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# Theo Chalmers



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## Expansion: maybe city is big enough already

PLAN:MK is Milton Keynes Council's latest offering in what I call its 'Politics of Obfuscation'. It is the new Local Plan, covering a period of 15 years from adoption.

It sits alongside the Core Strategy adopted in 2013 which sets out the strategic planning policies to guide development in the borough and the Site Allocations Plan - 130 designated sites, effectively a totalitarian 'city infill' where the council looks to build on every scrap of land in our older estates in order, it says, to ensure "a flexible supply of land to meet our housing target in the Core Strategy, in case the delivery of some of our larger sites is delayed".

Plan:MK is out for consultation until April 6 so unless you want your thoughts to be ignored - and they still might be - get on to it quickly. They are, confusingly, asking 20 questions buried in different places in the document. They include: What facilities or opportunities should Milton Keynes try to develop in the future? Is the outward expansion of the Milton Keynes urban area in this direction the best way to accommodate new development in the longer term? What do you think about the scale of the development suggested for east of the M1?

There are several things that occur to me. One is that Milton Keynes was designed as a polycentric city that might, theoretically, be expanded infinitely. However since most of the specially designed grid road 'nub ends'

have now been built over, stopped up and/or turned into effectively useless 'city streets', we can no longer effectively do this.

To expand outwards the borough area needs to expand in negotiation with the neighbouring authorities of Central Bedfordshire, Aylesbury Vale, South Northants, Wellingborough and Bedford. Otherwise we will suffer unwanted 'dumping' of former estates with no supportive infrastructure, as nearly happened with Salden Chase.

Thirdly, if we build on every scrap of green land within our city, surely we are destroying everything that makes us all so love the place and over-stretching our entire infrastructure.

I asked the council these questions with their answers in italics:

How many new homes is the council obliged to deliver and under what statutory instrument or other ungetoutable obligation? *28,000 as set out in Adopted Core Strategy.*

By when must these new homes be delivered? *In CS plan period, from 2010 to 2026.*

Does the figure include new homes already granted planning permission in the WEA, EAA and elsewhere in the borough? *To a degree but on those sites the completions before 2010 are excluded.*

If so, how many additional homes are required to fulfil the obligations? *Currently 28,000 minus the completions from 2010 to 2016.*

How many homes for which there is planning permission have not been started within one year by those holding the permissions and also within two years or longer? *Not so easy to calculate. The 5 year land supply schedule is attached.*

The land supply schedule is very informative. It fully complies with the council's (un)stated policy of 'Politics of Obfuscation' but does set out targets of a rolling five-year requirement for 8,750 new homes across the borough. It never really reveals why.

I wonder if they have considered that Milton Keynes might already be big enough and that we really do not need to make it any bigger than the planned developments in the Western and Eastern Expansion Areas, B4.4 in the City Centre opposite The Hub and other planned developments? Incidentally, 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.

Residents who live in outlying villages are rabidly against ribbon development merging them with the city. Perhaps we should all just concentrate on what is planned; force developers to pull their fingers out and develop areas for which they have planning permission. In the meantime, the council is no doubt eagerly awaiting your response to its well-hidden online public consultation. Cheerio.

## They are your greatest advocates, so invest in your staff

IT IS a well-known fact that a more satisfied employee is likely to stay longer and work harder for your company if you invest in them. As your most valuable asset, investing in your workforce should be high on your priority list, showing them you believe in their potential and creating the strongest possible team.

Training is a powerful tool for your company. By developing the expertise and talent in the workforce, companies can benefit from improved competitiveness and increased profitability, market share and customer satisfaction, which in turn can lead to those magic words: business growth.

Whether it is to promote retention, recruit new staff or boost existing staff morale, the need for training is as great now as it has ever been.

According to the Chamber's latest



Investment in staff will pay dividends in productivity and a healthier bottom line, writes Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce chief executive Paul Griffiths as the Chamber unveils its new programme of training courses for 2016-17.

quarterly economic survey, 80 per cent of manufacturing firms said their investment in training was consistent with the previous quarter or has increased. In the service sector, 86pc of businesses reported that investment in training either increased or remained in line with the third quarter.

So employers also recognise the importance of having a workforce who know the latest regulations, trends and tricks of the trade.

We at the Milton Keynes Chamber recognise that need and now offer more

than 40 different training courses, including 13 brand new courses for 2016-17.

For regulatory requirements, we have Health & Safety for the Small Business and Fire Warden courses.

Brush up on your Absence Management and Managing Change skills with our brand new training offering. It is vital to equip your managers with the necessary tools to ensure your team is well informed on internal issues, knows the appropriate procedures and chain of command and,

therefore, creates a smooth system of operation.

Our new courses also cover the basics of How to Hold Difficult Conversations, Negotiating Skills, Conflict Management and Communication Skills. This reinforces the importance of training individuals to deal with difficult customers and ensure their continued business with the company.

Customer dissatisfaction can be detrimental to businesses, especially if staff do not know how to handle difficult customers. Employees become disillusioned and feel unconfident in such situations and customers leave the company, disheartened.

In the new batch of course offerings you can also learn about:

- Personal Development;

- Project Management;
- Google Analytics
- Tips on Sales for Non-Sales Professionals;
- Winning E-mail Marketing Strategies for Business Owners.

Our list of scheduled courses is not exhaustive. We understand that your training needs may be unique and we have bespoke cost-effective ways of meeting those with tailor-made training. Incorporating training that develops employees toward long-term career goals can also promote greater job satisfaction.

Your employees are your best advocates of your company. Make them feel valued, give them ammunition to positively promote and continually invest in them to ensure their optimum productivity.



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