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No clarity in mystery of a 1,000-home discrepancy



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I APPEAR to have stirred up a bit of a hornets' nest at Milton Keynes Council. You may recall that in my last two columns I have discussed the council initiative Plan:MK, the new Local Plan for the borough covering a period of 15 years from adoption. It sits alongside the Core Strategy, adopted in 2013, which sets out the strategic planning policies currently used to guide development in the borough and the Site Allocations Plan.

The simple question I asked was this: if we are to know how to respond to the questions asked about expansion in Plan:MK's public consultation (now closed), surely we cannot do this meaningfully unless we know exactly where we are right now? To that end I attempted to find out exactly how many new homes have outline or full planning permission but have not yet been started.

That is a very simple question, you would think, wouldn't you? Believe it or not, the council appears not to have these figures. One effort was made to discover the numbers, based on a graph taken from Plan:MK Topic Paper - Issues Consultation Growth in Housing (Sep 2014) - produced by the council. I gave details of this last month. It showed an alleged 50,000 to 60,000 unbuilt dwellings in the pipeline.

Urban Eden has also submitted a Freedom of Information request to the council, as yet unanswered, for the same numbers. However the

council, in an effort to parry my 50-60,000 assumptions has issued some new, and various, data. This is now on the Plan:MK website.

It reads: "Milton Keynes Council monitors MK's housing stock and future commitments each quarter, and once a year publishes projections as part of our assessment of 5-Year Housing Land Supply. Because we look at every site, this projection is very accurate."

"We use this information to chart the relationship of outline planning permissions, full permissions, and completions over time. The data shows a trend using a snapshot in time for each year and should not be added to make a cumulative tally. We believe this is where the incorrect figure of 60,000 comes from."

The council goes on to explain that total housing land supply in the borough as of April 1 this year is for 21,872 dwellings (that, by my reckoning, provides almost 13 years of agreed housing supply).

Of the total, 14,754 have planning permission (3,707 of which have full permission) and the remaining 7,118 dwellings are to be delivered on sites allocated in the Local Plan or in Neighbourhood Plans.

Fair enough, you might think. So "this projection is very accurate", is it? Contained within a report to councillors, circulated almost simultaneously, is the information that as of April 1 land was available for 22,951 homes, of which 3,017 have full

planning permission. A total 5,230 will be delivered through Local Plan allocations, deliverable brownfield opportunities and windfall allowances.

So we seem, according to the council's latest figures, to have lost, or gained, over 1,000 homes - a not inconsiderable sum, constituting developments covering several acres. How might one explain that, except as somewhat confused and confusing?

In the meantime I have discovered something else, rather unexpectedly, which also goes further towards supporting the suggestion that developers might be 'land banking'.

It appears that, on August 8 2013, councillors unanimously agreed to extend the 'longstop' date (the deadline by which developers had to complete housing) in the Western Expansion Area as follows:

"The applicants only have an eight-year period to build out over 6,600 homes before the longstop date takes effect. This will cause financial difficulty to the applicants and they wish to see an extension of the long stop date to 2031."

"The Officer recommended that a Deed of Variation be agreed in relation to extend the longstop date to March 31 2031 on the two above applications, to be reviewed further if required at any point after March 31 2029."

So is the tail now wagging the dog? It all gets stranger and stranger. Cheerio.

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Chamber chief executive Paul Griffiths looks back at the success of Export Week and outlines the support available at the Chamber to businesses looking to develop their overseas trading.

and learn about the support available to them as part of the national campaign to help local companies unlock their worldwide potential. Our international trade manager Brigid Hodgkinson gave a passionate and informative speech about how our experts can help importers and exporters to increase brand reach globally and support successful overseas trading.

Milton Keynes Chamber's international trade team works closely with UKTI and helps many companies large and small every day, offering advice over the telephone, translations, a drop-in surgery and the processing of the vital documentation and certificates needed to export products abroad.

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