



The Civic Society For Milton Keynes

MILTON KEYNES STRATEGY FOR 2050

**A Response to
Milton Keynes Council's
Draft for Engagement**

May 2020

ABOUT THE FORUM

Milton Keynes Forum was founded in 1989 to contribute to the development of civic awareness and to encourage informed participation in the life of the growing city. We are an independent voluntary organisation without affiliation to any political party, business or pressure group.

Our members bring a range of specialist technical and professional expertise and Milton Keynes Council is represented on our committee.

Our specific aims are to “educate, enable and encourage”:

1. To educate our members and the public generally about issues facing Milton Keynes
2. To enable those who live and work in Milton Keynes to influence its future
3. To enable the people of Milton Keynes to continue to create the social and physical environment to which they aspire, and
4. To encourage in Milton Keynes the varied social and cultural life that will make it a civilised place in which to live and work.

The following pages represent the collective input from Forum members via our internal working party and has been co-ordinated by Robert de Grey, to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude. It is presented in the Forum’s traditional role as a critical friend and we will look forward to being part of the ensuing discussions.

Robert has also stepped outside the immediate consultation response to offer a personal piece at the end of this document to stimulate further discussion around the future of Milton Keynes. He emphasises that it is a work of fiction, and not a considered prediction, but we will leave it to the reader to form his or her own view.

www.miltonkeynesforumforum.org

OUR RESPONSE TO THE MK2050 CONSULTATION HAS BEEN PREPARED DURING THE CORONAVIRUS GLOBAL EMERGENCY. NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THE OUTCOME OF THIS MIGHT BE.

BUT CHANGES IN OUR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES ARE INEVITABLE.

WE WILL THEREFORE WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON THE NEXT ITERATION OF THE STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

The engine that drove the creation of Milton Keynes was Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC), a Government agency set up in 1967 under the New Towns Act.

Its singular purpose was the creation of the New City. It had sweeping powers to acquire land, develop it and retain the profit, as well as providing service infrastructure such as roads and drainage in conjunction with others. It was accountable to central, rather than local, Government although the local interest was served by having local and county councillors amongst its Board members (although they acted in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of their authorities). Such a structure ensured that the Corporation could keep a clear focus upon the task in hand and retain a long view without having to take account of the fickle nature of local politics.

Following completion of their task, residual assets within the New Towns were passed either to local or central government or a variety of local organisations, charities or others as appropriate.

It was a model common to all of the 32 Post-War British New Towns and served them well. The last Development Corporation closed in 1996 and, in the following 25 years no better template has been found to facilitate large scale development of an urban area.

As one of the last New Towns to be designated, Milton Keynes was able to draw on the experience of those that had been before. There was a rich knowledge amongst the New Towns of land assembly and community development from which we benefitted - a number of key people within MKDC had experience that dated back through other New Towns to the post-war redevelopment of Coventry.

At one level, the development of Milton Keynes was always going to be a success. Its location between London and Birmingham meant that it was an obvious focus for growth but it was the singular vision of MKDC and its talented leadership that led to the creation of a place that is widely acknowledged to be the best of the British New Towns and somewhere with an international reputation.

Their work supported the creation of many features of Milton Keynes that are commonplace today, the most obvious (and, perhaps, its crowning achievement) being the Parks Trust, the charity that owns and manages the treasured open space network that comprises 25% of the city. It is largely forgotten though that the creation of the Trust was bitterly opposed by Milton Keynes Council, which felt that it should be the guardian of the city's parks and took MKDC to Court over the matter. Few, if any, would now believe that the parks would be better managed were they to be under

Council control and subject to the whims of financial pressures but, as we look to the next phase of growth of Milton Keynes, the dispute serves as a salutary lesson of the benefits of being able to take a long term view away from the ballot box.

MKDC was wound up (prematurely, most would agree) in 1992 with a third of the city still to be developed. In the intervening period the responsibility for the completion of Milton Keynes and its subsequent expansion has stuttered between a number of different bodies - Commission for the New Towns, English Partnerships, Homes and Communities Agency, Milton Keynes Partnership Committee and, currently, Milton Keynes Development Partnership (a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council). All have had their successes, but they have been few and far between. None has had a clear, unencumbered focus upon the development of Milton Keynes and it is a sad sign that, in Milton Keynes of all places, the Development Partnership does not have a practicing architect amongst its Board members.

It was perhaps inevitable that, once Milton Keynes Council became the planning authority for the city's expansion, it would want to stamp its imprint upon the city. Unfortunately, its two major interventions - the abandonment of Grid Roads in the Eastern and Western Expansion Areas, and in Central Milton Keynes, closing one set of underpasses and the adjacent car-parks - have been widely condemned and will not be repeated. The folly of abandoning H7 in favour of the City Street, Countess Way, is now all too apparent in the way that it has reduced the ability to be able to expand the city east of the M1.

It is frustrating that, in the Western Expansion Area, with a substantial number of houses in the area now occupied, there are no shops for residents - or even the sign of any in the pipeline: we seem to have lost the art of what it takes to build a community. There is but a single underpass to connect the area with the rest of Milton Keynes and residents are otherwise required to cross the intervening grid roads at grade.

The recent plan for Milton Keynes East shows a welcome return of grid roads, but not the grid squares that form the successful building blocks for the rest of Milton Keynes. To quote Stuart Mossdrop when writing about the West End of extension of the Shopping Building, it falls 'disastrously between a self-assured coda and a genuine extension of the original'.

The changes that have occurred in CMK and the two Expansion Areas only serve to underline the strength of the original Plan for Milton Keynes and the work of MKDC in its implementation.

This should act as a warning to us all.

There has been much talk in recent years about the dangers of creating a “two speed city” in Milton Keynes in the future, with the inference being that the new expansion areas will be better than the original “New Town”. But perhaps it is the reverse that could become true? Those who happen to live in within the “pink line” that marked the original boundary will enjoy lower density housing, more prolific landscaping, more open space and better access to it and the ability to move more freely around the city than those living on the urban fringes.

The expansion of Milton Keynes promises to be a huge challenge. If there is a genuine desire amongst the whole community to grow to the extent proposed then it must be done in a manner that captures the spirit of the development of the original Milton Keynes. It has to be a project commensurate with the quality of the development of the original city with exceptional leadership to attract exceptional people.

The following pages represent our comments upon the *Strategy for Milton Keynes 2050*: we comment upon a number of questions concerning the fundamental issues at the heart of this document which we have grouped into sections on Process, Policy and Delivery.

PROCESS

What is the process the Council is going through of which this engagement document forms a part, and what is the timescale?

We are one of the few organisations in Milton Keynes (MK) that tries to take an holistic view on the future planning of the new city. Usually we understand the process that has been going through and the purpose and role of the consultations. On this occasion we are not clear as to how this document fits in with the public consultations on other documents that we are going through with the Council, especially those being prepared as part of the planning process.

As on previous occasions, we are invited to comment on a document where there is already considerable momentum within the Council behind the policies advocated. Over the last thirty years, we have regularly prepared comprehensive responses to documents similar to this engagement document but have often felt that the Council's mind is made up on the big issues and is only prepared to look at lesser concerns with an open mind.

It is essential that consultees know how the responses to this document are going to be dealt with. We believe that the Strategy needs substantial re-consideration and re-drafting before it is adopted for the reasons set out below, but that this opinion is difficult for the Council to hear and act upon.

PROCESS

What is the status of this document and at what stage does this engagement become planning policy?

This Strategy has a contradiction at its heart. On the one hand it says that it will not form part of statutory consultation, but on the other hand it is said that it will inform the review of Plan:MK. For example, to quote:

Your comments will be considered in finalising the Strategy for 2050 prior to adoption later in 2020, and they will also feed into the development of the new Local Plan for Milton Keynes borough; and

Whilst the engagement on the Strategy for 2050 will not form part of a statutory Regulation 18 consultation for the purposes of plan-making, it will inform the review of Plan:MK and the comments received will be used by the Council's Development Plans Team in beginning to draw up the new Local Plan for a full Regulation 18 consultation at a later date; and

The Strategy for 2050 is not a formal planning policy document and therefore has no weight in the planning process and is not a material consideration in the determination of planning applications at this stage.

