**Development of South East Milton Keynes (SEMK) and East West Rail**

Over the last couple of years there have been a number of significant developments which will affect the community of Woburn Sands. The two key initiatives are, first, the approval in PlanMK for the development of the land between Woburn Sands and Bow Brickhill; this is known as SEMK. The second initiative is the approval by the Government to develop the Oxford-Cambridge railway (known as East-West Rail or EWR). There have been a wide number of publications about the proposals and a variety of consultations have been held although these have not involved many public meetings due to COVID. The Town Council has been involved in many of these discussions. The time is now approaching when a number of key decisions will be made by the relevant authorities. This article brings residents fully up to speed and gives details what will be happening in the next few months and how you can contribute.

In all the discussions the Town Council has been anxious to ensure that the long term economic and social health of the existing community is not put at risk by these proposals. The wider Woburn Sands community consists of about 9,000 residents many of whom live to the North of the railway line. About 35-40% of the residents live in Central Bedfordshire but regard the Woburn Sands High Street as their centre.

**SEMK**

SEMK consists of approximately 198 hectares, just over half of which lies within the parish of Woburn Sands; the balance lies within the parishes of Bow Brickhill, Wavendon, and Walton. Under the provisions of PlanMK approximately 3,000 dwellings plus associated infrastructure are to be provided.

Milton Keynes Council is required to publish a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which sets out the overall shape of the site, its constituent parts, and how it will link into the existing infrastructure. A draft SPD was published in early 2021 for consultation. This draft was revised in the light of responses and a second/final draft was published by MKC for Delegated Approval by the Leader of MKC (Cllr Peter Marland) on 30 November 2021.

Following discussions between Cllr David Hopkins (acting on behalf of WS Town Council and Wavendon PC) and Cllr Marland a number of important modifications to the second draft were agreed at the November meeting and will be incorporated in the final version to be signed off in January 2022:

* Cllr Marland confirmed that MKC’s official Council policy is that no further development of Milton Keynes will take place to the east of Newport Road until the 2040’s at the earliest, and preferably later than this
* There will be only one road link between the SEMK development on to Newport Road and one on to Bow Brickhill Road. Those links will be local links (ie not grid roads) and weight and speed limited. These links will be constructed at the same time in order to protect traffic flow through Woburn Sands
* The development will be phased from West to East and therefore will not reach the Woburn Sands/Wavendon area until the early 2030s. This reflects the fact that final decisions on the detailed layout in this area cannot be made until the arrangements for the railway crossing and station at Woburn Sands are agreed

Following the November Delegated Decision Meeting the decision was “called in” by Cllr Hopkins (on behalf of WSTC and Wavendon PC) and Bow Brickhill PC on the grounds that (a) there was no overarching transport strategy (as had been promised in PlanMK), (b) the SPD should be delayed until the EWR plans had been agreed, and (c), in the view of BB PC, the case for locating a Gypsy and Travellers’ Site in the South West of SEMK had not been justified. The “Call in” procedure creates a Scrutiny Committee which has the power to review the decision and report back to MKC.

Informal discussions between MKC officials and representatives from WSTC and BBPC prior to the scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee were held. As a result of these discussions MKC agreed on a number of procedural measures which will tighten up the relationship between EWR, MKC and WSTC in order to ensure better coordination. One of the measures specifies that the inclusion of an optional site for the relocation of the Woburn Sands station in the SPD should not imply that MKC will automatically agree to the relocation. MKC has also agreed to share all traffic data. Accordingly the scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was cancelled.

The final SPD will be signed off at a Delegated Decision Meeting on 11 January 2022 and available on the MKC website later in January.

**East West Rail**

EWR published their initial proposals for informal consultation in respect of Woburn Sands in early 2021; these included an option to close the railway crossing and construct a by-pass which would deliver all traffic into Woburn Sands via The Leys/Hardwick Road/Theydon Avenue. There was a large response from Woburn Sands residents objecting to this option; residents were also very concerned at the prospect of frequent closure of the existing crossing gates which was the alternative option suggested by EWR. It should be noted that some 60-65% of all traffic into and out of Woburn Sands currently uses the crossing.

Following the close of the consultation the Town Council has had a number of meetings with EWR. The Council has made clear that the preferred option is to build a road bridge either over or preferably under the railway. This would be very disruptive in the short term but would provide a robust long term solution. EWR are currently investigating this option and will report back early in 2022. They are also considering the location of the station and how this would be affected.

EWR’s intention is to bring forward proposals in mid-2022 for formal consultation. The consultation process will be followed in due course by a submission to the Department for Transport; this submission will include the proposals for the whole stretch of the line between Milton Keynes and Cambridge (including a new stretch of line between Bedford and Cambridge). The submission will be accompanied by a detailed business case which will have to be signed off by the Treasury. If agreed by central government the Secretary of State will issue a Development Control Order (DCO). This order will supercede any MKC planning provisions which might be included in the SEMK SPD; hence the importance of ensuring close liaison between MKC and EWR in finalising the SPD.

Once the DCO is published it will be the subject of a Planning Inquiry when any interested party can make representations.

It is impossible to be specific on the timescale but realistically the Planning Inquiry is unlikely to happen before the end of 2023; mid/late 2024 seems more likely. Implementation would therefore start 2026/27. EWR have advised the Town Council that they plan to have the whole line operational by 2030.

The Town Council will issue regular bulletins to report progress as and when information becomes available. Subject to COVID restrictions public meetings will be held when possible.

MDG

21 December 2021