see that the Growth Board are working with England's Economic Heartland on sustainable transport issues. Their Strategy seeks to take new approaches to transport provision by assessing potential future scenarios. We need to get away from the assumption that everybody living in the area has to commute to work. The increase in home working and local work hubs will help, along with locating employment sites close to housing developments. As electric cars become the norm, this will require the development of significant charging infrastructure as well as potentially changing the layout of new developments and parking areas.
9. The Society welcomes the 2020-2025 Roadmap where it refers to 'Bucks' distinctive character and local heritage'. This is a particularly important issue in the Chilterns AONB where many areas have their own distinctive character. The Chiltern Society is active in promoting high quality and sustainable design in the distinctive vernacular of the Chilterns and has done so for many years by hosting the Chilterns Building Design Awards. When the county prepares its own Design Code it will need to be complimentary to the existing Chilterns Building Design Guide.
10. The Vision makes little reference to the agricultural economy. As much of Buckinghamshire is rural, it is essential that we maximise the beneficial use of rural land for farming whilst creating habitats and interconnected networks for nature. In some locations there may be opportunities to encourage 'rewilding' projects.

We hope that you can take these comments on board in developing your final Vision Statement. As the above issues will be central to the Local Plan and other policy documents, we would expect them to be addressed in more detail in the Vision. Please keep us informed of progress with the Vision, including adding us to any mailing list.

Yours faithfully

Colin Blundel

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