We believe the processes which MKC is going through are confused. In addition, the priorities of the Strategy are wrong and it has many flaws as described in this response: it must be redrafted and its relationship with the review of Plan:MK clarified. Ambiguity around its status must be resolved before it is presented again for public consultation. A clear sequence of events and timetable must be adopted.

PROCESS

Why is the Council consulting on this Strategy document rather than an executive summary of the work done by David Lock Associates?

We understand that the Strategy is a freestanding document: we are therefore commenting on this alone, not on the document prepared by David Lock Associates (DLA) *MK 2050 Milton Keynes Strategic Growth Study*; on the papers prepared in support of their Study; nor on any previously documents issued by the Council.

DLA carried out an intensive and wide-ranging study which could have been the document to be consulted on. There is now a certain amount of confusion with two documents covering similar topics with different wording. Therefore, we are only commenting on the *Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050: Draft for Engagement*.

POLICY

Why are we discussing the expansion of Milton Keynes up to 500,000 people by 2050?

Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) was wound up prematurely in 1992. Since then, under the auspices of several development agencies, in partnership with Milton Keynes Council, the Plan for Milton Keynes has nearly been built out and a variety of poorly planned extensions to the Milton Keynes designated area are being built or have been committed with the granting of planning approval. When a number of extensions to the new city outside the boundary of Milton Keynes Council (MKC) are included, a population of 400,000 people is in the process of being developed, compared with the originally planned population of 250,000 people, reduced in the late 1970's to 200,000.

In a resolution adopted by the full Council, MKC's position is that *'a population figure of 400,000 or beyond will present major challenges and would require substantial investment and consultation in Milton Keynes and the surrounding areas in order to accommodate the needs of the existing and projected population; and notes that any future growth will require detailed technical and feasibility work and be subject to the due planning process'*.

MKC are now consulting (or engaging) on the *Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050* which assumes that a population of 500,000 people could be accommodated within the Milton Keynes metropolitan area by 2050. It assumes a completely different structure of development and restructuring some of the original New Town around a new public transport system.

We have tried to track back through MKC papers as to where this population of 500,000 people came from but have not been able to find any technical justification for this figure. If it exists, we would like to look at it; if it does not exist, this Strategy may be built on sand.

If the proposed Strategy is carried out, the planning of Milton Keynes will reinforce and expand the two-tier city:

1. grid squares of the original city being redeveloped as part of their 'regeneration', with deprived populations suffering the strain of regeneration;
2. other grid squares untouched by regeneration, increasingly prosperous in some cases, and resisting infilling in places;
3. a sprawl of poorly planned medium-to-high density housing around the perimeter of the designated area of Milton Keynes;

4. new polycentric developments built around sizeable existing settlements such as Olney and Winslow; and
5. a denser Central Milton Keynes (CMK) with more and more high buildings and the classic infrastructure jettisoned in favour of creating more developable land.

One view amongst Forum members is that Milton Keynes is at the cusp of losing the advantages that are the basis of its success: maybe the current size ('New Town Plus') is enough and other areas should take on the challenge of growth. For most people the city is of a convenient size and remains a place that has a high quality of life that might be undermined and be unachievable in the expansion areas for 2050.

('New Town Plus' = the designated area of the New City + the expansion areas completed or under construction + Newport Pagnell: this is most people's perception of the current urban area of the Borough.)

This to other Forum members appears to support the 'pulling up the drawbridge'. Our conclusion is that more growth around Milton Keynes is inevitable and that the key issue is how to control that growth to ensure a similar quality of life is enjoyed there as in the existing settlement of Milton Keynes.

The inconvenient issue is that that Milton Keynes and its neighbouring local authorities already have Plans that provide for substantial developments on MK's boundaries which are at an advanced stage; but these could be better planned as developments more consistent with MK's existing structure.

Examples are in Aylesbury Vale: Salden/West Bletchley plan; Crest Nicholson's Shenley Park (north-west of Bottledump); the southern area of Eaton Leys; and in Central Bedfordshire: Hayfield Park.

We need a longer time-frame than conventional Local Plans allow and for beyond-boundary developments to be planned as part of the overall planning of Metropolitan MK.

We believe that the time has come to pause and quickly review our direction of travel, using resources that are integrated and have the capacity to make holistic proposals within a planning system that does not encourage creative solutions to complex problems and leaves too much control in the hands of the large housing developers who are not serving us well.

POLICY

What impact would such expansion have on the Council's laudable objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and carbon negative by 2050?

We are in a **climate crisis**.

In the next 10 years, as climate change is happening more quickly than was even anticipated at the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2015, there will be a scramble to become carbon neutral internationally. The contribution of Milton Keynes to this world-wide problem could be influential.

The expansion areas could become a testbed for new ideas in carbon neutral development. (It will be hard enough by 2030 to make MK carbon neutral by 2030, let alone to become carbon negative by 2040.)

MKC will not be following its own policies if it takes only small steps towards carbon neutral. To date, the Council has adopted a policy direction for carbon neutral but has yet to make serious commitments to its implementation in its projects and day to day working. For example, its proposed new council housing is not being built to Passivhaus standards; and little is being done to upgrade all of the existing stock, private and public alike - for example by converting to all electric installations and pioneering decarbonised gas supplies - a priority if the domestic sector is going to meet the Council's policy. In planning new expansion areas currently, such as Milton Keynes East, little is being done to reduce carbon emissions. It should be leading by example whether it is commissioning its own buildings or initiating new developments through Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP).

We could only support a Strategy that was based on an annual reduction of 10% in carbon emissions. We see no evidence of MKC is serious about achieving carbon neutral by 2030. It is failing to focus on those areas that are within its control or within its sphere of influence, and instead is pledging ambitious targets on behalf of the whole city with no clear strategy for meeting these pledges, which depend on the actions of a myriad of other organisations.

Every year we delay, the percentage reduction in carbon emissions per year we have to achieve goes up; this is the nature of the challenge of the climate emergency.

POLICY

What impact does the Strategy have on the biodiversity of Milton Keynes and the surrounding area?

In the same way there is a climate crisis, there is also a related **crisis of biodiversity**.

The biodiversity of MK has increased as the city has developed (although from a fairly low base). This is helped by the provision of extensive, linked areas of green space and their management by an environmentally aware body, the Parks Trust.

In spite of this, insect life (especially bees) on which all other life forms depend, has reduced substantially; bird life has diminished with, for example, the dawn chorus a shadow of its former self. This indicates a catastrophic reduction in the biodiversity, both in the open countryside and in settlements.

The Council must declare a borough-wide biodiversity crisis and work with its partners to create a suitable response to this crisis with the necessary resources.

Conservation organisations identify the main drivers of biodiversity decline as: agricultural management, hydrological change, poor woodland management (44% of woodlands are not in sustainable management), invasive species, urbanisation and pollution.

The impact on the Strategy would be considerable and would include:

- acquiring land on which diverse habitats could be created or re-established;
- wilding some land by leaving it to change with the minimum of human intervention;
- outside development areas, not putting in new roads that create more and more small pockets of land which either confines wildlife in small areas or forces the crossing of busy roads.

But let us be clear: an effective Action Plan for biodiversity linked to climate change requires changes in the way in which we live. For example, tree planting sequesters some carbon and adds to one type of habitat but does not solve the crisis in climate change and biodiversity.

We would only support a strategy if it made a significant commitment in response to the crisis in biodiversity.

POLICY

Why are the Six Big Ambitions not more strategic?

The six ambitions compare unfavourably with the Goals of Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) which could, with minor rewording, read as follows:

- Opportunity and freedom of choice.
- Easy movement and access, and good communications.
- Balance and variety.
- An attractive city.
- Public awareness and participation.
- Efficient and imaginative use of resources.
- *Reduction of emissions that contribute to climate change.*
- *Creation of greater biodiversity.*

We propose that these amended Goals be used again today with the suggested Ambitions being second tier Objectives

POLICY

What kind of a city would Milton Keynes become with 500,000 residents and how would the existing residents benefit?

