

Annual Report for 2020/21 from Unitary Councillor, Cllr David Hopkins.

What a year it has been. I must start by paying tribute to the residents who have done so much to help our community through the Covid 19 crisis offering practical help and support to neighbours be it through the Food Bank, collecting and delivering prescriptions to those isolating or simply being at the end of the phone for those who need support and reassurance. I suspect we all know friends and neighbours who have not made it through this terrible pandemic and my thoughts and prayers go out every day to relatives and friends who have lost their lives.

Can I also pay tribute to our fantastic staff at the Asplands Heath Centre and to our hard working and always cheery High Street chemist and his team for their helpful, timely and dependable support to our community. I was delighted to have been able to escort the Mayor of Milton Keynes on his visit to a number of high street premises during 2020 to add his thanks for their service to the town.

The No Expressway Group

On a positive note, many thanks and congratulations to the success enjoyed by the *No Expressway* Group (whose dynamic leadership was made up from Woburn Sands residents) in convincing the government to first pause and then drop entirely its plans for a motorway style route from J13 and through the very heart of our communities that would have caused enormous environmental and social destruction. We must be wary however of those who advocate an *Expressway by Stealth* in the form of a Grid Road extension of the H10 all the way to junction 13. Let us be clear, a Grid Road is defined by MK Council as a reserved 80 metre wide corridor and I am certain you can imagine the destruction and blight that would cause to those living on or closest to such a high speed route. Remember as well, that Newport Road was downgraded by MK Council from a trunk road (formally the A5130) to simply the Newport Road to reflect its design and capacity limitations, so I am sure you can visualise the idea of it linking a grid connection into the heavily residential Newport Road, a route already stretched to and frequently beyond its built capacity.

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT - MK Connect)

Milton Keynes Council replaced scheduled bus services in April with what it describes as a Demand Responsive Transport solution which it now calls MK Connect. Let us be quite clear, it is financial pressures that have led to this alternative transport solution following the loss of the many millions of pounds of parking revenues the council would have achieved in Central MK in particular but which have been lost in the current pandemic led crisis. MK Connect works like a minibus that meets you wherever you are, allowing you to travel whenever you want. The service has not been without its teething challenges but, until there is a change of heart or policy at MK Council back to subsidising public transport routes, we must do all we can to make DRT work as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The proposed expansion of MK through the South East Milton Keynes (SEMK) - Strategic Urban Expansion.

A considerable amount of information has been circulated by the Town Council through its magazine, special edition newsletter and through the likes of *Wafas & Wallas* and the Hogsty End Handbook outlining the Milton Keynes Councils proposals for the development of up to 3000 dwellings in line with the local Plan (PlanMK). The local Plan (a requirement of central government) was adopted by MK Council in March 2019 and the area (SEMK) - an area of around 198 hectares - was included. The proposal specified amongst other matters, that the development "should

incorporate buffer areas ... within the site to avoid coalescence with Wavendon, Woburn Sands and Bow Brickhill and that it should 'respect and reinforce the distinct character of those communities'. Approximately half the SEMK area lies within the parish of Woburn Sands.

An initial proposal for a Gypsy and Traveller site close to 'the Groves' and in the eastern buffer zone was quickly removed following effective lobbying.

Milton Keynes Council is required to produce a Development Framework for SEMK which will become a Supplementary Planning Documents – SPD - (or local masterplan if you prefer) when adopted. This document will govern the development of the area and will have to be adhered to by developers of the site. New schools, leisure facilities, medical facilities and proposals for the site infrastructure are all set out in the draft SPD.

The SEMK development is of vital importance to the future of Woburn Sands; we must not allow the vibrancy and community spirit of the town to be destroyed by SEMK; we must find a way of working in harmony with SEMK to the benefit of both Milton Keynes and Woburn Sands.

The process of moving towards the Adoption of the SPD (Masterplan for SEMK) by MK Council will progress through the remainder of 2021. Much more at <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/south-east-milton-keynes-strategic-urban-extension>

East West Rail – EWR

If SEMK were not enough, we have also been presented with a series of proposals by East West Rail in connection with its latest plans to operate train services from Oxford to Cambridge by 'the end of the decade'. The most significant proposal with potentially the greatest impact on our communities would be the suggestion that EWR would close the Newport Road/Station Road level crossing replacing it with a new route running from a point off Newport Road (close to the Wavendon Arms in Wavendon), crossing the railway at Woodley's Farm and linking into Bow Brickhill Road and beyond to Hardwick Road via the allotments and Edgewick Farm! It does seem that at first glance EWR has concocted a series of proposals that greatly favour the yet unbuilt SEMK and are to the detriment of those living in both Woburn Sands and Wavendon. It is also very apparent that there has been virtually no coordination nor consultation between MK Council and EWR in advance of both sets of consultations going public.

There are many battles ahead. Much more at <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/>

Traffic & Speeding – 20 MPH Zones

With the help of neighbourhood petitions and in line with residents wishes, I have been able to promote and support the implementation of a number of 20 MPH zones across the town.

Looking Ahead to 2022

On a more positive note we can look forward to the opening of the new sports hall off Summerlin Drive on Parklands later this year and the Town Council will hopefully be in a position to forward a new, updated Neighbourhood Plan to MK Council setting out the ways in which can add to and enhance the environment in which live. At MK Council I have been chairing a committee that looked at just how Milton Keynes can deliver on its Climate Change Emergency responses and I am working with residents groups in each of the communities in the Danesborough & Walton Ward (including Woburn Sands) examining practical ways in which we can make a difference locally.

We will of course also know more about the SEMK and East West Rail proposals – many battles ahead there I suspect and with the lifting of Covid restrictions residents and councillors will be able to hold the council to account in person rather than relying upon the unacceptable virtual meetings that we have had to ensure for the past 14 months.

Other Bodies

As well as representing Woburn Sands at MK Council and sitting as a member of the Woburn Sands Town Council, I also represent our community on the following organisations;

- Bucks and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (as Vice Chairman)
- Milton Keynes Museum Board
- Milton Keynes Gallery Board
- Chair of Governors at St Marys CoE Primary School in Wavendon (and Vice Chair of Governors at New Chapter School on Coffee Hall)
- Board Member of the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership (Managing the Greensands Ridge from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire which passes through our community as the Brickhill Woods and Old Wavendon Heath)
- Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership
- Milton Keynes Development Partnership
- Chairman, Wavendon Parish Council

Our retiring Town Clerk

A finally, can I add to the many tributes that have been made to our retiring town clerk, Lynne Stapleton. Lynne has contributed enormously to the community over many, many years and I have seen personally how her intervention and experience has worked in our favour to make things happen, speed decision making and generally get things done in Woburn Sands.

Thanks also to Lynne's assistant Pauline Biggs who has taken this opportunity to also retire. Once again, her tireless work has made all our lives that little bit better.

Thank you both.

And welcome to Alison Jordan who has certainly hit the floor running as our new Town Clerk.

Cllr David Hopkins

May 2021