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Gridlock is inevitable if NIC gets its way

LAST month - and last year, come to think of it - I wrote how localism as government policy is already dead. So please do not think for a second that your thoughts as a voter, a council tax or business rates payer or as a 'stakeholder' count for anything. They just do not. And while Milton Keynes Council is still trying to deliver its five-year housing plan quota, and its renamed Site Allocation Plan under a new name - the Urban Capacity Study - which lists 117 areas mainly open or earmarked for demolition for probable intensive development, there is a further huge threat acting completely outside of these bad-enough schemes.

The government's unselected, unaccountable, non-consulting National Infrastructure Commission has been hard at work. Hard at work planning for Milton Keynes to double in size, to become a commuter town to serve those far too important to be ruined cities of Oxford and Cambridge (both protected by their Green Belts, something Milton Keynes has been denied) and to be subject to endless gridlock. Nice.

As NIC says in its own extensive report: "If East West Rail and the Expressway were to be developed along the same broad corridor, analysis of land constraints suggests that key opportunities for growth over the next 30 years could include: the re-establishment of Milton Keynes as a developmental location of national significance, through the intensification and expansion of the town to a population of at least 500,000, in line with local aspirations. This presents an immediate opportunity for growth".

Current population is approximately 270,000 and I do not recall any of us being asked for our "local aspirations".

I am certain that the vast majority would respond negatively to a doubling of size for the city and endless gridlock.

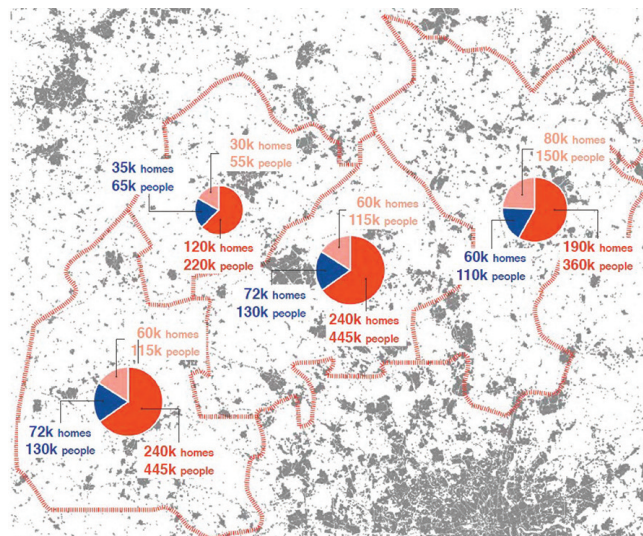
And that is even if East West Rail and the East West Expressway are actually completed, the latter of which is looking increasingly unlikely as developers fill up plots en route with housing, permissions for which are often acquired on appeal based on Milton Keynes Council's recent inability to deliver its five-year housing plan.

"Speculative development can remain a threat even when local authorities have prepared and adopted local plans," the NIC document explains.

"The [National Planning Policy Framework] requires local authorities to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites to provide for five years housing against their overall housing requirement.

"Where a five-year supply is not identified, 'relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date' and speculative development is more likely to be approved."

Analysis by estate agency Savills on planning appeals lodged between January



This NIC map shows an illustration of planned and required development levels 2016-2050. MK, of course, is in the middle.

Pink Current known planned development.
Red Additional development required to meet corridor-level housing need, c.23,000 a year.
Blue Additional required to reflect pressures from land constrained markets, c.7,000 a year.

2014 and April 2015 found that over half of appeals upheld nationally cited lack of a five-year land supply as a material factor, the report adds.

Sanguine

Milton Keynes Council's wholly owned Development Partnership which manages the last of the undeveloped land in Milton Keynes, bought for £32.5 million five years ago from the Treasury, seems entirely unmoved and sanguine about this huge threat

to the place we love.

When questioned at a recent meeting its chief executive Charles Macdonald merely said that he regards the NIC's plans as a "great opportunity", presumably to make more money from its land bank. But what about that MK Renaissance you talk about? Is that just hot air?

One of the biggest problems facing those who seek a renewal of what happened under the old Milton Keynes Development Corporation is that any land acquired will

have to be bought as building land, not as farm land, as then. This has very serious consequences. As the NIC says, agricultural land might be valued at around £25,000 per hectare but land with planning permission might range in value from £1.6 million per hectare in Northampton to £2.7 million in Milton Keynes and up to £5.7 million per hectare in Cambridge.

Lack of commitment by a supine Milton Keynes Council in recent years to extending the grid roads - something that was always intended to happen - means this, according to the NIC.

"In Milton Keynes - a city designed with private car ownership in mind - peak period congestion at some junctions, particularly those serving the M1 and the A5, is severe. Congestion in Milton Keynes is expected to grow substantially over the next decade and the forecast impact of planned growth will be to increase total travel times in the morning peak by 54 per cent."

So once again we are doomed to an active and gradual ending of those things that make MK unique. We have a city copied all over the world from South America to China, Africa to Europe but soon we will have nothing but gridlock and crowded new estates with nowhere to park and nowhere to play to proudly show those city-planning delegations that visit every year.

Happy New Year. Cheerio.

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