We interpret the proposed growth figures to be:

	Dates	MK New Town +	MK Borough	Metropolitan MK
People	2020	?	268,600	315,000
	2040	?	?	400,000
	2050	?	?	500,000
Dwellings	2020	?	?	?
	2040	?	?	+41,000
	2050	?	?	+41,000+46,000
Jobs	2020	?	?	182,000
	2040	?	?	?
	2050	?	?	+120,000 = 240,000
Employment floor area (m2 class B)	2020	?	?	?
	2040	?	?	?
	2050	?	?	2,000,000

Table 1

There is no map in the Strategy showing the location of the additional houses coming from the local plans for Milton Keynes and the adjacent boroughs. We cannot see

what we are growing from nor where the dwellings and jobs are allocated for up to 500,000 people.

We have prepared Table 1 showing, where figures are included in the Strategy, the broad allocation of dwellings and jobs: such a table should be completed and included in the Strategy, perhaps broken down into smaller areas such as CMK, Olney etc.

The Strategy does little to explain why continued growth beyond 2030 would make 'a great city greater'. It does not question the continuing market pressure on Milton Keynes to grow and to continue to grow. We are reaching the limits of growth in South- East England and should be establishing structures to encourage jobs and prosperity in the declining areas of the UK, of which there are too many.

We have yet to see a social and economic appraisal of the proposal to expand MK to 500,000 people by 2050. We have yet to see a technical report spelling out the advantages and disadvantages of this level of expansion. We are not clear how it could benefit the existing residents of MK. This seems to us to be a figure plucked out of thin air with no proper assessment of the implications.

Growth during recent years has been structured differently from the grid structure of the new city; little benefit has been brought from these perimeter developments with confusing typologies and to date few citywide facilities. And the principal reason for structuring these areas around a City Street (with the intention of creating an urban grain that encourages the use of public transport) to date seems to have failed.

Generally, members of Milton Keynes Forum have been strong supporters of growth. However, the quality of that achieved so far has been so poor that many of us are becoming sceptical about further expansion.

Traditionally, cities expanded to the limit of their public transport system. However, with MK being different to almost anywhere else, the answer for MK is that probably that it has expanded to the limit of the motor car. We are now back to the former and MK will simply expand to ever reducing standards until it sorts out public transport (in whatever form that might take).

We therefore conclude that, if Milton Keynes is to grow as proposed, there has to be a commitment to providing citywide benefits such as:

- major funding for making existing buildings and infrastructure achieve carbon neutral;
- adding national facilities to the existing range of facilities for sports, the arts, the community and culture; and

- significant improvements to the public transport system.

The Council's commitment to growth should be entirely conditional on the adequacy of a package of the benefits it would receive. There is a danger in giving qualified acceptance of growth in that the acceptance is noted whilst the qualifications are quietly forgotten.

We therefore can only support a Strategy for 2050 if the package of benefits is signed and sealed before further growth takes place.

POLICY

Why is the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway being planned as a project separate from the East - West rail link and from the areas of growth; and what is its purpose?

We understand that the Expressway is a government project, but as it has a significant effect on the expansion of MK, MKC should prepare urban designs that integrates its design to avoid it being prepared in isolation. It is a major item of expenditure on a dual carriageway that will compete with the East- West rail link. The illustration on page 31 of the Strategy shows the inefficiency of the car compared with other modes.

The money that would be spent on the Expressway would be better spent on electrifying the rail link, ensuring that the capacity of a two-track rail link for slower and faster trains be exploited to the maximum, and creating good links by other modes to stations from expansion areas.

If money is to be spent on roads, this should focus on local improvements without creating additional corridors for roads. For example, any by-pass should be integrated with the design of the expansion area without encouraging high speeds. The existing route between Oxford and Cambridge should be considered as a whole without creating a motorway by stealth.

New roads are not the answer to the environmental problems we face: local improvements should be considered as the opportunity to improve the lives of residents along the existing road and to reverse some of the damage done to biodiversity.

We would be unable to support this major transport investment if it continues to be designed in isolation as a motorway that encourages people to drive rather than take the train.

POLICY

How will MK's economy grow as a result of this Strategy?

The national assumptions for the last 20-30 years have been that economic growth will/should mostly happen within or around London, and that people and businesses should be attracted to London & the South East - and by implication, attracted from the rest of the country and the rest of the world.

Milton Keynes has benefited from being adjacent to the booming economy of London, and from always having sites available for incoming businesses. This has resulted in a building boom within particularly Central Milton Keynes over the last 10 years.

We are concerned about the amount of land within the Borough that is being allocated for warehousing use and the low employment density that results, which is coupled with a general lack of sites within the borough for office use. In short, will there be sufficient land to support the number of jobs for the anticipated population or could we reach the situation whereby the houses are being provided for out-commuters because of a lack of jobs with Metropolitan Milton Keynes? More work is needed upon this.

However, in the intensely competitive property market of the south-east, it is important that Milton Keynes does not start to stagnate and continues to innovate.

One of the priorities must be to ensure that there is at all times an economic development team who can provide the Council with informed and objective information about the local economy and its readiness for changes to the UK and global economies. Promoting MK is a distinct and separate activity.

A well-grounded and skilful economic development team could provide useful foresight into some of the issues that MK should be watching, including:

- how ready MK's economy and society is for the fundamental changes required to drastically reduce Climate Change Emissions from CO² etc.;
- how economic conditions and UK trade change now that we have left the EU;
- how the coming of HS2 will affect MK both positively and negatively;
- how well the pared-down East-West Railway performs when it is complete;
- whether competing sub-regions draw some of MK's strengths elsewhere;
- what the next big area of innovation is globally and whether MK becomes part of this;
- whether MK's skew to relatively low qualification levels and school attainment is remedied;

- whether MK becomes more of an ageing population than other enterprising cities or remains a youngish population from expansion drawing in younger people.

What is not clear is whether growth and hence population size is been driven by an argument centred around a future economic need, an aspiration for an effective transport system or a national housing need. We are not convinced from the evidence base that these three aspects have been worked up in a consistent and integrated way. There is a tension between the three.

As the MK economy will be a major driver for expansion, we would take that as a starting point for the MK Strategy. This is covered in some detail in the strategy. A city-wide innovation campus is proposed that is described as 'A physical and digitally connected network of locations' that are designed to support diversity under a general theme of innovation and R&D, thus providing a foundation for innovation to flourish.

We support these ideas for economic development which need substantial investment in them if they are to flourish.

POLICY

How realistic is the ambition to build a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, on which the Strategy depends?

Travel by bus in MK at present is not the preferred option of most residents and visitors to MK. But as congestion has built up, with queues sometimes backing up the full length between roundabouts, a mass rapid transit system is being promoted again as being possibly viable.

A fixed rail tram has been rejected as being expensive and inflexible. But hybrid trackless bus/trams running along and adjacent to grid roads (MRT) would appear to us to be an option amongst others (such as autonomous vehicles) worth full investigation.

Strategically the loops of the MRT from CMK serve some areas well, whilst other areas have to use buses or other transport modes, either to link up to the MRT stops or to take passengers directly to CMK.

Currently only around 25% of jobs are in CMK; even after intensification of our city centre, the majority of jobs will be outside CMK. Good public transport will have to serve all places of employment, not just 'Employment Areas' but also other places of employment such as the hospital and health centres, schools and nurseries, and local shops,

There is a danger of creating a two-tier public transport service; the notional layout for example in the area bounded by Wolverton to the north, Fairfields and Whitehouse to the west, and H4 Danstead Way and V7 Saxon Street to the south and east respectively, some parts are well served whilst others involve travel by other means as the distance to the stop is well beyond the recommended 400m. We believe that in creating a new public transport network, it should have equal access for all.

The Strategy refers to densification within MK arising from the regeneration of designated estates; the development of unused sites; and the creation of new sites across Milton Keynes. However, regeneration to date has not resulted in many new houses; and regular searches have been carried out for new sites of which a small number have had their use change to housing. Outside CMK there are a limited number of new sites which have now been allocated to housing. We consider the densification of Milton Keynes is undesirable and unachievable as it assumes the redevelopment of existing grid squares to a higher density.

