

MK Futures Team

Milton Keynes Planning

Civic Offices

Milton Keynes

30th April 2020

**WSTC Response to MK 2050 Plan**

1. The Woburn Sands Town Council (WSTC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft MK2050 Plan but has not been able to consult residents due to the Covid 19 situation. The following views therefore represent the views of Councillors rather than the whole population of the area.

**Contextual Issues**

1. The status of the MK2050 Plan is not clear to the Town Council. The principle spatial strategy of the plan is based on expanding Milton Keynes into adjacent local authorities. While this may be an inevitable consequence of any major growth in the population of MK it would seem premature to publish these ideas without first consulting those authorities.
2. Furthermore the Government has yet to publish its final proposals in respect of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and, in particular, the expressway/road links between the two

University towns. These proposals will have a significant impact on the aspirations of Milton Keynes. It is also possible that it might be suggested that an overarching Development Corporation of some sort should be established to coordinate the development of the arc in which case any decisions on the 2050 Plan would be premature.

1. Notwithstanding the above caveats however, it is clearly useful for the residents to develop their own ideas on the future of MK and the ideas in the 2050 Plan are a useful start to this process. The WSTC would, however, point out that PlanMK has only just been agreed, and that PlanMK (2) is in course of preparation. It is essential that MKC ensure that these plans are properly integrated and that short term decisions do not close down longer term options. This is particularly important when considering the future of Woburn Sands which is currently under considerable threat (see paras 12 – 17 below).
2. It goes without saying that the present Covid 19 situation will lead to a significant re-assessment of the potential growth/development of the UK and therefore of this region. There will clearly be a tightening in the public finances for a number of years and there may be a number of changes in national policy on such matters as design parameters, density or travel. At the personal level the nature of employment and of retail may well change on a more permanent basis as a result of coronavirus. These changes will need to be taken into account in the next stages of the discussion on MK2050.

**The 2050 Strategy**

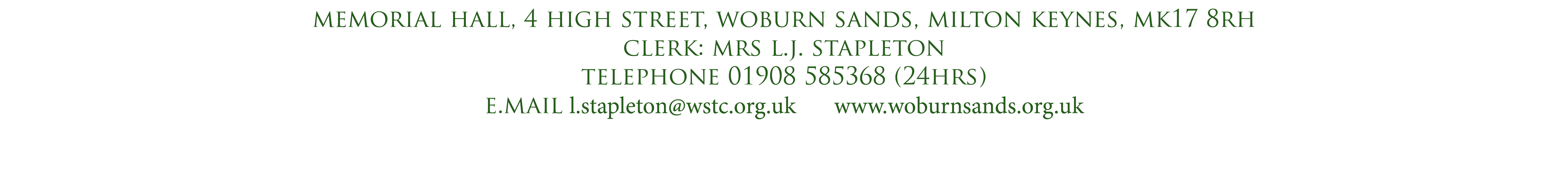
1. The 2050 Plan suggests that it would be possible to deliver 2,900 dwellings per annum (Slide 20: Current number of homes c130,000; 2050 c216,000 homes. This is a growth of 84,000 dwellings over 30 years). This is a very optimistic target and seems to be based on a study carried out by Opinion Research Services (ORS) who were asked by MKC to justify a “strategic ambition for the Milton Keynes Growth Area to reach a population of half a million residents by 2050”. In effect this target is an ambition which, to be fair, cannot really be justified in the ORS Report. A target population of nearer 400,000 as originally envisioned in the MK Futures projection would appear to be more realistic.
2. It should be noted that, in the first 50 years of its life, Milton Keynes has only occasionally delivered more than 1,500 dwellings per annum. PlanMK proposes a target of 1750 dwellings per annum in the next fifteen years so it is difficult to see how the target growth suggested in the 2050 Plan can be achieved. A lower population growth as suggested above must throw into doubt the grandiose capital schemes underpinning the 2050 Plan.
3. In general the WSTC supports the six ambitions set out in the Plan but the Council would like to add the following point to the slide summarising “The Area Today” (slide 7). One of the current strengths of Milton Keynes is the retention of traditional settlements such as Woburn Sands. These settlements make a valuable contribution to the city and need to be protected and enhanced in any future plans – Milton Keynes must not become just another urban sprawl. To some extent this is recognised in the wording of Ambition 1 (“…maintain our vibrant communities…”) but the Town Council would like to see a more explicit commitment in the text.
4. In this connection it is worth noting that the current pandemic lockdown experience has strongly reinforced the priceless value of the environmental assets provided by the green/blue infrastructure and the traditional settlements in Milton Keynes (such as Woburn Sands and its environs) to the physical and psychological welfare of MK’s citizens.
5. A key strength of Milton Keynes is the ability to move around the city quickly and easily; the principle way of doing this is the grid road system. Inevitably this has made it difficult to operate an effective public transport system and has enhanced the role of the car. We accept that this has caused environmental challenges with high levels of carbon emissions and the wastage of valuable city centre space for car parking.
6. This is recognised in the 2050 Plan but the solution proposed – a Mass Rapid Transit system (MRT) – is, in our view, a questionable policy to pursue. No details are given in the 2050 Plan but a MRT system can be very expensive to develop and install. It may therefore prove to be somewhat of a white elephant given the present transport infrastructure and reliance on the private car. The Town Council urges that a rigorous cost/benefit study should be carried out before any decisions are made; the alternatives to a MRT system must be properly considered.
7. In support of our caution it should be pointed out that the design of cars is likely to evolve significantly over the next few years; they will undoubtedly become more environmentally friendly and, as time passes, should become more affordable. The future development of buses and guided busways will also need to be considered as part of this study.
8. Notwithstanding the foregoing the Town Council accepts that it is logical to plan the future of the city along transport corridors as proposed. We do, however, wish to make some specific comments in respect of the Woburn Sands area.

