
Urban Eden MK2050

Principles for a Master Plan

Urban Eden MK2050 – Principles for a Master Plan

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Preface

Background

We believe that a major factor in the great success of MK is that it was planned on a number of sound principles set out in the Master Plan. The subsequent build adhered to those principles. Urban Eden has been saddened by the departure from those principles in recent years and there are newly developed areas that are (far) the worse for it. Further, we are concerned that the Council's planning exercise MK2050 will yield an outcome similar to the horse designed by a committee - a camel!

Urban Eden has, therefore, decided to create a high level vision for MK that aims to update the original principles to drive MK for the next 40 years and during its expansion to at least 350,000 people. It is drawn from a membership passionate about our city.

Milton Keynes is Unique and Renowned Worldwide as a 'Planning Success'

"There is nowhere else quite like Milton Keynes. It is unique in so many different ways."

Isobel McCall, Chair of the LSP and Former Leader of Milton Keynes Council.

Milton Keynes Sustainable Community Strategy

Our Handbook for Change

2004-2034 (Refreshed June 2008)

The City that Thinks Differently Embraces Evolution and Champions Change

[http://www.miltonkeynes.gov.uk/partnership-](http://www.miltonkeynes.gov.uk/partnership-working/documents/SCS_main_book_for_web_March_2009.pdf)

[working/documents/SCS_main_book_for_web_March_2009.pdf](http://www.miltonkeynes.gov.uk/partnership-working/documents/SCS_main_book_for_web_March_2009.pdf)

Unfortunately this contention has not been illustrated with actions in MK generally and the growth areas in particular. At best, for example, transport solutions imposed recently have been unimaginative and developed from those installed in other towns and cities. At worst, the grid system has been destroyed in and around the expansion areas where they have been designed with the discredited 'city streets'.

Original Six Broad Goals from the MK Master Plan

The original goals contained within the Master Plan were as follows (page 13; Vol. 1):

- Principle 1: Opportunity and Freedom of Choice
- Principle 2: Easy movement and access and good communication
- Principle 3: Balance and variety
- Principle 4: An attractive city
- Principle 5: Public awareness and participation
- Principle 6: Efficient and imaginative use of resources

We believe these remain valid and also hold true for 2050. We believe that the following list represents some important updates:

- Only the best will do, i.e. regain pride in the City with upgrading, repair and maintenance, etc
- Infrastructure before Expansion (I before E)
- Ensure thinking is 'joined up'
- MK is unique so we should be delivering MK solutions, not those inappropriate plans shoe - horned in from other towns
- Think of MK in the context of the region

