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YOU WILL recall that I wrote in the previous edition of Business MK about plans by neighbouring boroughs to 'dump' new communities right on our borders. The advantages for them would be that they will collect all the council tax and government house-target 'brownie points' - Aylesbury Vale, for instance, is required to expand by 33,000 new homes.

By contrast, the citizens of Milton Keynes will collect all the grief; overcrowded roads, buses and trains; overwhelmed doctors' surgeries, hospitals and emergency services and schools and colleges at breaking point.

As I predicted, the revised application for South West Milton Keynes (formerly Salden Chase) has now been submitted. Read the details at www.southwestmiltonkeynes.co.uk and the determination to ignore the much-loved elements of our original master plan are evident.

Nevertheless the members of the consortium responsible promote only the good things which, according to them, include the following (my comments in parentheses):

- Up to 1,855 homes, up to 30 per cent of which will be affordable housing (*Call me cynical but 1pc can be called 'up to 30pc'*);
- Land required to provide a route for a Bletchley Southern Bypass;

Fresh ammunition in the 'expand our borders' debate

- Land reserved for a six-GP surgery (*but, I note, no plans to actually build one*);
- A primary school with early years provision;
- A site for a secondary school (*but no plans to actually build one*);
- An employment area;
- More than 53 hectares of green space including parkland, sports and recreational facilities.

Vanished

Of particular note is the fact underpasses are no longer in the plan. The underpasses planned for the new 'grid road' through the development - a southern extension of the V1 Snellshall Street - in the old version of the plans have now mysteriously vanished.

The grid road extension would form

part of the Bletchley southern bypass linking the A421 and the A4146, if this is ever built. Instead it is now proposed to add underpasses in later if the road is ever extended south of the railway and dualled.

So dangerous and traffic-slowng at-grade crossings are to be provided with underpasses possible at a future stage. This is the same approach used on other developments in the expansion areas as decreed by the appalling, now departed, Milton Keynes Partnership, a wholly owned subsidiary of English Partnerships and responsible for much that is wrong with Milton Keynes.

The argument being that 'someone' will pay for the underpasses later but the intention is obvious - they will never be built. The clear desire is also to ignore the much touted entreaties of

our two local MPs of 'Infrastructure before Expansion'.

I will give praise where it is due however, and one small improvement is the replacement of the Buckingham Road signal junction with a roundabout. Whoo hoo. However, this will have at-grade pedestrian crossings over both the new road and Buckingham Road.

The current scheme is significantly smaller than the original Salden Chase first proposed in 2007 - the thinking being, I suspect; to 'ever so slowly boil the frog'. The South West Milton Keynes proposal takes up the land between H8 Standing Way, Newton Road, the edge of Bletchley and the Oxford-Bletchley railway - soon to be expanded to Cambridge as the revived Varsity Line / East-West Rail.

There is no planned station for the development despite it being right next to this rail line and having almost 2,000 homes in its first iteration, a further example of cost-cutting at the expense of future-proofing and providing good infrastructure.

I repeat my call for Milton Keynes to have its borders expanded to include areas targeted for actual expansion of our city. It is the only action that makes sense.

If you agree, let your MP know. Cheerio.

Brexit jitters are hitting confidence, says survey

BUSINESS confidence about the year ahead has been dented following the outcome of the EU referendum, says new research.

Almost half of respondents felt less confident about the coming 12 months, with only eight per cent feeling more optimistic. Just over one in five are planning to curb investment over the next year, although 56pc said their plans remain unchanged.

Firms questioned in the survey by business advisers Grant Thornton pointed to the impact of a general decline in the UK economy as the main area of concern, followed by the effect of exchange rate movements and declining consumer confidence.

Kevin Gale *pictured*, practice leader at Grant Thornton's Milton Keynes office said:

"Many are taking a 'business as usual' approach to their day-to-day operations but some are reconsidering their investment intentions based on the post-vote indicators and general mood in the markets."

The Bank of England's decision to cut interest rates has encouraged businesses but others are affected by the fall in sterling hitting their cost of imports. They urge the government to prioritise growth in the wake of the Brexit vote by:

- Working to retain full access to the single market;
- Continued EU recognition of equivalence of UK regulations and standards;
- Securing trade deals outside the single market;
- Ensuring the continued free movement of people.

Mr Gale said: "Despite the lack of consensus on the timing for Article 50 to be triggered, the general sentiment from clients and the market is that they want the government to have a clear vision before beginning the negotiations. Businesses are encouraging the government not to rush the process but acknowledge that delaying it increases uncertainty, which is equally bad for business. It is critical that the government uses this opportunity to collaborate with public, private and third sectors to ensure all are given the chance to contribute to this critical stage in the UK's future."



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