As this process is open-ended as far as the number of new dwellings are concerned, it cannot be counted on when looking for increased demand for the MRT.

The new or expanded settlements around Milton Keynes could generate greater demand but, in most cases, are not big enough. In addition, they have been selected without consideration of the unacceptable lengths of green running between stops i.e. running for long stretches without a bus stop.

The Strategy assumes a carrot and stick approach to persuading people not to use their cars. There are two main ways of making public transport more acceptable. The first of these is to reduce the numbers of free car parking spaces (in most areas except CMK) and increase charges in CMK. The second is to give priority to the MRT on the grid roads. Restricting car parking is very unpopular. Giving priority everywhere to the MRT requires considerable investment in the infrastructure.

We support the principal of allocating two lanes to the MRT on grid roads that have been already dualled and creating guided bus routes to the side of single carriageway roads with the MRT having priority at all junctions.

We assume that on all MRT routes it would be a requirement that passengers are kept waiting for a maximum of 10 minutes. There is a danger that this considerable capital investment and running costs would still result in an underused system and unacceptable congestion on key roads.

The proposal in the Strategy to introduce the MRT is dependent on a supporting network of feeder services. This is a completely different public transport, for which a public transport strategy is required. The Forum would urge MKC to prepare and adopt such a strategy as a matter of urgency. For the programme for growth depends on having a public transport strategy in place to deliver that growth.

There is no easy solution to the public transport problems of Milton Keynes. Any new transport strategy would have to answer the following questions:

- are there any alternatives to the trackless tram as the main form of public transport?
- how are car-drivers persuaded to leave their car at home, especially for commuter journeys?
- how much should bus users pay, if anything?
- what routes should be used for public transport which gives equality of access (some new routes shown on the diagram are totally unacceptable, for example around Stony Stratford)?
- is 400m an acceptable distance for bus users to travel to their nearest bus stop?
- faced with the climate crisis, is providing a welfare only public transport system - largely used by children, pensioners and the disadvantaged - acceptable?

The local authorities engaged in the preparation of this draft strategy have neither the resources nor the expertise to solve the transport problems of Milton Keynes and the areas around it.

It is therefore a priority that a Passenger Transport Executive be established for at least Metropolitan Milton Keynes (MMK).

POLICY

Has enough land been allocated to this expansion and what density for residential development has been assumed?

Assumptions are made about the density of new dwellings in the remaining expansion areas. We would be interested to know the density of housing in these areas and the overall density including the full range of non-residential uses such as offices that are needed to support any new housing development.

We would not support higher densities in development around existing settlements thus creating the undesirable outcome of higher-density dwellings around the more affluent villages.

It is essential that any new development includes the full range of provision to be found in the new city e.g. community centres, schools, health services, and open space. This would include sites and open space to be handed over to the Community Foundation and the Parks Trust respectively.

We would not accept a strategy that offered a lower level of provision for non-commercial uses than that can be found in Milton Keynes as originally built.

POLICY

Is the proposed development to be built in the best places, well integrated with the public transport system?

The Council is at present giving planning approval to schemes that extend the existing urban area of Milton Keynes, without the benefit of extending and in joining up with the existing pattern of grid squares. This is difficult to understand especially as few studies have been done into alternative urban forms that might have been used to extend the city.

The proposals shown in the Strategy are a significant departure from both the grid squares of the New City and the amorphous city extensions. We support looking afresh at urban forms that could be used in the extensions to the new city, a study that should have been completed before any city extensions were built.

The Strategy assumes a change from a polycentric city to one focussed on CMK. No evidence is offered in the Strategy to prove that this is indeed is happening.

We do not understand how the urban form and movement system were selected, and why only one option is included in the Strategy. For example, another option amongst many could have been considered that showed additional settlements along the MRT route from Central Milton Keynes to Olney. Everyone living in the new urban areas should have the same quality of life as those in the original MK (underpasses, local shopping, open spaces etc). Linear forms of development along transport links would avoid long lengths of green running for the MRT.

We would only support a strategy that integrated an MRT system into the current layout of the new city and did not assume demolition and densification to increase demand and justify the cost of the MRT.

POLICY

Is there local support for building so much of the development within the original designated area of Milton Keynes?

We hate to say it, but MKC with English Partnerships tried once before to introduce densification along the V7 to V8 corridor which roused considerable anger amongst local residents. After a rowdy public meeting hosted by the Forum, the proposals were eventually dropped.

Residents require considerable reassurance that their quality of life will not be downgraded as a result of densification or indeed regeneration.

We believe that the Strategy should not assume that additional dwellings will be provided through densification and regeneration. If they are, they should be considered as windfalls and not part of an agreed programme.

The exception is Central Milton Keynes. Land in the city centre is a valuable commodity. We are not clear that there is a strategy for keeping the balance between competing demands: dwellings, offices, retail, leisure, culture, green space, transport, etc. We are pleased that the Council is taking steps to resist the use of Permitted Development Rights as we are concerned about the loss of office space within CMK.

When the pendulum swings in the opposite direction, we do not want to discover that we have no sites left for the unexpected development.

However, if the MRT is successful in changing the modal spirit to benefit public transport, then new possibilities arise with the reduction of the number of car parking spaces in CMK.

All of this is very contentious and needs deep public support if the Strategy is not to be blown off course.

We could not support a strategy that ignores the carefully designed structure of CMK and the design qualities of the new town buildings.

POLICY

Are the implications of creating a new green and blue infrastructure taken into account?

We tend to take the green and blue infrastructure of Milton Keynes for granted. Well managed and beautiful, for most people it is the backdrop of their lives. Only when it

is taken from us do we realise how much we valued it, for example on the east and west flanks, which have impoverished green frames and landscaping.

The green and blue infrastructure in MK has been successful because not only have bold ideas been implemented but it is owned and managed by the Parks Trust (dedicated to it) and by the Council.

The tables that follow show typical management regimes for different green and blue infrastructures in different locations:

- A for land around MK, with very restricted access;
- B for land within MK, with generally open access;
- C for expansion areas, with full engagement by the public sector;
- D for expansion areas carried out by the private sector under planning guidance.

A LAND AROUND MK: TYPICAL GREEN + BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE		
farmland, woodland, rivers and streams		
Designation	Managed by	Permitted access
Farmland/ fields/ river banks	Farmer, tenant or owner	Rights of way or with farmers' permission
Parkland linked to country house	Owner or tenant	Rights of way or with owner's permission
Woodland	Owner or tenant	Rights of way or with owner's permission
Lakes/ river banks	Owner or tenant	Rights of way or with owner's permission
Nature reserve	Conservation society	In accordance with the rules of the society
Highway verges	Local authority/ parish councils	Open to all
Private gardens	Owner or tenant	With owner's permission

B WITHIN MK: GREEN + BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE		
linear, district, local, parks		
Designation	Managed by	Permitted access
Linear Parks, Campbell Park	The Parks Trust	Open to all
District parks	MKC	Open to all
Banks of balancing Lakes	MKC/The Parks Trust	Open to all
Lakes	AWA	Controlled access
Woodland	MKC/The Parks Trust	Open to all
Local parks, play areas etc.	MKC	Open to all
Highway verges	MKC/ parish councils	Open to all
Landscaped reserves	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Private gardens	Owner or tenant	With owner's permission

C EXPANSION AREAS: GREEN + BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE		
as it should be		
Designation	Managed by	Permitted access
Land left to wilding	The Parks Trust	Controlled access
Linear Parks	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Banks of balancing Lakes	MKC/The Parks Trust	Open to all
Lakes	AWA	Controlled access
Woodland	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Local parks, play areas etc.	Parish councils	Open to all
Highway verges	MKC/ parish councils	Open to all
Landscaped reserves	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Private gardens	Owner or tenant	With owner's permission

D EXPANSION AREAS: GREEN + BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE as it might be		
Designation	Managed by	Permitted access
Land left to wilding	Private owner	No access
Banks of balancing Lakes	MKC/The Parks Trust	Open to all
Balancing Lakes	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Linear Parks	The Parks Trust	Open to all
Local parks, play areas etc.	Private company	Open to surrounding residents
Highway verges	Private company	Not provided, controlled by company
Private gardens	Owner or tenant	With owner's permission

Table 2

(‘Rewilding is large-scale conservation aimed at restoring and protecting natural processes and core wilderness areas, providing connectivity between such areas, and protecting or reintroducing apex predators and keystone species. The ultimate goal of rewilding efforts is to create ecosystems requiring passive management by limiting human control of ecosystems.’ Wikipedia April 2020)

This simplified table illustrates the large shift in the ownership of the green infrastructure that could take place within an area that is being developed. Our preferred pattern of ownership and management is shown in Table 2, Section C above.