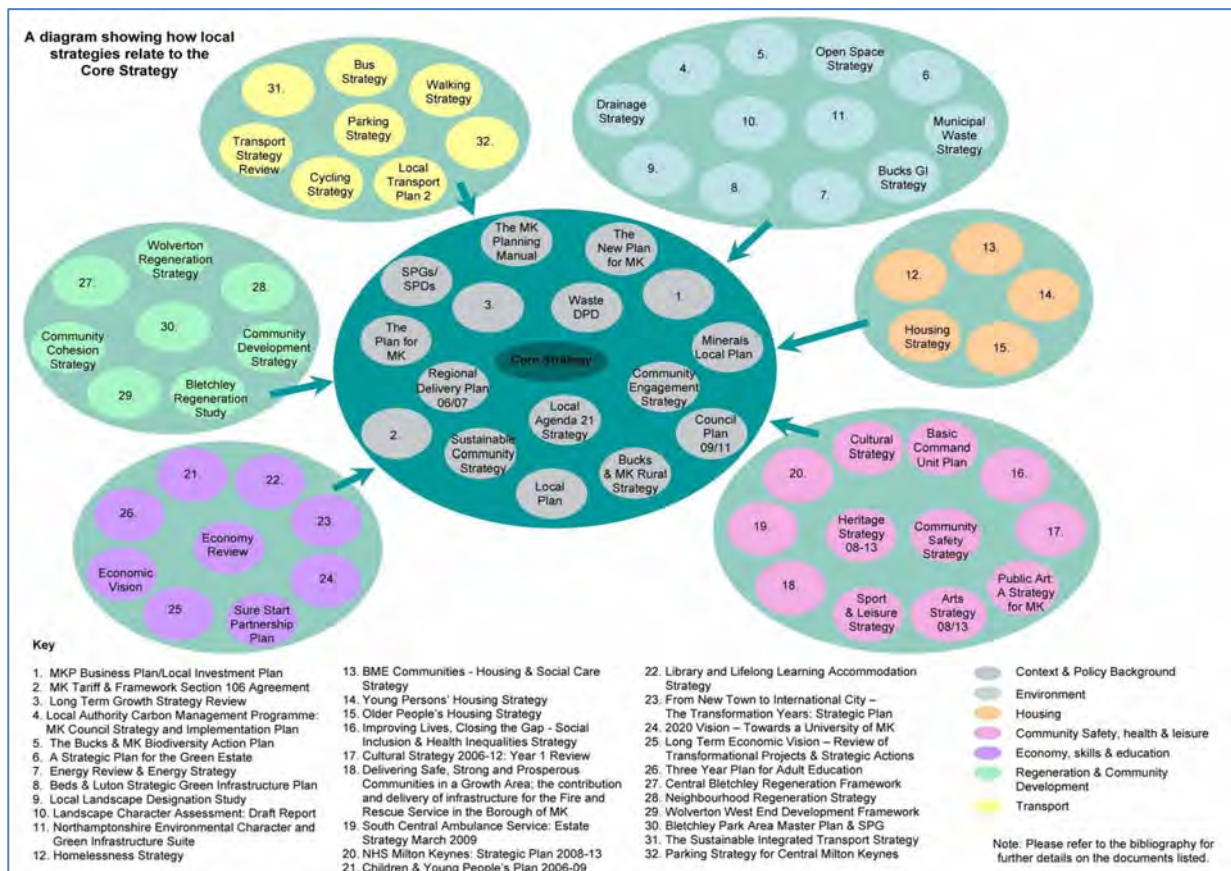
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- Must bring existing areas along with the improvements in new build
- Stop the 'Cultural Cringe'
- Be bold, be brave, have self-belief

Public Consultation

As citizens of MK, we feel disadvantaged by the current consultation process. The volume of materials that have been created by the multitude of bodies that meddle in the development of MK is breathtaking. This diagram is reproduced from page 6 of 136 from the document entitled "Core Strategy - Pre-Submission Publication Version, January 2010" and can be found here:

<http://cmis.milton-keynes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=29065>



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appointees from the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA - formerly English Partnerships) and sits within central government.

Pre-Ordained Outcome

"But now we're more prepared to live closer to each other, prepared to live higher. People are getting married older and women outliving husbands for longer, so there is more single living. This is borne out by the number of houses in multiple occupation - family homes shared by singles. The extent of growth needs to be addressed - do residents want their city to be bigger than Bristol? – throwing up options such as infilling on estates or building beyond the motorway. The city also needs to look at the future of its transport system, as well as the high reliance on jobs in light industry."

Sam Crooks, Leader of Milton Keynes Council

<http://www.mk-news.co.uk/Home/TimetorethinkMK.htm>

We disagree strongly with Sam Crooks' contention and we're not alone.

<http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/mk2050-blog/DisplayArticle.asp?ID=69201>

This sentiment is very worrying. So too are the vast array of planning strategies and plans that carry the same sentiment. Low density and green space defines MK's uniqueness and competitive advantage. So 'infilling' and allowing the muddled thinking on building density of Central Government to prevail will guarantee the demise of this great city. In Britain, densification of existing communities carries a 100% failure rate.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the over-riding principles against which the growth of MK should be governed, in the opinion of Urban Eden. It acts as an antidote to the flawed consultation process and the attempts by government at pre-ordained outcomes.

It must be pointed out that we are working on a budget of goodwill, no funding and precious time. We have picked the level of detail accordingly and recognise we cannot compete with the resources of MK Council and the other bodies involved.

Assumptions

We appreciate that forecasting our economy is difficult but we do need to start somewhere. Therefore, we make the following assumption:

- UK standard of living is maintained (or even improves), hence
 - o Growth in the economy
 - o Investment possible including in the public realm
 - o Outcomes include continuing personal choice in spending; e.g. more personal transport, albeit with a move towards alternate fuels (e.g. electric, hydrogen, hybrid etc)

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UEMK2050 Principles for a Master Plan

MKC has chosen to categorise the consultation into five categories, namely Live, Work, Play, Move and Grow. To ensure our suggestions and critique can be set against their proposition, it makes sense to categorise our version in the same way.

