

Response of Stoke Goldington Parish Council to the Plan:MK consultation.

March 2016

Question 1

Workshop outputs for a longer term Vision

Do you agree that these bullet points are a useful starting point to be used alongside other inputs (including the outcomes of the MK Futures 2050 Commission) for a Vision for Plan:MK and Milton Keynes in the longer term?

Answer

Broadly yes, however, we feel that planning out to 2050 is a meaningless exercise. Past experience shows that that this is guesswork at best and that priorities will change in the intervening years. For instance, Milton Keynes was already planned to be a town of 400,000 today had previous visions been realised. We suggest that the 2050 vision is dropped in favour of a more deliverable 15 year plan.

Question 2

Form of Vision for Plan:MK

When we come to write the Vision for Plan:MK do you think it would work best as a short, bullet point list or would there be value in expanding each aim with some explanatory text to provide more detail about what it covers?

Answer

Some expansion on each aim is desirable, particularly with respect to how and when infrastructure improvements will be delivered and at what cost since these are key to the viability of any plan. Also housing numbers that are envisaged for each area are key to assessing the merits of any option. To date even a broad brush estimate of these factors is missing which draws into question whether this consultation is premature.

Question 3

Other opportunities

What are your thoughts on this list of workshop outputs? Do you think there are any that should be considered further through Plan:MK?

Answer

We were surprised by the lack of publicity given to the workshops, particularly in the light of their critical role in this consultation process. This was most unsatisfactory.

The Longer Term Vision and Opportunities seems to be an entirely urban-centric list with no consideration at all for the rural parts of the borough which throughout the document are considered more as a resource over which the urban borough can expand. Plan:MK needs to recognise that Milton Keynes has two distinct communities, urban and rural, which have a degree on interdependency but which have separate and different characters and needs.

We believe that the next step in the process should include a specific engagement with the rural communities in order to better understand their needs, concerns and wishes.

Question 4

The next 'big things' for Milton Keynes

What sorts of facilities or opportunities do you think Milton Keynes should try to develop in the future?

Answer

- *Develop links with Cranfield University and motorsport companies to make Milton Keynes an engineering technology hub along similar lines to the bio-technology hub at Cambridge*
- *Develop local academies with close links to local businesses, including apprenticeship schemes*
- *Significant improvement in the rail link to London and public transport links to the railway station.*
- *Consider a tram network for Central Milton Keynes including links to the Park and Ride system.*

Question 5

Continued outward expansion of Milton Keynes urban area (Direction of Growth 1)

Do you think that continuing the outward expansion of the Milton Keynes urban area in this direction is the best way to accommodate new development in the longer term?

Answer

There is potential to grow in these direction, mainly to the south west and to a lesser extent to the south and south east. It is essential that growth in these areas maintains the existing character of Milton Keynes i.e. low density, low rise, green spaces and an extension of the existing grid structure. All of these characteristics are things that differentiate Milton Keynes from less attractive towns. We appreciate that this implies a greater land take than higher density options but strongly believe that Milton Keynes should be about quality not quantity and that the approach employed up to date has been the right one and the reason why Milton Keynes is successful.

Question 6

Sensitivity of areas on the edge of Milton Keynes to new development (Direction of Growth 1)

Are some areas on the edge of Milton Keynes identified in this direction more sensitive to new development than others? If so, which? Are there some areas identified in this direction that you think are more suitable?

Answer

Yes. The existing settlements should have their identity protected and not be consumed into a wider metropolitan area. In this respect the south/south east is more sensitive.

Question 7

Final extent of outward expansion of Milton Keynes (Direction of Growth 1)

If Direction of Growth 1 were to proceed, should we define an eventual 'final extent' of development? If so, where should this be?

Answer

Yes. The east west rail corridor will present a significant cost challenge to any expansion further south. Adequate room for any reasonably foreseeable expansion exists north of this line and the additional cost of multiple crossings should be avoided.

Question 8

Treatment of existing settlements in Direction of Growth 1

Is a green buffer the best way of protecting the character and integrity of the existing settlements that lie within the areas of new development identified in Direction of Growth 1? Or would you prefer to see them integrated in a similar fashion to the villages in the existing urban area, for example Great Linford and Loughton?

Answer

A green buffer is much preferable.

