

A flexible vision of region's future

A MAJOR factor in the success of Milton Keynes is that it was based on principles set out in the Master Plan. In response to the council's attempts to redefine their vision, Urban Eden determined to create its own MK2050 plans too. I am delighted to preview some aspects of it. The original goals contained within the Master Plan are as follows:

- Opportunity and freedom of choice;
- Easy movement and access and good communication;
- Balance and variety;
- An attractive city;
- Public awareness and participation;
- Efficient and imaginative use of resources.

We believe these remain valid with some important updates:

- Only the best will do - regain pride in the city;
- Infrastructure before expansion;
- 'Joined up' thinking, not piecemeal;
- Milton Keynes is unique so our solutions should be too, not those shoehorned in from other towns;
- Milton Keynes is more than a city - it is a 'region';
- Bring existing areas along with the improvements;
- Stop the 'cultural cringe';
- Be bold, be brave, have self-belief.

With a proposed population increase to 350,000, it is clear that an East-West corridor including Marston Vale between Milton Keynes and Bedford is a suitable area for expansion. The East-West rail link is important and there has to be sufficient allowance for major transport routes linking the A1, M1 and M40.

We should be building communities in which people will want to stay - not stop-gap, 'this'll do until we get something better', solutions with poor parking and impracticalities for expanding or contracting families.

There should be easy access to all amenities through transport corridors and public transport. People crave convenience, wanting 'exactly what they want'. Houses, communities and infrastructure which do not really suit people's needs are flawed. Milton Keynes was built on flexibility of movement and ease of use. That needs to be ring-fenced.

There is much privately owned 'public space' land in Central Milton Keynes. If multi-storey car parks are widely introduced, there will be more. If housing leaves the centre, even more land will be privately owned, and the centre will be lifeless at night.

The centre should not become denser and any increase in office space should be constructed with sufficient parking or other provision for access and egress. Any non-essential activity that could be decentralised from the city centre should be, and that would include office space.

With the expansion of the 'deskless society', many people will be working from home anyway. Any development should be flexible enough to be changed, for example an office could become a shop, leisure or housing.

Fishermead and Conniburrow should have additional overhead road connections to the city centre with footpaths alongside and

Campbell Park needs to be better connected by placing V8 Marlborough Street in a tunnel (a la Monte Carlo) with car parking, homes and shops above, providing opportunity for further development. Destroying or narrowing transport corridors such as the boulevards must stop.

There should be a presumption against tall buildings but those of high quality and iconic design would be considered if they brought their own access solutions and did not contribute to gridlock or potential commercial failures caused by inadequate parking provision.

It was also determined that the planning policy must be as flexible as possible in Central Milton Keynes and that the general presumption was for the flexible use of buildings. Offices must not dominate the city centre. There must be more low-density retail, leisure, health and housing.

The increasing age profile of residents will be a major consideration in future development. Satellite health establishments might be located in Central Milton Keynes. A university in Milton Keynes was seen as crucial with student accommodation possibly in former office buildings, many of which are under-occupied. Home schooling and small, local 'specialist' schools are to be encouraged.

Diverse

Milton Keynes should champion diverse businesses and there should be recognition that people will want to work from home. The planning regime should be flexible enough to allow, for example, for the commercial development of live-work buildings where living accommodation is above or beside office or light industrial space: the old London Mews concept. Work hubs for occasional use could be attached to housing in residential areas or to local centres.

There should be a general presumption for the flexible use of all domestic buildings so that 'clean' business activities can be carried on. There will still be a need to accommodate large employers in designated, accessible and discrete areas. Milton Keynes should continue to encourage inward investment by large companies but should also encourage business start-ups, entrepreneurship and innovation. Milton Keynes must be promoted as the 'flexible city' where business dreams can be realised without endless red tape or constraint. "The answer is yes, now what is the question?" should be our mantra.

It must be recognised that Milton Keynes was founded upon the principles that only the best is good enough and thus we must aspire to the universal availability of the very highest bandwidth connectivity. Planning regulations should state that no development should take place without allowance for the installation of the best available technology. This will ensure the flexibility of the building and its use as a home and/or workplace.

Much of the green space currently in Milton Keynes is employed to solve the potential flooding problems. Some small non-linear parkland areas are underused or neglected. They must be considered for allotments and or for grazing livestock.

There should be a general presumption that these reserves must not be developed and

that similar corridor reserves must be included in new areas.

The grid system should be defined as it currently works. Transport corridors will continue with landscape reserves, no frontage developments and underpasses and roundabouts where suitable. There should be separate redways for cyclists, motorised wheelchairs and pedestrians. There needs to be significant investment in public transport, preferably in TraM:K; a transport system which ideally suits a grid-based city.

There should be balanced communities, reflected in housing, workplaces and educational establishments. There needs to be flexibility in funding for schools dealing with large influxes of non-English speaking pupils. There must be a general presumption that flexible planning decisions must favour the creation of integrated multi-generational family homes.

Milton Keynes was recognised for its public art and high-quality cityscape which is now in a very poor state of repair. We need to regain pride in the infrastructure, art and landscape of our city.

As well as providing resources for managing what we have now there has to be a general presumption that all new development (including green spaces) should be properly fostered and cared for and that this will be part of the planning/maintenance process.

We must inculcate and promote even greater pride in our city.

There you have it - a brief preview 'high-light tour' of the results of our deliberations. I sincerely hope that you see the merit in a firm set of city protection guidelines within which much creative flexibility can be expressed. Cheerio.

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