However, this simple pattern that was assumed within MK has in recent years come under considerable pressure. For example, developers are in some cases handing the green space (with the agreement of the planning authority) to a management company which then charges surrounding dwellings the cost of maintenance etc. The Parks Trust was not named in Plan:MK as the sole recipient of new parkland.

We oppose this drift towards the privatisation of public space and believe that the Strategy should be explicit about this drift.

The green and blue infrastructure has its role to play in our drive to avoid the climate changing. It must have tree planting to act as a carbon sink which contribute a small amount to reducing carbon emissions. At the same time, for biodiversity, it must have a mix of habitats, such as grasslands, scrub, wetlands etc. Above all, we have to ensure that existing important habitats are not built over.

In facing the climate catastrophe, we do not have time to allow strategies for the reduction in carbon emissions and biodiversity to fail. For this the Council needs the deep involvement of the Parks Trust both at the beginning of the planning process and in the end becoming the owner of the green infrastructure.

We therefore will be only able to support the Strategy if it includes the ownership of most of the new green and blue infrastructure by the Parks Trust, a responsibility in exchange for which a financial package would be agreed.

POLICY

Have the proposals been analysed for the subsequent management and maintenance costs?

The Council has often asserted that MKDC has left the Council with the problem of maintaining and managing the extensive infrastructure of the new city without the resources to do it. Assets were indeed handed over by MKDC to the Council, but appear to have been used to prop up Council services.

The Council should be the guardians of the public realm and should not use the assets handed over to it to cover the cost of maintaining the infrastructure for other purposes.

Obviously, the MRT is not only a major capital investment but also a continuing significant running cost. The funding of this is not clear from the Strategy although examples of such a system in Northern Europe and indeed world-wide, demonstrate that a system such as MRT is affordable if development land value can be captured.

The Strategy has to be costed and proved to viable before it has our support.

POLICY

Treatment of existing communities and CMK

We are concerned that the Council is drifting towards the imposition of new patterns of development onto the existing grid and the developments within it. Residents show one of the highest satisfaction ratings for their new city compared with any other large town or city in the UK. This is a remarkable achievement, especially for a New Town. To attempt to squander this achievement will create a strong reaction from residents, who are not clamouring for increases in density, for example.

Any new sites are used for building will by definition reduce the available green space. The green space of Milton Keynes is highly valued by residents, who have shown on numerous occasions that they are prepared to resist development on green space.

Likewise, local residents value the classic infrastructure of Central Milton Keynes. As part of the Strategy, studies would need to be done into building on the street level car parking in CMK, for example, without compromising the underlying structure of the classic infrastructure.

We would not support the Strategy if the grid road structure and the CMK classic infrastructure were further compromised.

DELIVERY

What mechanisms for the delivery of this growth have been considered?

The situation is now desperately urgent. As there seems to be continuing doubt about MK's five-year supply of housing land, MKC or an inspector at a planning enquiry again grant planning approval outside the land supply agreed in Plan:MK. At present, it seems inevitable that land around MK will continue to be developed on a random basis.

Much of the impending development is beyond MKC's boundaries and will happen whether or not there is a strategic plan for MMK. For example, the Inspector for the AVDC Plan pressed for priority to be given to the development of Shenley Park, and then Eaton Leys south, both of which are right on MK's boundaries.

Similarly, developers consulted on their plans for Hayfield Park, also on MK's boundary, this time in Central Beds. Local councillors on both sides of these boundaries will be seen publicly to resist, what will become inevitable, to sustain 5-year supplies of housing land in order to prevent developers achieving planning consent for areas not in local plans; and to respond to pressures of housing need. A strategic plan that crosses local authority boundaries is urgently required.

It is probable that the target of providing homes for 400,000 will be met, but in the form of an unsatisfactory urban sprawl whose quality will be mixed, determined by developers, supported by rising house prices.

This Strategy tries to pre-empt this developer-led planning but it crosses local authority boundaries and is beyond the capability of one or more local authority to implement. Although they are planning authorities, the authorities are set up to administer the planning system and not to proactively create new parts of MK City.

There have been discussions about setting up new Development Corporations. This in our view is the best way to proceed: but it is most urgent, for as the New City expands around its original designated area, it will become more difficult to introduce a coherent strategy for growth.

Our view is that, for the complex task of implementing a strategy for MK 2050, a Development Corporation should be established that is nationally accountable, with majority local representation on its board. Nationally nominated board members would have the capacity to negotiate with Central Government, have the confidence to appoint talented staff, and to follow their lead or lead them.

The remit of the Development Corporation would be to prepare a plan without regard to local authority boundaries; to supplant local plans where appropriate; to work closely with a regional transport authority; to use some of its resources to buy out developers of land which runs counter to the objectives of the plan.

Elsewhere, Combined Authorities and other approaches are being used to achieve collaboration. In our view, multi-authority support for cross-boundary development of MMK on its own is not adequate. Only a multidisciplinary development agency whose role would be to develop a masterplan and take that through a democratic process and Planning Inquiry to achieve a long-term plan and controlled development. This will not be achieved through each authority's slow local plan processes. It also needs a substantial team of many professional backgrounds with much imagination to do this well.

The Forum's preferred option of a development agency dedicated to preparing and implementing a master plan for Milton Keynes would preferably be linked to the establishment of a transport authority which would be responsible for the franchising of the street for example.

The Forum is not proposing that strategic planning for Metropolitan Milton Keynes should be put on hold. If establishing a development corporation would take too long and was not acceptable to central government, then we would propose a shared development unit within the four authorities who would be tasked with recruiting the best and brightest staff available with a view to preparing a preliminary master plan for MMK. This not only would result in a better master plan but also could be the core of a future development agency.

Metropolitan Milton Keynes (MMK) is already happening, planned relatively independently, and disjointedly, by the three neighbouring local authorities and MK Council, each for their own area. Although two of those three surrounding authorities have had some involvement in the 'MK Strategy for 2050' it is not a joint strategy. But large areas of its proposed strategy are not within MK Borough boundaries. They stretch a large part of the way towards Mursley, almost to Potterspury, towards the Brickhills, and out into Central Beds area.

The way forward will not be resolved by mere "cross border co-operation between local authorities to generate a strategic plan". A new structure to do this are what is needed. Cross border co-operation between local authorities to generate a strategic plan is not adequate for the task.

As the changing scene in local government is so complex, it is not clear what structures would be preferred by central government with the peculiarities of an expanding MK potentially crossing three local authority boundaries.

So, although our preference is for a development corporation, we have tried to identify the criteria for assessing the options. Any new structure would have to:

- be acceptable to and supported by central government;
- be independent of but accountable to its sponsoring authorities, working in partnership;
- have full planning powers;
- be allowed to be dynamic and attractive to talent;
- be well resourced, with a healthy contribution coming from capturing some value from land sales;
- have climate change and biodiversity at the heart of its mission;
- have the power to work across local government boundaries;
- have the power to shape sub-regional public transport;
- have powers to spend on any project that supports the development even if outside its designated area of activity;
- have within its remit the responsibility of looking beyond 2050.

Thus, we will be pressing for a better plan and one planned jointly for the MK area with the three neighbouring authorities through a single agency entirely focused on that task.

This question of structures has to be resolved within a few months, if the opportunity to shape the expansion areas is not to be lost.

A strategy for MK 2050 with significant institutional change such as establishing a development corporation or similar, with a clear implementation strategy, would have our support.