It is our belief that principles should hold firm and that the time, cost, quality triangle applies, i.e. if we have limited funds, we should slip time not reduce quality.

MK2050 Category	Principle	Contents
Live	Built environment	• Size – 350,000 (2031 figure) – assumes jobs are created – see note ref MKSM job shortfall • Growth must be based on current levels of housing density, i.e. transport must fit density, not the other way round! • Maximise use of existing key routes; e.g. a route through MK linking East to West; ○ Marston Vale development etc. ○ A421 to M40 ○ A421 to Bedford and use waste industrial land ○ East – West rail link and associated land • Protect good quality agricultural land • Must retain ability to expand – no more ‘closed’ developments that ‘fence-in’ MK
	Social provision	• Safety net, social mobility, elderly, disabled, religious needs, care in the community, fight isolation etc

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MK2050 Category	Principle	Contents
	Central MK	• Should be only for anything that has to be centralised • Flexibility of design and build (i.e. re-purpose buildings and land) • Transport solutions based on hard facts and ensuring the 'maths' works • Use of surrounding estates to 'merge' with CMK (planning guidelines relaxed, i.e. office space in estates, dwellings out of old office blocks, Campbell Park) • Link central-area housing grid squares with full transport flyovers • We need to protect ○ Boulevards ○ Trees ○ Low densification • Proposed content ○ Leisure / entertainment / healthy-living ○ Retail ○ Cultural centre ○ Green space ○ Education ○ Regional hub ○ More people living in CMK • Tall buildings ○ A presumption against tall buildings except in the event of a great opportunity or iconic building ○ Anyone who wants to build a tall building must meet the needs of the people who will use it • Offices to be converted for domestic or other use until such time as public transport/parking is adequate and therefore allows them to move back in • Office reductions be encouraged because of rise in flexible mobile/home working environments • Iconic buildings where possible using a revised MK design standard
	Health	• Use the same site for all development of facilities (i.e. not a second hospital site) • Need to factor in requirements of dispersed medical facilities • Certain health facilities to be located in CMK rather than on hospital campus

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MK2050 Category	Principle	Contents
	Education	• We need to provide for lifelong learning through nursery, primary, secondary schools, HE, University, OU, Cranfield and so on • Educational planning should be as local as possible • Quality should be consistent across all schools • More discretion for local resourcing • Include commercial/real-world/lifestyle training for all ages
	Local services	• Fire / refuse / recycling / policing is an 'Infrastructure before Expansion' issue
	Arts	• Best in class policy regarding art • Protect, nurture and extend existing public art • Use arts in creating social cohesion e.g. Living Archive projects • Encourage investment in public art projects such as 'IF' (MK International Festival 2010) • Raise international awareness of art in MK to benefit local artists, visitors, hotels etcetera
	Crime	• Design environments in such a way that occupants have ownership of and pride in their surroundings. Allow parking outside homes not in separate locations where crime can occur unseen
Work	Business support	• Champion diverse business structure • Must have designated areas for large scale employment. Sited in conjunction with transport corridors • Efforts not just to creating hi-tech jobs but jobs for low skilled labour, too • Planning regime should be flexible enough for all types of live/work scenarios (within the principles of good neighbourliness) • Work hubs in local community centres • Greater flexibility in existing residential areas
	Digital City	• Phased from now, planning mandated highest commonly available connection speed • Should be a planning requirement • As per the speed people can expect at work

