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## Cometh the hour, cometh the plan

HAVING acknowledged the 50th anniversary of Milton Keynes and the tenth year for Urban Eden, celebrating the successes of the city, the design principles which guided them and the now widely acknowledged failures to expand Milton Keynes correctly, this month I look to the future and the opportunity to expand as was always planned rather than through piecemeal development.

The opportunity is strategic, involving government, regions, neighbouring authorities and, potentially significantly in leadership terms, ourselves here in Milton Keynes.

There are clear lessons to be learned from the debacle of the Western and Eastern Expansion Areas as well as the failings of Milton Keynes Development Partnership, the council-owned body tasked with managing the borough's remaining land assets. We also have encroachments on our borders by neighbouring local authorities desperate to dump their housing commitments on us, making us responsible for schools, police, fire, ambulance, hospital, doctors etc. One such planned development is Aylesbury Vale's putative SWMK near the Bottledump roundabout on the H8 Standing Way. Indeed I have called for Milton Keynes' borders to be expanded, as London's were in the 1960s, to include such potential development land.

Nevertheless our future may yet be determined by the opportunity to co-operate with neighbouring authorities as required by the government's National Planning Policy Framework to create the National Infrastructure Commission's (and government's) vision. And, of course, there are inputs from the eight so far adopted Neighbourhood Plans, the outputs of the council's MK Futures 2050 Commission and Urban Eden's own published vision: Urban Eden MK2050: Principles for a Master Plan.

This brief window of opportunity comes about through an almost accidental convergence of intentions and plans, which is crying out for co-ordination and cohesion; a new Master Plan perhaps?

Meanwhile Milton Keynes Council has to produce a new strategic plan PlanMK whose draft version, by the time you read this, will have been considered by the council and is now open to citizen input. I was delighted that it contained the Strategic Objective to extend the grid road pattern into any major new development areas. It also references

the ambitious MK Futures 2050 plan which the three major parties have endorsed and the government's focus on the Reading-Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge-Norwich arc.

The latter is a pan-regional scientific/technological/industrial and residential strategy. Milton Keynes is geographically and in its own design its hub so let's get a plan and sponsorship to fit.

This will require determination and leadership to match 1967, starting with our MPs, through civic all-party coherence and involving regional and local collaboration, as required by the NPPF. The screw which is applying all this pressure is the government's desire to stimulate house building while those developers sitting on land with planning permission are resolutely refusing to actually build anything, instead relying on gaining stupidly granted build extensions from timid councils such as ours.

This is nothing more nor less than land banking. The draft PlanMK calls for delivery of land for a minimum of 26,500 new homes within the borough between 2016 and 2031 but appears to ignore all those unbuilt homes. Hmm.

So let's turn all this to our advantage, for if we do not we will be prey to piecemeal initiatives however large or small. The perils of this are evident, not only from the last ill-fated attempts at expansion but very recently the spectacle of Cllr Andrew Geary, the esteemed chair of the development control committee having, as a ward councillor, to denounce plans by a developer for a potentially huge but nonetheless one-off expansion to the north.

In its Housing White Paper, the government promises locally accountable new town development corporations. Aylesbury Vale District Council, with Buckinghamshire's other three district councils, have submitted a report to Westminster urging two unitary authorities for the county.

In it Milton Keynes is hailed a success as a unitary authority and AVDC, as a proposed new unitary authority, proposes to work with us as part of the Oxford-Cambridge arc.

Confused by all the acronyms? I hope not. Uplifted by all the exciting possibilities? I hope so.

Cheerio.

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