CONCLUSIONS

The Strategy is not a sound basis for going head with a further extension of MK:

- it does not meet the ambition of the Council's policy on the climate emergency;
- it does not meet the necessity of reversing the decline in biodiversity;
- it is dependent upon a proposal for mass rapid transport which does not served well the existing city as well as the proposed expansion areas;
- it will not lead to setting up an energetic and talented development agency.

However, in rejecting the Strategy as it stands, it does not mean that we find planning ahead for 2050 the wrong thing to do. On the contrary we consider it to be most urgent: as we need to make progress in refitting the existing Milton Keynes in response to climate change, so we need to adopt a strategy that includes this refitting and takes us to 2050.

The Forum, with its members, has a great resource which could be used to promote and consult on revised strategies before the Council moves to adopt the preferred one. We hope the Council will take us up on this proposal.

APPENDIX ONE

Policies that we support in the Strategy

Having structured our response around fundamental questions about the Strategy, we may have missed policies that we support. These are listed below and are commented on as appropriate.

page no./para no.	topic	comments
06/01	people at the heart	essential
06/03	long term view	essential to have a strategy
07/02	ambitions for growth	but see our comments
08/02	deliver infrastructure	essential
08/03	plan for city-wide facilities	essential, MK lacks provision of city-wide facilities
08/05	local housing need	but too high at present
09/04	inclusive growth	essential but not happening now
09/04	carbon neutral/ negative	essential but not happening now
10/01	look beyond MK boundaries	essential
11/01	build at the rate of 2,900 homes a year	yes, but should not penalise the growth of MK
12/02	community spirit	essential to support
12/03	difference of MK	yes, but current growth areas not distinctive
13/04	increase nos. living in CMK	within an agreed framework
13/05	innovation in design of early estates	but they are threatened by regeneration
14/03	all citizens should benefit from economic success	essential
16/02	creating new communities	essential
16/05	affordable housing	under provision presents problem to MK
18/01	homes built by the Council	essential to achieve real affordability
18/03	mixed communities with older people	essential
18/04	alternative forms of tenure	owner occupation not only form of tenure
18/04	variety of design	e.g. existing growth on western flank poor design
18/04	improved green standards	essential to achieve high Passivhaus standards
19/01	placemaking, healthy communities	but policies alone do not create good places

19/06	active travel- walking and cycling	essential to achieve zero carbon
20/02	create places where people meet informally	desirable
20/03	connections to public transport	essential to achieve zero carbon
20/04	Passivhaus	essential to achieve zero carbon
20/04	community generation of electricity	desirable
20/05	sense of place	essential, not happening in current developments
20/05	innovative design	does not necessarily create quality places
20/06	mix of use	essential
21/02	sensitive to existing communities	essential
21/03	culture	essential
22/01	National Park City	good idea
22/04	lakes and parks	essential
22/06	Parks Trust to maintain green infrastructure	and manage: essential, should say 'will' not just should
24/01	job creation and productivity	MK's growth based on job creation
24/02	EW rail link	essential
24/02	MKU	strongly supported
25/03	inclusive economy	essential
26/03	knowledge economy	essential
27/03	innovation campus	good idea
28/01	mixed use/ jobs	supported
29/01	link grid roads into new development	but is this possible?
31/01	use gridroads more efficiently	essential, alterations not adding to existing infrastructure
31/03	expand and improve redways	essential
38/06	MBE	see our proposals (attached)
40/04	quality of office provision	essential
40/04	digital connectivity	essential
42/01	Bletchley interchange	supported
49/02	current developer lead process not up to MKDC standards	agreed, strong vision, leadership, capture of land values, long term stewardship all essential
50/03	Infrastructure provision built ahead of development	essential

51/02	delivery vehicle	should be a development corporation accountable to local authorities and central government
51/4	role of MRT	high capital and running costs but some kind of MRT essential to provide high quality service

APPENDIX TWO

Policies that we do not support in the Strategy

Having structured our response around fundamental questions about the Strategy, we may have missed policies that we do not support. These are listed below and are commented on as appropriate.

page no./para no.	topic	comments
04/01	status of strategy	opposed because ambiguous when put in context
06/02	note on terms	should include MK +
07/02	six big ambitions	not ambitions, strategies
08/04	maintain our grid roads	does this mean extending grid road system? not done with current special strategy
08/05	meet our local housing needs	doing more than local needs: must negotiate a reduction
13/03	first solar powered house	solar heated, not powered: first solar heated house in USA late 1940's. Important not to oversell MK
13/06	early estates designed by up-and-coming architects	yes, but MKC would like to demolish these early estates, MK's heritage, for regeneration + densification
19/02	create places to support MRT	too late to do this: means restructuring existing city
19/05	supporting mixed use communities	too late
20/09	mix of uses	no mention of space for jobs, homeworking
22/06	developers' contribution	no mention of habitats for biodiversity
26/06	regeneration to focus on life chances	focus entirely on housing at present
27/05	30,000 to 40,000 new jobs in CMK	located where? expand onto infrastructure?
28/05	Logistics	hasn't MK enough large warehouses, with reducing density of jobs?
32/04	MRT use infrastructure	MRT is a high-quality bus service: will it attract drivers onto it when they accept high congestion?
33/02	Initial view of network	not on all gridroads therefore excludes some estates: unacceptable routes e.g. around Stony Stratford
35/01	CMK to have more jobs	a polycentric city puts less stress on the public transport system
35/03	MRT to be fed by other modes	local buses to MRT stops a major deterrent
36/01	Existing city to be changed to a more compact development pattern	neither desirable nor achievable
37/01	image showing wide space for roads etc. and high buildings	no, this is not MK

38/06	more vibrant CMK	as the Hub has shown, altering the pattern of development is difficult and expensive: development must work within existing structure
40/01	future framework of CMK	no: this arbitrarily zones CMK, we support mixed use within the block and from block to block
40/03	CMK economy	why focus everything on CMK especially when MRT can take you anywhere quickly?
44/04	directions of growth	three blobs around MK structured differently does little for the links between the existing and the new
45/46/47	recommended strategy	not accepted for the reasons stated in the main text
45/03	high quality places with MRT	what if MRT is not funded, but development takes place without it?
45/04	Olney bypass	any bypass should be integrated into the urban design of the development
45/05	CMK increasingly important role	assumes building on infrastructure and redeveloping many sites: possible but cannot be taken on trust
45/07	development within and around MK	leads to restructuring the grid and demolition of MK's built heritage
46/02	long term growth areas	if desirable, depends on viability of MRT
46/05	building communities	yes, but how good is MKC at involving local communities?
48/01	locations but no detail	plans will be closely scrutinised so should be much more diagrammatic
48/03	recommendations to be tested through local plan processes	so this is the beginning of consultations at the start of local plan process
49/04	Fullers Slade ballot, 2019	please do not quote as a model, a disaster from beginning to end
50/01	implementation via local plan	not a strong enough vehicle for creating successful developments
53/01	growth options	linked to local plan review yet options assessment has no drawn indication of urban form

APPENDIX THREE: REFERENCES

As this has been written unencumbered by references, and as there have been contributions from many members of the Milton Keynes Forum, references would have to be gathered up from those members. This has not been done; any queries about the evidence base will be dealt with as best we can.

APPENDIX FOUR: MILTON KEYNES 2050, THE INTERVIEW.

A provocation by Robert de Grey

An interview with the Leader of Milton Keynes Council in 2050 is below. It has been written with the intention of stimulating debate around the future of Milton Keynes up until 2050. It is a work of fiction, not a considered prediction.

As the reporter strolled up the hill, she thought that Milton Keynes is so beautiful in the spring with millions of trees, many of them mature, coming into leaf; the smells from the carefully considered, well-maintained planting; and the buildings and the roads elegantly integrated. Most of the buildings, whether reflecting the grid or reacting with freer forms, were designed by the country's leading architects.

She saw that Midsummer Boulevard had changed yet again: where there had been pop-up containers sitting on the car parks, now permanent buildings were being built. The pavements remained the same, all the trees had been retained, just the car parks had changed. Was this a planned process or just going ahead because the land belonged to the council who would make good money out of it? Beyond the rebuilt Midsummer Place lay the Milton Keynes Experience which she had promised herself to visit before returning to the capital, York.

