

Planning and a pocketful of fairy dust

Floorspace Projections Table (over the 30 year plan)

Use	Floorspace (sq m / residential units)		
	CMK	Campbell Park	Development Framework Total
Office/Commercial	306,070	127,230	433,300
Retail	88,647	4,052	92,699
Hotel	34,077		34,077
Food & Drink		9,103	9,103
Community & Leisure		2,366	2,366
Total Floorspace	428,794	142,751	571,545
Residential units	3,466	2,368	5,834

Anticipated outputs over the 3-year plan period are summarised in the following table:

Output	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	Comments
Housing Completions	0	203	545	Local plan expects to average 330 units per annum from 2005/06
Housing Starts	74	963	568	
Employment Opportunities - Jobs	0	85	1898	
Floorspace: sq.m.				
Mixed	0	361	0	
Retail	835	1,555	10,000	
Offices	0	3,465	6,600	
Hotel	0	0	3,860	
	0	1,070	0	

This Development Framework will be reviewed at 5-yearly intervals to incorporate any changes in the aims and to reflect the progress achieved at that time. The first review will be no later than 2006-2007.

The Central Milton Keynes Partnership

◆ This poster bearing the name of the Central Milton Keynes Partnership was displayed at thecentre:MK until I mentioned it in the minutes of a meeting of Urban Eden. Instantly it disappeared. Luckily, I'd already taken this photograph. So Central Milton Keynes Partnership, when are we getting our five year review of the Development Framework?

I'VE DISCOVERED something almost unbelievable about Milton Keynes Council - so unbelievable in fact that I'm having trouble believing it myself. Crazy as it sounds, they've got a pocket full of fairy dust.

I'll explain in a moment but first this. Some years ago, the council decided that they'd quite like to aim for an arbitrary reduction in road traffic and that, in order to achieve it, they would encourage people out of their cars and on to buses.

Now, obviously, this has not happened. Despite their best efforts to make driving in Milton Keynes more and more difficult; despite new and largely empty bus lanes restricting road use; despite new, wholly unnecessary traffic lights; despite road closures, road narrowing, unnecessary speed restrictions; despite making parking more expensive, Milton Keynes is still a great place to traverse by private vehicle.

In fact, despite their worst efforts, road traffic has increased in Milton Keynes since 2003. Partly this is a result of the city's population expansion but it's also because of the success it's enjoyed, the greater wealth of its people and a natural desire, particularly among the young, to roam free.

It's also because the design of Milton Keynes lends itself so admirably to personal transport, be it by foot, horse, bike, car or motorbike. Unfortunately, as I have written before, it is Milton Keynes Partnership's desire to deny the people of Milton Keynes this very freedom which so angers the many members and supporters of Urban Eden.

So why haven't buses been more successful in encouraging people out of their cars? One reason is that the agendas of the bus companies lie some considerable distance

from the 'mission' wished upon them by those who dream up these schemes.

I met recently with Keith Spicer, managing director of Arriva Shires, at the environment policy development committee meeting that we both addressed. He made it quite clear to me that his company was simply a commercial mass transit supplier and not especially interested in performing any social functions such as picking up the odd gaggle of grannies from deep inside the estates.

He said that his company preferred to run buses along the boulevards and grid roads and if Milton Keynes Council wanted them to make uneconomic detours, they would require payment for a subsidised service. That seems fair enough to me.

However, the council never lets an unfortunate truth stand in the way of its obduracy. So without the slightest evidence that reductions in traffic levels were achievable, they put a traffic reduction figure of 33 per cent on their desires list. Then, I very fondly imagine, naked and holding hands with their chums from English Partnerships in a fairy circle in a wooded glade, they closed their eyes and wished.

Since then, they've acted as though they had a pot of fairy dust and when planning applications arrive which require significant traffic reductions in order to work, lo and behold the plans are based on that magical assumption. Such an application is the one for the new 1900 place six-storey car park (development Site E1.1) planned to replace the at-grade parking all around thecentre:mk.

So what's wrong with this car park, then? Well, according to our research it's the largest to be built anywhere in the UK with only one entrance and one exit and the only one of its size not in an airport, with multiple entrances. According to experts, very good barrier systems can accommodate 200 to 250 cars per hour. So, using statistical analysis of average traffic flows through the four barriers in one entrance planned into the car park, Urban Eden's experts reckon it will, on a very good day, take almost two hours to fill all 1,900 spaces; causing massive and lengthy tailbacks all around thecentre:MK at busy times.

Add the closure of Secklow Gate to the mix and you have chaos.

This does not allow for any inevitable breakdowns or technical problems. And the larger the car park, the greater the delays on each of its six floors as you wait for the slowest common denominator (you know, that person in the 1.2 Nova who's always in front of you) to enter and exit a bay.

On each floor then, each car making a manoeuvre can potentially hold up every other moving vehicle, that's 1,900 potential opportunities to be delayed on each and every visit. Compare that with the relatively free-moving at-grade parking we enjoy outside thecentre:mk now.

The car park and its associated housing will be back before the planners as a Revised Outline Application shortly, alongside others for the market and the Welcome Hall. Alarmingly, the traffic forecasting in Chapter 8 of its Environmental Statement, which deals with traffic and transportation

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and which is relevant to the car park proposal, refers to forecasts made in 2002 and 2003 for expected traffic flows in 2012.

It states that Milton Keynes Council and English Partnerships had asked for further traffic modelling to be undertaken to account for other developments in accordance with English Partnership's Development Framework. So the modelled traffic levels for 2012 were enhanced by 15pc to account for such changes in traffic growth. Questionable in itself but this is where the fairy dust has been used: the data was then all reduced by 33pc to account for Milton Keynes Council's planned reduction in the use of the private car.

As local group MK Forum recently stated, while 2012 may have been, in 2002, a reasonable timescale for traffic forecasting, that is not true today. The forecasts should be revisited to provide a reasonable estimate of traffic levels in at least ten years' time, i.e. in 2017. These should take account of the intended population increase in Milton Keynes and the sub-region as a result of the government's desired housing developments.

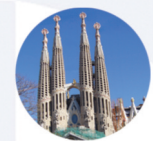
Finally, I have learned that Milton Keynes Council and English Partnerships have for some time had access to the very latest Multi-Modal Transport Models that can predict future traffic and transport conditions all the way up to 2031.

Given the inevitable impacts on traffic of the new multi-storey car park, the planned closure of Secklow Gate and the effective closure of Midsummer Boulevard East, you'd think they'd urgently create an up to date Transportation Assessment, wouldn't you? But no.

After all, who needs to face the horrible truth when you've got a pocket full of fairy dust?

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