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It's official. There is no vision for our city's future

YOU MAY recall I wrote last month about attempts to ask the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles to "call in" and send to Judicial Review the decision to approve a multi-storey car park next to thecentre:mk. Despite every councillor who voted for it being opposed to it, Pickles has failed us and his reasons for doing so are effectively meaningless (e-mail me if you want a copy). In the meantime another bogey development, the one previously called Salden Chase and latterly South West Milton Keynes, has reared its ugly head again.

This development, west of Far Bletchley, north of the East West Rail Link, east of Whaddon Road, Newton Longville and south of the A421, by the South West Milton Keynes Consortium of developers Hallam Land Management, Taylor Wimpey, Connolly Homes, William Davis Homes and Bellcross Homes comprises:

- Up to 1,885 mixed tenure dwellings;
- An employment area;
- A neighbourhood centre including retail, community and residential uses;
- A primary and a secondary school;
- A grid road reserve;
- Multi-functional green space;
- A sustainable drainage system;
- Associated access, drainage and public transport infrastructure.

A planning application was lodged with both Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale District Councils at the end of January.

Now while Milton Keynes councillors of every political hue have previously told me that they resolutely oppose such a development, they also universally opposed the car park mentioned above, which they voted for. So excuse me if I have completely lost faith in their will to preserve and extend the best of Milton Keynes and not allow any ill-designed clumpage of homes and businesses relying on our roads, police, doctors, fireservices, hospital etc to be dumped on our borders.

However there is something unexpected revealed in these plans that is far more worrying and these are extracts from a document obtained from Milton Keynes Council called Milton Keynes Transport Model Traffic Forecast Report from May 2012 which I have never heard of or seen before.

This astonishing document, in its Table 4.2 Local Network Infrastructure Schemes section, describes how the following ten Milton Keynes roundabouts will be signalised:

- A5/A4146/Watling St;
- Kingston;
- Brinklow;
- Monkston;
- South Grafton;
- H3/V9 Great Linford;
- H3/V10 Blakelands;
- H3/V8 Redbridge;
- A422/Willen Rd Marsh End
- A422/A509 Tickford.

And 13 roundabouts will be converted to Traffic Signal Junctions (meaning that the roundabouts will disappear completely):

- Kiln Farm;
- Crownhill;
- Loughton;
- Knowlhill;
- Oakhill;
- Oxley Park;
- New Bradwell;
- Coffee Hall with left slips;
- Silbury (completed 2007);
- Marina & Netherfield (double);
- V4 Watling Street-V7 Saxon Street;
- Fairways.

Roundabouts at The Bowl and Grange farm are to be adjusted (whatever that means).

There is even a section marked: Priority converted to Traffic Signal junctions which lists two more, at Watling Street/Tilers Road and Watling Street/High Street.

Have the people of Milton Keynes been asked about this, or even informed? Not so far as I am aware. And why did we have to find it in a plan published by neighbouring Aylesbury Vale?

A member of Urban Eden made enquiries at Milton Keynes Council about this and received the following reply: "Anna Rose [the new service director for planning and transport] has asked me to respond. The transport document referred to is a highly technical report that provided a transport evidence base. It is not a policy document although it did inform the development of the Core Strategy and also the Local Transport Plan."

Pastiche

From that, I deduce that Milton Keynes Council is working behind the scenes to further destroy the things that its citizens, as revealed in polls, so completely love.

Once our roundabouts all become signalised junctions, we shall no longer enjoy the simplicity, efficiency and convenience of free-flowing buses, taxis, trucks and cars and Milton Keynes will turn into a pastiche of unloved Basingstoke, Crawley or Newton Aycliffe. When will our elected councillors learn?

And, despite my constant suggestion that someone, indeed anyone, in power needs to develop a 'vision' for Milton Keynes, such as was held by the original Development Corporation, tragically at a recent meeting council leader Peter Marland declared publicly that he has "no vision for Milton Keynes".

Even the previous chief executive of the council David Hill told me personally that he had no vision either as he relied on the Cabinet to provide one. So, of course, my thoughts turned to new chief executive Carole Mills. Perhaps she has a vision. So I asked her.

She has now effectively confirmed that she has no vision for Milton Keynes either, reporting that she supports councillors in the work they undertake on visioning for Milton Keynes "as it is they who have the democratic mandate."

So I guess it is official: there is no vision for Milton Keynes and we are all doomed. Cheerio.

Business travel: HMRC puts the devil in the detail

Tax expert Chris Floyd attempts to steer a safe path through the minefield that is the expenses claim.

WHEN it comes to business travel, the rules applied by HM Revenue and Customs are not as straightforward as many people think. While the basic rules are simple enough, each rule has an exception - and there can even be exceptions to those exceptions.

It is easy to see that an employee travelling from their office to a customer or a supplier and then back to the office will have completed a qualifying business journey. The cost of that journey can be fully met by the employer regardless of whether the journey was by taxi, bus, train, plane or in the employee's own vehicle. This is an allowable expense in the accounts of the employer, and is not a taxable payment to the employee.

> "Each rule has an exception... and there can be exceptions to those exceptions.

Employees using their own vehicle can be paid a mileage rate not exceeding the HMRC approved rate. If the employer pays a more generous rate, the excess is taxable as a benefit. Conversely, if an employer does not reimburse the full cost of the travel, the employee can claim tax relief on the difference from HMRC. At the other end of the scale, if an employer pays for 'ordinary commuting' costs, this is taxable in full on the employee as a benefit.

While those two scenarios are fairly straightforward, what is the position if an employee travels from his home directly to a client's premises? Is this commuting or is it a qualifying journey? Many will think that it is a mixture of the two, deducting the employee's normal commuting cost from the overall journey.

Well, this is not necessary as the whole journey is counted as qualifying travel. Furthermore if the employee travels from home to a client via their normal office - to collect some paperwork, for example - again the whole journey qualifies as a business journey. A distinction is made, however, if the employee stops at the office to check some e-mails or make a phone call. In that case there are two separate journeys - the normal commute from home to the office and then a qualifying journey from the office to the client.

Commuting is regarded by HMRC as a journey from one's home to a permanent place of work. Following this, if an employee is sent on secondment to work in a different location, travelling to this new place each day will be a qualifying journey. The caveat to this is that, at the time the employee is posted to the temporary workplace, the secondment is intended to last no more than 24 months.

This rule may or may not be useful to workers who are site-based. This situation depends on an individual's employment contract and details of relevant working practices before a decision on the tax treatment of any travel could be made. Additionally, it is possible that an employee may have more than one permanent workplace, for example working at one site for two days a week and at another for the other three days.

Where a journey is qualifying travel, associated costs will usually also be allowed. As well as obvious costs such as parking charges, an employee can be reimbursed for subsistence costs. The costs should be reasonable for the length of time an employee is away from their permanent workplace. This may range from a cup of tea, to a three-course meal and overnight accommodation.

The same rules also apply to those who are self-employed but it can be a little harder to correctly apply them, especially for someone working from home. Most journeys will qualify as business travel. However, if the same place is visited on several occasions (usually with some regularity) HMRC may interpret that place as a permanent work place and disallow any travel there from the workers home.

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