**Woburn Sands**

1. The agreed Vision for Woburn Sands is set out in the Neighbourhood Plan:

*Woburn Sands will retain and enhance its character and identity as a small old town in rural Milton Keynes, and will remain an attractive and sustainable location which meets the aspirations of residents, the wider Woburn Sands community and all those who use the town’s facilities.*

1. The Town Council does not consider that the 2050 proposals will enable the town to meet this vision. The spatial strategy and indicative MRT network, as shown on slides 17 and 24 suggest that Woburn Sands will be a “stopping point” towards the Eastern expansion of Milton Keynes; furthermore there appears to be a suggestion that the Railway Station should be re-located to the West thus obliging the town to be firmly linked into the SEMK development proposed in Plan:MK. These ideas are directly contrary to the concept of the retention of the town’s character and identity.
2. At the moment the future of Woburn Sands is unclear. The development of the East-West Railway is still under discussion; if the present plans come to fruition it will become necessary to close the railway crossing which is the main arterial route from Woburn Sands to central Milton Keynes. No alternative transport network has yet been discussed.
3. Secondly PlanMK proposes the construction of approximately 3000 dwellings between Woburn Sands and Bow Brickhill. No Development Framework has yet been agreed but the Town Council’s position is clear. We can only support the development on two conditions – first, there should be no vehicular access on to the Bow Brickhill Road since the consequential traffic through Woburn Sands (and Aspley Guise en route to the M1) would bring the entire road network to a standstill. Secondly, there must be a buffer zone between the current boundary of Woburn Sands and the new development.
4. These two issues must be resolved before any consideration is given to the ideas in the 2050 Plan. WSTC would also like to take this opportunity to point out that the consultants used to undertake the drafting of the 2050 Plan (David Lock Associates) are the same consultants advising the developers interested in developing the SEMK site; in our view this is a direct conflict of interest.
5. The Town Council believes that there must be a proper strategic study of the long term development of the wider Woburn Sands area undertaken by independent consultants before any further decisions are made. This is irrespective of any consideration of the other spatial suggestions in the 2050 plan. Furthermore the residents of the area need to be fully involved; they have worked hard to ensure that Woburn Sands is an attractive location with appropriate facilities. In doing so they have contributed enormously to the success of Milton Keynes.

Woburn Sands Town Council