After going through the anti-virus unit, she was taken to a meeting room near the front entrance (visitors were not allowed into the depths of the building). She was greeted by a lively and alert man about 80 years old, the Leader.

As was now the custom, they sat round a 2 m diameter table and began to talk.

The Leader So you left Milton Keynes 12 years ago: you will find things have continued to change since you left. Are you going to look around this afternoon?

The Reporter Yes, I plan to look at both the old and new areas. Then on Wednesday I shall talk to some residents who have been actively involved in the project, and on Thursday to the heads of various organisations based in the city. But as I explained over the phone, I wanted to speak to you first because you were involved in the early days. I wanted to find out from you how it all started.

The Leader Well, it all started in the coronavirus shut down, after which, everyone was saying it will all be different now. A few of us started talking about where Milton Keynes was going wrong and how to protect the ideals of the pioneer city-builders. We were afraid that what had drawn people originally to the city had gradually been submerged in later developments and what was good would soon be lost in another surge of mediocrity. What we didn't realise at the time was that other cities were doing the same sort of thing. When we fully came out of the

lockdown in 2024, we slowly discovered that people wanted to create a new and kinder society, not one dominated by the competing demands of some people and their bullying organisations. And then the government, as part of its decentralisation strategy, came up with the idea of up to six innovation cities: we seized the chance and bid to become one of them. To our surprise, we were successful.

The Reporter Yes, I've heard of innovation cities but have never had a clear idea what it meant and what their status was. Perhaps you could explain.

The Leader For the five innovation cities that they selected, the full governmental powers were delegated down to each city. This meant apart from foreign affairs and defence, the selected cities took control of all the public services in the area and within the budgets that central government would've spent on them, they could shape services as they wished. They were given taxation powers and, in our case, we are expected to establish a new relationship with private sector organisations.

The Reporter That was very brave move by central government, it must have been opposed by local authorities that are not part of the scheme.

The Leader Well, we knew there was going to be a lot of opposition and that's why we set about building public support for the innovations we had in mind. To start with we did four things: persuaded the government to change local authority boundaries to take in parts of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Northamptonshire; to run the council on a consensus basis as we needed all party support; to build public support with generous support for those taking part in a series of citizens assemblies, which in effect shaped future policy; and as the pressure had gone out of the housing market, to put a temporary stop to all development in and around the city.

The Reporter To run the council on a consensus basis?

The Leader Yes, the size of the responsibilities that had been passed to us by government, at our request, was such that we needed all the talent available regardless of political views. We didn't want to steamroll any proposals through, so any one councillor, or any one resident, could object to a proposal and we would negotiate with them until we reached an agreed conclusion. Incidentally, a lot of things went straight through without any opposition.

The Reporter Is that democratic I wonder? But let's move on, you were talking about the four things that you started with.

The Leader We had been careful to build up local and national support for some of the ideas; we established Milton Keynes advisory group, a body of people who were able to influence government policy: and strong

groups within local communities. But you must remember that we came out of the virus lockdown brimming with new ideas and found in English society that many people were saying 'we can't go on as before'. It was just a moment to innovate especially as so many people recognised the contribution made by the poor to the way in which our society was run.

The Reporter But these are purely institutional changes. What did you want to happen? What direction did you want the city to go in?

The Leader We tried to build support around a programme of ideas that we had developed during the lockdown. We wanted to spread the principles behind citizens assemblies to all parts of Milton Keynes so that everyone knew someone who had served in an assembly. We were looking for participation in developing our ideas and mechanisms for ensuring that everyone understood the detail and supported the principles. It was a kind of direct democracy where if more than 75% of the population supported a policy after we had negotiated an agreed way forward and dealt with individual objections, we would set about implementing it. For example, with education.....

The Reporter Ah yes, I wanted to ask you about education. I had heard that you adopted the Finnish model, with children starting at school at the age of 7, following their own curriculum. They have no homework and have short days and yet, by international comparisons, it is one of the world's best education systems. They also outlawed all forms of private education. How did it go down with the more conventional parents in Milton Keynes?

The Leader This is the kind of way we introduced new policies. To start with, we established a monitoring unit that studied the effect of all our policies. We knew initially that there was virtually no constituency for establishing schools on the Finnish model. As we had put all schools into a democratically elected Trust, we had to persuade it to convert a primary school to the Finnish model. It proved to be remarkably successful and soon we had other schools clamouring to convert. One of the unexpected side-effects was that the prevalence of bullying both amongst pupils and between staff, and staff and pupils, was substantially reduced. So we were able to abolish parental choice which had a big impact on the transport system because parents saw no benefit in driving across the city in pursuit of an education that could be found on their doorstep in the local community school. We also integrated all the schools in MK, so wherever you lived you were a pupil of one school. And we also took our anti-bullying programme out to organisations across the city, to the NHS for example. We also encouraged adults to study alongside the older pupils.

The Reporter You must've been very persuasive! What affect did this have on the four universities in Milton Keynes?

- The Leader* Many in academia were hostile to the idea of a more technical University, MK:U, but were amazed at the demand from local pupils and the quality of those pupils. We started with one campus in CMK but as Cranfield started to take undergraduates and as the Open University declined in the face of stiff international competition, we had a growing presence on both their campuses. Local people want to study in their local university, because of the kind of city we were now building.
- The Reporter* And drawing young people to the city, whilst seeing more young people staying in Milton Keynes after having completed their education, meant that local community structures were transformed.
- The Leader* Yes, in this respect, the virus showed us there is a great deal more solidarity within local communities than we had understood. As the effect of the virus gradually diminished, Thursdays ceased to be the day on which NHS staff were thanked and became community days. People got together on a street by street basis to enjoy each other's company and to discuss how the local community was changing (Thursday is the community day). Cars were got off the streets as their number declined and many streets became play streets for adults and children alike. In places garden fences were removed and large communal gardens created. As the use of garden chemicals had been prohibited, and as we were responsible for looking after more and more farmland, wildlife increased and residents grew more and more of their own food. With careful support, the diets of the population improved enormously. A network of good food outlets was developed, which sold wholesome food and was linked to cookery skills courses. MasterChef series 1500 came to Milton Keynes.
- The Reporter* This must have had an impact on social deprivation in Milton Keynes. There were horrific statistics on the number of people using food banks and the difference in mortality rates across the city.
- The Leader* Our long-term data collection shows that the number of children living in poverty has reduced, that the difference in mortality rates has diminished, that people were living longer and in good health, and that vulnerable people feel much better supported. This has led to a reduction in demand for children's and adult social services. It is my view that the mental health of the population has improved substantially. And once people have experienced the quality of life in MK, they are very reluctant to move, as has been shown by the take up of MK University by local young people.
- The Reporter* A lot of these ideas must have sprung out of the role the NHS had played during the virus outbreak. How did the discussion of the changing role of the NHS have an impact on local services?

The Leader *Countering the virus and dealing with subsequent health emergencies showed the need for a more robust attitude to the NHS locally. We tackled it using a two- pronged approach: a major public health information campaign about surviving pandemics and intensive care for those who are hospitalised, using small scale community hospitals with any exchanges with the medical staff being via 3D modelling. Instead of the doctors looking at their computer all the time, they studied holograms, which included internal organs. In hospital, a patient's family could feed and look after their non-medical needs. Thus, additional resources came with innovation. We also saw through the integration of the hospital and community trusts with adult social care and children's social services (as happened across the country). A lot of the care services were in the private sector, and were underfunded and held in low esteem. So many of them were brought back into the public sector and there was a big campaign, as part of a larger campaign, to ensure that essential but poorly paid workers were held in respect and better paid. We didn't want doctors looking down on cleaners, for example, and not respecting their essential role. We wanted the pay gap to be reduced.*

The Reporter *Why was this so important?*

The Leader *Most people were fed up with the existing work patterns. From zero hours contracts to a low minimum wage, from a lack of growth in middle income families to the despising of the poor, from Amazon-like employment practices to poor working conditions on building sites; the list was too long. Our economy was no longer based upon fair pay for a fair day's work but rather on exploitation, poor skills and unethical behaviour by companies and their directors. This had to be changed. We had to intervene to ensure that, in exchange for the propping up of the private sector during the lockdown, we would all have a stake in the workplace to ensure that companies were run both ethically as well as profitably. This frightened some companies, who left MK. But most embraced it, acknowledging that competing in the race to the bottom was not good business sense. So, we intervened in the local economy and looked at how the companies that were located in MK met our new employment policies, including heavy taxation on wealth transferred in any one year, effectively a cap on individual earnings.*