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MK2050 Category	Principle	Contents
Play	Sport	• Recreation for all ages /abilities • Competitive /professional sports excellence • Parks, lakes, green spaces • Involvement in local empowerment activities e.g. public Tai Chi, fun runs, paper chases etc • Hi-spec facilities
	Open Spaces	• Green environment was established to protect downstream communities from additional flooding • Designed to be dual purpose – leisure and lungs! • Must be maintained for the future • New development must be accommodated by flood planning • All parks should be run by the Parks Trust • Leave / convert space for allotments / animal husbandry • Maintain green corridors and built into the expansion areas
	Agriculture	• Need to protect high quality agricultural land for future local food production • What can we grow locally? • Encourage conversion of small, under-used open spaces as allotments or grazing
Move	Transport system	• CAGoT report to be used along with Focus Group on Roads report as both were supported by large public ICM polls • Define the grid system ○ Landscape corridors ○ No further dilution of the city-wide green borders through sales / land swaps by MK Parks Trust ○ No frontage development ○ Presumption for Roundabouts ○ Pedestrians, wheelchairs and cycles separated from road users • Super redways ○ Straight, lit, maintained, 25mph • Proper provision for cyclists • Mass transit system e.g. TraM:K • Freedom of choice to travel without having to use the car • Best in class public transport systems

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MK2050 Category	Principle	Contents
	Road system	• Focus on transport corridors – current routes sacred • Grid system principles must be maintained (route not necessarily road) to ensure space is locked in • Junction 13 to M40 trunk road • Need to plan and secure route for Southern Bypass • Introduce ‘naked streets’ in CMK e.g. no clearly defined ‘rights of way’ so everyone slows down, keeps moving, gives way
Grow	Population policy	• Aspire to well balanced community based on ethnicity, age, socioeconomics based on the policy that already exists • More discretion for local resourcing
	Financial policy and planning	• Infrastructure before Expansion in order not to create a disadvantaged community which will hemorrhage talent, wealth and thus deteriorate and become unbalanced • Continue to tax property developers • Continued increase in land bank values likely on fringe as fringe expands so tax the landowners • Nurture and support ‘self-build’ by allocating land and being flexible with ‘unusual’ plans. Allow people to have and realise their dreams
	Attraction	• Add quality of life (this was central to the marketing efforts over the years and has always on investigation proven to be the thing that draws people to MK - lifestyle, all the lovely pictures of wooded areas, parks, sports facilities, happy shoppers etc.) • Marketing effort must centre on this and make sure that it is delivered; not just promised.

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 Initiated on 22nd February 2010,
 completed on 18th May 2010,
 officially launched on 1st June
 2010

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Appendix 1 – Additional Notes from Meeting 22nd February

Present: Theo Chalmers (Chairman), Tom Walker, John Napleton, Susan Napleton, Kathy Luff, John Luff, Graham Benjamin, Ken Baker, Mark Coster, Stuart Copeland, Sue Malleson, Andy Thomas, Phil Ashbourne, Andrew Lockley, Vicki Lamburn, Linda Inoki.

Theo welcomed the attendees and it was agreed that certain items on the Terms of Reference document would be given priority during the meeting.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE ORIGINAL MASTERPLAN WITH THE BIRTH OF THE DE-REGULATED, FLEXIBLE CITY

Live - Built Environment

With a proposed increase in population to 350,000, the first question to be addressed was where the expansion of the City should take place. Although there was a discussion on expansion in all areas, there was a general consensus that the quality of farming land and landscape to the West should preclude this area from large-scale development. Expansion to the North, South and East was discussed, but all the options have advantages and disadvantages. It was clear that an East/West Corridor including Marsden Vale was emerging as 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. The nature of the expansion needs to be considered in the context of not just local but regional development and the kind of role that a City like Milton Keynes should play.

The difficulty in providing public transport in a diffuse City like Milton Keynes is not necessarily addressed by simply increasing density – more people does not mean that they will automatically use public transport. Building houses is not enough – we should be building communities and that means building houses that people will want to stay in and invest in emotionally; not ‘stop-gap, this’ll do until we get something better’ solutions with built-in problems such as poor parking, user-unfriendliness, impracticalities for expanding families.

It was agreed that some fundamental principles should be applied to any development and these were that there should be freedom of choice for citizens; that there should be easy access to all amenities through transport corridors and public transport; that “only the best will do”; that Milton Keynes will continue to be proud to be “different” in providing what its citizens actually want.

It was agreed that people crave ‘convenience’ and only want ‘exactly what they want’ and building houses/communities/infrastructure which don’t really suit people’s needs and in which they feel unsettled and suffer ‘inconvenience’ was a false ideology and inherently flawed.