Question 9

Scale of development east of the M1 (Direction of Growth 2)

What do you think about the scale of the development suggested for east of the M1 in direction of Growth 2?

Answer

There should be no large scale development east of the M1. We have no faith that the necessary huge infrastructure improvements will be delivered on time or possibly at all, leading to significant problems. Additionally the cost of such improvements will be such that this option is unlikely to be viable. A small amount of redevelopment in Newport Pagnell may be desirable to make use of previously industrial areas (Aston Martin). Dualling of the A509 to Olney should be a priority, even at current traffic levels. Similarly, even at current population levels the North / Rural North part of the borough lacks facilities for recreation and sport and these would be desirable now regardless of any further development.

Question 10

Final extent of development east of the M1 (Direction of Growth 2)

If Direction of Growth 2 were to proceed, should we define an eventual 'final extent' of development? If so, where should this be?

Answer

See response to Question 9. There should be no large scale development east of the M1.

Question 11

Treatment of existing settlements in Direction of Growth 2

Is a green buffer the best way of protecting the character and integrity of the existing settlements that lie within the areas of new development identified in Direction of Growth 2? Or would you prefer to see them integrated in a similar fashion to the villages in the existing urban area, for example Great Linford and Loughton?

Answer

See responses to Questions 9 and 10. There should be no large scale development east of the M1.

Question 12

Size of new settlement(s) (Direction of Growth 3)

Would it be better to have one much larger new settlement, like a Garden City, in the northern part of or adjacent to the Borough, which is large enough to be self-sufficient in terms of jobs, schools, health, shops and all other services? Or would you favour an approach of having several smaller settlements?

Answer

The size of settlement hinted at (5,000 to 10,000 homes) would destroy the character of the existing settlements and the rural part of the borough which would become a continuous conurbation. It would also necessitate very large scale (and costly) infrastructure improvements of which an additional junction onto the M1 would be a key part in most cases. We have no faith that the necessary improvements are deliverable or affordable. Additionally it is likely that such settlements will only be dormitory towns with the majority of employment still concentrated in the existing urban area, which is not a sustainable solution. For all these reasons we are opposed to this option.

Question 13

Possible locations for new satellite settlements (Direction of Growth 3)

Are there any locations that you think would be suitable for a satellite settlement? And if so, why?

Answer

No, see question 12.

Question 14

Final extent of new satellite settlements (Direction of Growth 3)

If this approach were to proceed, should we define an eventual 'final extent' of development around any satellite settlement?

Answer

We are opposed to any development of this nature for the reasons given in Question 12.

Question 15

Intensification and Redevelopment of the urban area (Direction of Growth 4)

Do you think that intensification and redevelopment of the existing urban area should take place alongside greenfield development as identified in the other directions of growth?

Answer

Retaining the existing character of Milton Keynes is very important. High density housing (e.g. The Hub development) has not proved successful and has resulted in the kind of problems that are seen in other urban areas and a high turnover of residents as a result. However, there remain significant areas of Milton Keynes which have remained undeveloped even after infrastructure (such as street lighting) has been installed. This seems inexcusable given the pressure to expand outwards.

Question 16

Types of Redevelopment or Intensification of the urban area (Direction of Growth 4)

Are there any of the redevelopment/intensification approaches mentioned above that you would particularly support, or that you think should not be considered? Are there any opportunities that have not been included?

Answer

There may be a limited number of opportunities to repurpose existing buildings in Milton Keynes, however, if this is done greater freedom should be given to the developers to come up with attractive designs which are not subject to petty restrictions such as retaining existing windows. This leads to compromised buildings which are less attractive to residents. It is noted that such buildings take much longer to sell than purpose built apartments. Additionally it may be acceptable to demolish buildings which are no longer useful and which do not have any particular architectural merit and replace them with new purpose designed residential accommodation. There is a significant amount of unused industrial property in the borough which could be replaced and it is likely that the growth in online shopping will reduce the demand for retail space. In general we are not in favour of high rise developments and wish to see the skyline of Milton Keynes remain largely as-is.

Question 17

Other areas suitable for redevelopment (Direction of Growth 4)

Are there any locations that you think would be particularly suitable for redevelopment?

Answer

Yes, for modest scale development e.g.