The Reporter *Development companies must have been especially unhappy with you calling a halt to development whilst you sorted out how the city was going to grow.*

The Leader *Well, the virus gave us some breathing space. The demand for new housing around Milton Keynes didn't exactly collapse, but dropped significantly. We were able to hold a number of citizens assemblies to try and understand what people liked or did not like about the existing housing stock (the most popular house type was the bungalow!). The priority for many was to have control over their own houses. This*

meant involving future residents in the design of the houses, and instead of the stock being either owner occupied or rented from an anonymous, large organisation, we handed over a good deal of the new housing to housing cooperatives and similar organisations such as housing trusts. This took a lot of people out of the housing market which was popular, particularly when we replaced inheritance tax with the wealth tax. We also encouraged self-build and custom build. We put together major developers with the best architects available and encouraged them to innovate; and we ensured that all our sites could only take a maximum of seventy houses. As most of the land was in our ownership, we have managed to build some outstanding housing: low-cost, self-managed, appealing design and of course giving back to the grid more electricity than they consumed. The rate of new house building has not been as high as originally planned, but in my view the quality is as high as any housing in the rest of Europe.

The Reporter For the first time you have mentioned the local generation of electricity. Milton Keynes is known for its environmental policies. Were you really as successful as is suggested in the paperwork?

The Leader We are really proud of our environmental record. We had committed ourselves to achieving significant targets in the ten years 2020 to 2030. We met them all. This was the result of a huge exercise in public involvement. Without the support of local organisations and businesses and of course most of the people who lived in Milton Keynes, we would've been unable to get anywhere near our targets. It affected everyone, at work, at home and out and about. We had to take everyone along with us. We had to show that dealing with climate change created an improved environment which was as good for us as it was to wildlife. Biodiversity and tackling climate change went hand-in-hand. Thus, when and where we decided to expand the city, we included large areas of land that was wilded as well as easily accessible public open space. Development had to come with the open space that the people of Milton Keynes had got used to. And the interlinked pattern of different habitats was an essential part of creating a landscape in which biodiversity could develop. We also avoided cutting up the countryside with more roads, cycle paths, and other infrastructure. This all had a significant bearing on our transport policies.

The Reporter Milton Keynes was known for its low density and devotion to the car. How did you change this?

The Leader At the time there was a lot of talk about densification of the existing city to achieve adequate demand for a mass rapid transit system. Our citizens assemblies looked closely at what transport system could really help people to get easily between any two points in the city. The assumption had been that regenerating existing estates in Milton Keynes would encourage densities to be increased and therefore

concentrate high-density housing around bus stops. But to do this meant demolishing places in which people enjoyed living and moving a lot of people from houses to flats. This was not acceptable: buildings that were part of the heritage of Milton Keynes were being sacrificed to increase demand on a transport proposal.

The Reporter You obviously feel strongly about this: how did you resolve the contradiction between a car-based city and public transport systems that generally work better in a radial city rather than a grid system?

The Leader First, you have to accept that people expect a multimodal solution to their transport needs. Rapid transit systems, cars, taxis, bikes (including electric bikes), electric scooters, buses, walking: all offer part solutions for people to get about the city in different conditions. Second, a large investment in new infrastructure for a rapid transit system was not realistic: Milton Keynes has enough infrastructure, it is what it does with it that matters. So, the citizens assemblies recommended to the new passenger transport authority that lengths of grid road be closed to general traffic, following the principle that it was easier to convert junctions in dual carriageways for priority use by public transport. Junctions in single carriageways demanded significant changes. We therefore had bus lanes running up to every junction, thus giving priority to public transport.

The Reporter How was this implemented?

The Leader The main gains were to be made in Central Milton Keynes. We built four park-and-rides at four entry points into Milton Keynes and encouraged drivers from out of town not to drive into the city centre where parking was increasingly difficult. We linked these park-and-rides to CMK with the hybrid tram/buses, the predecessors of those that you see around MK today. When we could see that the pressure on parking in CMK and reduced enough, we had the confidence to begin to build 2 to 3 storey buildings on the car parking around the city centre. Meanwhile we were adding routes for the tram/bus to other significant centres of employment. As they were reliable, frequent, and free to the residents of MK, we began to have a high ridership on all these initial routes. Remember this was only possible because we converted some lengths of grid road for bus, emergency services and cycle use only. It was no longer a social stigma to use public transport, unlike the bus system we had inherited. Funnily enough we made one major investment in the road infrastructure. This was double up H5 Portway with through traffic on a deck above the grid road with a limited number of points of access. This took a lot of heavy traffic off the grid road system whilst not carving up the countryside with a new expressway. We considered doing the same on H8 Standing Way but by then traffic congestion was diminishing, so we decided not to.

The Reporter Moving on, what were your cultural and social objectives?

The Leader As the International Festival grew and became an annual event with individual events between the big shows in the summer, there were unexpected consequences. Milton Keynes gradually overcame its image. Increasingly artists, dance and theatre companies, and many other people in the creative industries, wanted to move to the city. So, we were able to introduce schemes such as the rehabilitation of the earlier estates which were then let or sold to this band of artists who found them to be a cool place to live. As we are building a large number of truly social housing, this was seen as something different from gentrification. Our social policies were geared to reducing poverty and increasing well-being. The virus has shown us that people came together in a crisis but didn't necessarily look after each other in between. So community development work became important again, building communities and supporting individuals. This was integrated with our housing policies which gave a physical manifestation to the different forms of ownership that we are promoting.

The Reporter And how did you meet your commitments on climate change?

The Leader We always saw this as a multifaceted problem, which could only be solved using many different policies. The two main targets are the domestic consumption of gas and the use of diesel and petrol in cars and other vehicles. Dealing with these has to be seen as an investment, not just expenditure. So for example we set up funds for rehabilitating poorly performing building stock, funds that made loans or grants to householders and businesses. From this initial idea grew the Milton Keynes Green Bank, modelled on the municipal banks of an earlier age. This allowed people to invest locally and see and use the results of their investments. And this was part of the way in which we funded the public transport initiatives.

The Reporter But surely the Green Bank did not fund all the things you have talked about?

The Leader Well, you must remember that government had not only passed down and asked us to run the public services of Milton Keynes but also had delegated its tax-raising powers. Following intense local debate and citizens assemblies, local people discussed and learnt a great deal more about the injustices of the taxation system, which at the time were very much biased towards low taxation for the rich. The more they learnt, the more determined they became to change the system for Milton Keynes. We introduced a wealth tax, abolished VAT, and ensured that individuals were being paid a good deal more than the minimum wage. All this frightened off a number of employers but was very attractive for forward looking entrepreneurs who adopted an ethical approach to business. I can let you have details of our accounts which are available online, and which clearly do demonstrate that we invested large sums of public money in the early days but are now

reaping the rewards. Incomes are rising, housing and transport costs are going down, and local people are committing themselves to our vision for Milton Keynes.

The Reporter I just want to ask you about your values and how many people share them in Milton Keynes.

The Leader I don't know about values, I am a pragmatic politician who had a number of simple objectives which have guided my work since I became leader. These were quite simply what contribution I can make to the survival of the human race in the face of climate change, collapse in biodiversity, and more recently how to protect people against the wave upon wave of viruses hitting us from every direction. What I have learned is that these objectives can only be achieved by collective rather than individual action. So perhaps my values are hidden in the idea of collective responsibility and collective action, combined with leadership.

The Reporter You haven't talked much about law enforcement, the justice system, and your inheritance of Woodhill prison.

The Leader I am afraid that we have run out of time now: perhaps if you have any further questions you could let me have that in writing. A quick comment on the prison: that's where we put the dissidents....

END

Robert de Grey

English Version v1: 03 May 2050

An extended version of this interview in English and Chinese can be found on our website.