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It's time to lift this enduring curse

HERE we are, the end of summer and I'm writing about the Western Expansion Area. Again. Why is it always such a monumental 'SNAFU'? Planning for the WEA was granted in 2007 by unelected, unapologetic, unconscionable bureaucrats working for central government but pretending to be local. And what an enduring curse they cast.

The WEA is the size of Buckingham, 350 hectares between Stony Stratford, Two Mile Ash and Crownhill, and will eventually comprise 18,000 people in 6,500 new homes, employment and parkland. The area is split by Calverton Lane, which should be the western extension of H3 Monks Way, into Areas 10 and 11.

According to developer Barratt Homes/David Wilson Homes planning 180 new homes in part of Area 11, it will be linked to the grid road system and will feature a 'link street' or a 'city street' in feeble disguise. This is the continuation of H2 Millers Way.

Bovis, which is developing part of Area 10, also has a 'city street' which eventually curls round from the V4 to join the V2 and H4.

So although we see claims of 'linkage to the grid system', there are in fact no grid roads there at all in an area that effectively permanently blocks the western approaches of our city.

We've already seen what a disaster 'city streets' are such as Countess Way, the speed-humped, lorry-banned, much-hated, eastern extension of the

H7 Chaffron Way and its similar western end, Hayton Way.

Now, in the recent past it seemed there was hope. I have previously written how the council administration in 2011 renegotiated a 'Collaboration Agreement' with principal owners Redlawn/Gallagher in order to agree significant variations to the original consented scheme.

It secured new network connection principles and an extension of grid roads into the scheme, with protected grid road corridors extending right across it.

The agreement stated: "Grid roads will be extended into the development at V4 junctions with H2 and H3. These junctions will be roundabouts. The grid road extensions will initially be constructed as single carriageway, with development set back from the road as elsewhere in Milton Keynes. The roads will include a landscaped corridor.

"Space will be available to both widen these roads and to extend further into the development should the need arise. Land required to do this will be made available to the council initially as highway verge land or public open space.

"The existing V2 grid road will be extended along the reserved corridor west of Grange Farm and will be connected to the WEA transport corridor at a new junction with the H4."

It seemed all was well. And then Barratt Homes/David Wilson Homes and Bovis started showing their plans in their usual meaningless public consultations. And - surprise, surprise - not a grid road in site. Nada. Nothing.

Where are those Grid Road Reservation Corridors to leave options for future generations? They were, and are, a distinctive feature of Milton Keynes' masterplan. Indeed, Milton Keynes Council's policy is now that they should be 80 metres as advised in The Milton Keynes Planning Manual.

The grid road corridor reservation for H2 Millers Way into that area is 27 metres from house front to house front, and that includes front gardens with on-street parking and multiple turnings.

It indicates a complete failure to understand what a grid road is.

The Bovis scheme opposite Crownhill has 'city street' access to V4 Watling Street but technically no grid road corridor alignment to worry about as it is south of Calverton Lane. However its 'city street' would be a grid road in all but name as it connects directly the V4, H4 and V2.

What happens when rush hour traffic from 18,000 new residents, visitors plus commuters try to use it? What will life be like for those who buy homes on top of that chaos?

The other and continuing scandal is

that there are still no pedestrian or red-way underpasses into the WEA. Gallagher say they have given money to the council and it is up to them. The council says they cannot put them in as it was not in the original planning permission - which overlooks the fact that they own a third of it - and Gallagher are only project managers.

Moving outside the WEA for a moment, Eagle Farm South, near the M1 in the south east of the city - Gallagher again - was approved days ago with between 41-metre and 47-metre grid road reservation (sources vary) corridor even though the council Framework Plan adopted in November 2013 correctly calls for 80 metres.

This disaster has the hands of every recent administration at the council on it. Indeed at the meeting in July of the City Breakfast Club networking group, council leader Peter Marland gave a speech extolling Milton Keynes as a 'can-do' city.

I asked him at the meeting about grid roads in the WEA. He replied (and I paraphrase) 'It's a can-do city, but we can't do that'.

Why not? The council still owns a third of the land in the WEA and it has a 'Collaboration Agreement' with Redlawn/Gallagher. Why, oh why, cannot the councillors who decide these things over three administrations of every political persuasion simply get it right and deliver what the people of Milton Keynes evidently want?

I despair. Cheerio.

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