- *Former Aston Martin site at Newport Pagnell*
- *Disused railway buildings at Old Wolverton (Old Wolverton Road opposite Wolverton Park Road)*
- *Current industrial area at Bradwell Abbey*
- *Current industrial area at North Crawley Road, Newport Pagnell*

Question 18

Other approaches for longer term development

Do you think there are other possible development directions, beyond those that came out of the Workshops that should be considered?

Answer

No, but the extent of growth needs to be grounded by a proper housing needs survey rather than coming from a "wish list".

Question 19

Your thoughts on the directions of growth

Are there elements of any of the directions that you particularly like or think have particular merit? Similarly, are there any elements that you think would be unworkable, even over the long term future? Are there any conditions or requirements you would place on any of the approaches presented that would help to make them a sustainable direction of growth that you could support?

Answer

Development to the south west and south east (west of the M1) is to some extent already ongoing and presents the easiest path for further expansion. Less infrastructure additions would be needed. Also repurposing some existing buildings in Milton Keynes and filling in gaps already zoned for development could add significant numbers of houses. However, it must be recognised that some of the existing infrastructure is already at full capacity e.g. the hospital, schools and the two junctions onto the M1. Any significant population growth must be accompanied by improvements in these areas which should be completed in advance of the housing stock.

The proposed development of satellite settlements is by far the most problematic and least attractive proposal. If it were to go ahead it is highly likely that infrastructure improvements

(many of which would be outside of the control of MKC to deliver) would lag far behind other elements of construction. The end result would be years of congestion and overloading of existing services. In addition the character of the rural part of the borough would be changed for the worse turning much of it into suburbia and all at huge financial cost.

Question 20

Order of preference of directions of growth

As mentioned at the start of this section, it is possible that the final Development Strategy in Plan:MK might involve a combination of parts or all of two or more of these directions of growth. Which of the directions of development would you consider to be the last resort, the one that you would find most difficult to support? Similarly, which do you think is the most sensible or sustainable direction, that should be considered as a priority?

Answer

It seems inevitable that a combination of parts will be the only viable result. Our preference (in order of preference) is as follows:

- *Redevelopment of existing sites within central Milton Keynes at medium density (part of Direction of Growth 4)*
- *Fill-in of currently undeveloped land already allocated for housing within the urban area*
- *South west of the existing built up area (part of Direction of Growth 1)*
- *South east of the existing built up area (part of Direction of Growth 1)*

The following options are unacceptable (not even as a last resort)

- *New satellite developments (Direction of Growth 3)*
- *East of the M1 (Direction of Growth 2)*

Additional comments and summary

- *We are sceptical about the need for growth on the scale envisaged by this consultation. Previous estimates of population size have proved to be very wide of the mark and no data is presented to support the need for additional homes on the scale envisaged by Plan:MK. Developers (who ultimately are the bodies responsible for delivering the growth) have shown a marked reluctance to develop even those areas that are already earmarked for development, presumably because they do not want to create a glut of housing stock. We expect that a lower level of growth will be capable of meeting future needs.*
- *In our discussions we found that there is a very strong sense of what makes Milton Keynes special. Low density, non-high rise housing, green spaces, trees, the grid structure, lack of traffic jams. These all contribute to making Milton Keynes an attractive place to live and work in. Therefore it is essential that whatever scheme is chosen these features are retained.*

- *Direction of Growth 3 (new satellite developments) is so poorly developed that we feel it should not even be part of the consultation. The lack of information presented (no preferred locations, no housing numbers, no analysis of the infrastructure implications, no approximate costing) means that it cannot be compared in any logical fashion to the other options. However, purely in terms of its impact on the character and nature of the rural borough it is objectionable and we are therefore unable to support it.*
- *We have noted that as new areas of Milton Keynes are developed the associated facilities for health care, recreation etc. lag well behind or never materialise. Indeed there is currently a proposal to eliminate the walk-in urgent care centre at Broughton just as this area is expanding. This points to a lack of joined up planning with the relevant agencies such as the NHS. The rural parts of the borough are presently poorly served by infrastructure and this should be corrected regardless of any significant development.*
- *The Vision for 2050 should be dropped immediately. This is a waste of taxpayers' money and diverts attention from addressing more near-term issues.*