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## Projects have merit but there is nothing new

AVID readers of this column may recall that last year I opined that neither council leader Peter Marland nor the current chief executive nor her predecessor had a 'vision' for Milton Keynes. It seemed that, stung by my constant suggestion that someone, anyone, in power needs to develop a 'vision' such as was held by the original Development Corporation, a Vision Commission was proposed. Perhaps to save face it was hastily, and clumsily, dubbed The MK Futures 2050 Commission.

Now its nine-member team has issued its report. I went to its grand launch at the Open University last month. Its key messages, trumpeted somewhat in the style of a politician declaring that he loved both grandmothers and apple pies, are six very hard to hate 'Big Projects':

- Hub of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc.
- MK:IT.
- Learning 2050.
- Smart, shared, sustainable mobility.
- Renaissance:CMK.
- Milton Keynes: Creative and cultured city.

These all have merit but there is nothing very new about them. Milton Keynes has been seen as a midway point between Oxford and Cambridge for years, not least during the days of Station X, Bletchley Park or the soon to be restored Varsity Line rail link connecting the two Beacons of Academe with the less academically inspiring Milton Keynes.

Project Two promotes a new university and central campus modelled on, and cleverly named after, the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology (MIT); hence MK:IT. It would be very good for Milton Keynes and alongside the Open University and Cranfield may provide a draw for technology start-ups. If built, it really must be on the B4.4. site across Witan Gate from Sainsbury's and the:hub.

Which brings us to more hard to hate apple pies. Learning 2050 suggests strong links between schools and MK:IT. Custard or cream with that?

Smart, shared, sustainable mobility is more contentious. Instead of saying we absolutely must have a tram system and we absolutely must have our electric buses going along Midsummer Boulevard through the arch over into which was always intended for such use, it beats around the bush with a word for every alternative that either already exists or has been planned for a while. Surely the Commission realised that in order to make omelettes, it must break eggs.

Renaissance: CMK nods to the CMK Alliance neighbourhood plan but although the commission promotes heavy inward investment into a revitalised, densified and exciting 24-hour economy, it fails to see the contradictions with its policy principles on maintaining green spaces nor addresses potential congestion, some of which we are already seeing and which will increase at a population of 400,000. Milton Keynes: The creative and cultured city. More apple pie and smiling grandmothers...

I applaud the efforts by the Commission members. I applaud their research, dedication and commitment. I am however saddened

that they believe that densification, demolition and infilling of failing estates and expansion outside the city will fail to protect the things we citizens hold most dear.

At a discussion with commission members I learned that they thought expansion was good and inevitable because if we only build homes for the children of those already here we will fail to bring in investment and Milton Keynes will stagnate. But I do not believe they have considered the consequences of not extending the cut-off grid roads, reducing polycentrism in place of a standard 'city centre magnet' model and thinking that a few driverless pods solve the major parking issues.

However they have one surprise up their collective sleeve: a new, locally controlled, Milton Keynes Development Corporation. I agree. Wholeheartedly. Just so long as it is not the renamed Milton Keynes Development Partnership, which so far has failed to effectively use the huge land bank it controls in the three years it has existed.

Its ludicrous plan for a pair of skyscrapers on Midsummer Boulevard is fine in principle but with no effective transport solution will simply create gridlock. To be Manhattan or London requires an underground rail system, trams or a monorail. Are we getting that? Clearly not. What if we had a mayor? This was asked of the commissioners whose response was: "There are good and bad mayors. We might get a bad one."

Not to worry, I am sure the council will carry on blithely compromising in its time-honoured make-do kind of way. Cheerio.

## 'A critical moment in our history' says council leader

**PARTY** leaders on Milton Keynes Council have pledged to put political differences aside in order to deliver the vision in the Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission report.

The council's Labour leader Cllr Pete Marland said: "This is a critical moment in the history of Milton Keynes. Our intention is to use the report as the basis for engagement with local people and for discussions with government on a new deal for Milton Keynes."

Neighbouring authorities including South Northamptonshire, Central Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire Councils will play a part in delivering the strategy, he added.

Conservative group leader Cllr Edith Bald said the report is "hugely significant" for the city and the wider region. She added: "It is critical that all three parties take on the challenge together to shape the future of Milton Keynes. This is not a discussion for party politics; the issue is leadership and collaboration."

Liberal Democrat party leader Cllr Douglas McCall added: "We have to work together on this. It is the future for the city and all of its people."

The commission has urged the council to begin work on a detailed delivery programme. The report also advocates



Cllr Pete Marland


establishing a locally controlled development organisation to attract investment to the city and to develop a non-statutory strategy for 2050.

SEMLEP chair Dr Ann Limb said: "We fully support this 2050 Milton Keynes strategy and indeed see this as a priority."

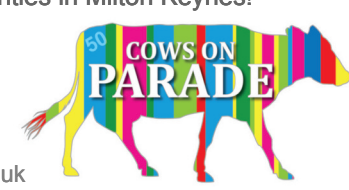
Milton Keynes South MP Iain Stewart was among the audience at the report's launch. He praised the report as "ambitious but pragmatic."

He added: "After last year's election I challenged the local council and other bodies to develop a clear set of values that should govern our future housing and infrastructure developments, the importance of Milton Keynes in the wider economic context of the Oxford-Cambridge arc. I am pleased that they did so and I look forward to working with Milton Keynes Council and government to develop a sensible way forward."

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