

# Theo Chalmers

Theo Chalmers is managing director of Verve Public Relations and chair of Urban Eden.

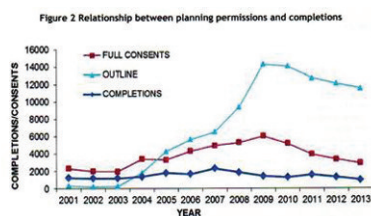


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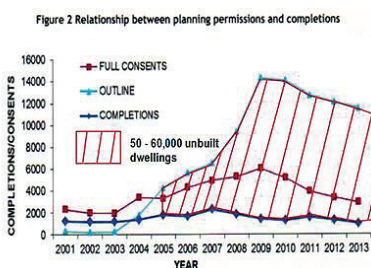
## Expansion plans put smooth running of our city at risk

IN MY column last month, I asked whether Milton Keynes is big enough. This month I have discovered much, much more to suggest that it possibly is.

The chart below shows that, with an annual average of 13,000 outline consents over the last five years but with completions running at less than 1,000 annually, Milton Keynes has at least 13 years of developable sites available to it. According to some calculations from local groups based on the council's own figures, there are approximately 50,000 to 60,000 houses in the planning pipeline, not the repeatedly stated 20,000. Thus no more are needed to reach the optimum size for Milton Keynes by circa 2037.



The issue then becomes the alleged failure of house builders to actually build homes for which they have outline permissions and bring such housing to the market. The question this raises is whether house builders are 'land-banking' and whether the council is either colluding with this (disgraceful), acting in utter ignorance (unlikely), or obsessively seeking new lands to cover in houses when there is no actual need (with this council, who knows?).



This graph above is taken from Plan:MK Topic Paper Issues Consultation Growth in Housing (September 2014). With an alleged 50,000 to 60,000 unbuilt dwellings in the pipeline, surely the council must call a stop to its ceaseless quest for new lands to conquer.

In 2005 Milton Keynes was achieving around 43 per cent 'Outline Planning' to 'Completions'. In 2006 that percentage fell to 30pc. If this was happening now, it would

deliver not the current 827 units but circa 5,000. Alarming in 2013 the relationship between 'Outline Planning' and 'Completions' was just 7.5pc. Is any more evidence required?

Developers appear to be land-banking as they did prior to the 1980s crash and choosing not to build yet on sites already allocated. I asked the council's director, planning and transport Anna Rose at a recent private meeting what our assumed housing needs would be if the British voted for Brexit.

Interestingly, she could not say.

Given all of the above, the scale of the options in the Plan:MK consultation must now be seen as excessive and unnecessary until robust evidence is available to clarify whether such high levels of growth are needed in addition to the present planning pipeline in preparation for post 2031.

### Gridlock

Other questions also need to be asked. What, for instance, is the maximum housing capacity for Milton Keynes beyond which housing growth negatively impacts movement and ultimately leads to economic gridlock?

Once, we had a polycentric city which in theory might be infinitely expanded. But with the permanent blocking-up or City Street downgrading of so many of the nub ends of our grid roads and failure to dual those always designed to be dualled, Milton Keynes no longer can contemplate such extreme expansion.

Originally, Milton Keynes was designed to support a population of some 250,000. This has now been exceeded as we are already at 260,000 and the Eastern and Western Expansion Areas are far from complete.

With the proposal for an additional 20,000-plus houses on top of those 50,000-60,000 yet to be built and with neighbours like Aylesbury Vale planning to 'dump' hundreds of homes on our borders - all using our schools, hospital, healthcare, fire and police - the smooth running of our city is now at serious risk. Current permissions alone will likely take our population to well over 350,000.

Unless Milton Keynes Council can categorically disprove these numbers, which are based on their own figures, I suggest a moratorium on outwards expansion unless and until a proper case can be made based on all the facts. Plan:MK must be put on hold.

Cheerio.

## DigitalMatters

### Cloud computing brings new versatility to systems

THE NUMBER of businesses adopting cloud computing is increasing writes Roger Lovis, partner at RSM's Technology Consulting Services and yet for many the decision about its adoption remains a difficult one. Confusion over what cloud offers and the associated benefits for your business, as well as uncertainty over delivery aspects such as security risks, can affect this decision.



• Roger Lovis

Cloud computing's simplest definition is providing technology services over the internet. It uses shared computer resources so that companies do not need to invest in their own infrastructure, shifting IT cost from capital to operational expenditure. Its pay-for-use model makes its services scalable to the

volume of a company's business compared to traditional on-premises alternatives. New applications can be deployed with minimal cost and significantly less lead time. The range of solutions means that businesses can choose to replace or extend existing systems.

Cloud computing also offers users

high responsiveness, with near-continuous systems availability and the ability to access data and applications from any place at any time.

Three types of cloud storage are available - public, shared and private - and the level of your data sensitivity will drive the decision about the best type(s) to use. The major cloud providers offer high levels of data security, certainly more than any organisation could provide for itself cost-effectively.

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