Milton Keynes was built on flexibility of movement and ease of use that needs to be ring-fenced for the future. It was very much the reason that many came here and stands the test of time.

Live – Central MK

There is a great deal of privately owned ‘public space’ land in the City Centre. If multi-storey car parks are widely introduced these will also be in private hands. There were also concerns that if housing goes out of the Centre, even more land will be privately owned, as well as the Centre being lifeless during closing hours.

With the prediction of a 350,000 population by 2031, where are all the jobs coming from? If there are the predicted jobs, how will people get into the City Centre? Where will they park if they come

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by car? It was agreed that the City Centre should not become denser and that any increase in office space should only be constructed with sufficient parking or other provision for access and egress. It is hoped that a workable public transport policy will help in this regard and reduce the need for additional parking. It was also a general view that any non-essential activity that could be de-centralised from the City Centre should be, and that would include office space. Any new development should be flexible enough to be changed, for example an office could become a shop or housing. With the expansion of “the deskless society” many people will be working from home and will need to attend an office only occasionally.

What purposes should the City Centre serve – will it be solely a retail and entertainment area for the whole region? Will it be a regional cultural hub? Should it become an educational centre with a University which would make the Centre a more vibrant and attractive place? Why not all three?

Should more people be encouraged to live in the Centre? Would there be a move to attract smaller entrepreneurs rather than the large retail chains seen currently? A suggestion is that access from Fishermead and Conniburrow should be improved to enable local people to use the Centre’s facilities more easily and open up the surrounding area to more flexible development. Currently there are two “lonely” bridges which have a reputation for muggings. The suggestion was that additional overhead road connections with footpaths alongside should be considered.

Campbell Park needs to be better connected to the City Centre. One way of achieving this would be to place V8 Marlborough Street in a tunnel (a la Monte Carlo) with car parking above and providing opportunity for further development sites.

Current policy seems to be making the Centre a more traditional place with plans to change the boulevards, build tall buildings and general densification. It was agreed that destroying or narrowing transport corridors such as the boulevards destroys flexibility, aesthetic appeal and imaginative public uses.

Although some members were in favour of tall buildings (i.e. over 10 storeys), the general consensus was that there should be a presumption against any tall buildings, but a tall building of high quality, status and iconic design would be considered especially if it brought with it its own access solutions and did not contribute to grid-lock or potential commercial failures caused by inadequate parking provision.

It was also determined that the planning policy must be as flexible as possible in CMK and that the general presumption was for the flexible use of buildings. It was also agreed that the general presumption was for offices not to be dominant in the city centre but for it to be more occupied predominantly by low density retail, leisure, health and housing.

Live – Health

The meeting agreed that currently there is sufficient development capacity at the hospital site to meet future demand/built developments. The increasing age profile of residents will be a major consideration in all aspects of future development. Satellite health establishments might be located in CMK.

Live- Education

A University in Milton Keynes was seen as crucial and it should be located in the City Centre area along with student accommodation, possibly in former office buildings, many of which are under-occupied.

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There was a discussion about the traffic problems caused by the “school run” and although there were some suggestions to ameliorate the difficulties, the current government policy of school place allocation and the poor reputation and performance of some schools (forcing parents away from their local provision) would mean that little can be done. Home schooling and small, local ‘specialist’ schools are to be encouraged.

Work – Built Environment

MK should champion diverse businesses and there should be recognition by the planning policies 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 – e.g. 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 business activities (except dirty, noisy, disruptive or “unattractive” uses) can be carried on.

There will still be a need to accommodate large employers in designated, accessible and discrete areas. Separate, large-employment sites need to be defined in future plans.

Work – Business Support

Urban Eden should continue to encourage inward investment by large companies but should also encourage business start-ups, entrepreneurship and innovation by offering new businesses as much accommodation flexibility and choice as possible. There must be as few barriers to starting a business and developing it as possible.

Milton Keynes must be promoted as the ‘flexible city’ where business dreams can be realised without endless red-tape or unhelpful constraint. E.g.. ‘the answer is ‘yes’, now what is the question?’

Work- Digital City

The technology exists but this is essentially a funding issue. Re-wiring with very high speed fibre optic cable would be the ideal solution, subject to other technical advances. Planning regulations should state that no development should take place without allowance for the installation of the best available technology in much the same way that buildings currently have essential services built in. This will ensure the flexibility of the building and its use as a home and/or workplace.

It must be recognised by those in power that Milton Keynes was founded upon the principals that only the best is good enough and thus we must aspire to the universal availability of the very highest bandwidth connectivity.

Play-Open Spaces

Much of the green space currently in Milton Keynes is employed to solve the potential flooding problems. New developments must have drainage systems not only to stop flooding but also to provide bio-diversity (SUDS – sustainable urban drainage systems). Some small non-linear parkland areas are under-used and neglected. The desire and need for allotments and or grazing for cattle, sheep, goats, pigs or free-range chickens should be considered subject to noise, smell and health considerations, including the flexible approach to the underused non-linear parkland. All green land should be managed by the Parks Trust. The reserves on the transport corridors (grid roads) provide noise abatement and wildlife havens.

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There should be a general presumption that these reserves must not be developed and incorporated into new developments alongside new transport corridors and that similar corridor reserves must be included in new areas.

Move- Transport System/Road System

The recent CAGOT report and the Focus Group on Roads with their associated ICM research polls should be a reference point for all transport developments. The grid system should be defined as it currently works and laid out for future developments. Transport corridors will continue in existence while other developments may change. The infrastructure layout is fundamental to any ongoing development. The transport corridors should provide landscape reserves; have no frontage developments with underpasses and roundabouts where suitable. There should be separate redways for cyclists, motorised wheelchairs and pedestrians. There should also be provision for the introduction of trams and improvements in the rail services. There should be no presumption against any form of transport and citizens should be able to exercise choice in how they access the city's amenities.

Public transport in the City will need to be massively improved – it currently languishes in the lowest 10% of UK towns. However the solution may not be busses.

There needs to be significant investment, preferably in TraM:K; a transport system which ideally suits a grid-based city.

Grow – Population Policy

There should be an aspiration towards a balanced community in terms of age, ethnicity and economics. This should be 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.

Strong communities are those where several generations of families can live together or close by. There must be a general presumption that flexible planning decisions must favour the creation of integrated multi-generational family homes.

Grow- Attraction

The poor image of Milton Keynes is exacerbated by the lack of any current Council/HCA Marketing Department. The City and its benefits cannot be efficiently promoted and there is no current co-ordination of marketing efforts. Again, it is a matter of investment.

Milton Keynes was recognised for its public art and high quality cityscape (e.g. granite borders) 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.

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Appendix 2 - NHT Public Satisfaction Survey - Milton Keynes 2009

The interesting results for Milton Keynes are:

- KBI 17 - Satisfaction with lack of congestion - No 1 the best in England (because of the grid route network).
- KBI 13 - Overall satisfaction with cycle routes - No 1 the best in England (because of the redway network and possibly the grid route network as well).
- KBI 06 - Satisfaction with local bus services - the worst (public) transport authority in England.

To find out why people in Milton Keynes consider its bus services to be the worst amongst people surveyed throughout England, one has to delve into the detailed public transport (authority) benchmark indicators. Milton Keynes was amongst the very lowest in all of the following categories:

- Frequency of bus services (72nd out of 76).
- Number of bus stops (74th out of 76).
- The state of bus stops (72nd out of 76).
- Whether buses arrive on time (74th out of 76).

As we know the Government also requires local authorities to report against a long list of its performance indicators. Data that local transport authorities are required to compile includes the number of public transport journeys per year in their area by bus. In Milton Keynes the figure is around 8.5 million journeys from a population of 240,000. This compares with Leicester, a regional centre a little larger than Milton Keynes with a population of around 300,000, where the number of public transport journeys per year by bus is already around 43 million.

The effect of the acute underperformance/under provision of public transport in Milton Keynes is now causing parts of the grid road network to become congested with largely sole-use transport during peak periods. If public transport performance was better and vastly more attractive, the grid road network and its predominantly roundabout junctions, which perform well throughout the day, would also be adequate even in peak periods, as they were designed to be.

Embedded Document: “NHT Public Satisfaction Survey 2009 - Results for Milton Keynes”



NHT Public
Satisfaction Survey 2

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1999. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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