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Crossings plan flies in the face of public opinion

THE WESTERN Expansion Area of Milton Keynes is the size of Buckingham. It comprises 350 hectares between Stony Stratford, Two Mile Ash and Crownhill and will have 6,500 new homes, employment land and parkland. A large part of the land was owned by Milton Keynes Council. Stupidly they imposed no conditions to make the WEA like the rest of Milton Keynes when they sold it, despite my entreaties.

For years Urban Eden and others have fought to have grid roads included and for there to be pedestrian underpasses under the H4 Danstead Way and V4 Watling Street roads which abut it. Occupation of homes in the WEA began late in 2015 and is increasing fast. However there are no safe pedestrian crossing facilities across the V4 Watling Street.

I have previously written how Milton Keynes Council in 2011 renegotiated with Redlaw/Gallagher, the principal owners, a 'Collaboration Agreement' in order to agree significant variations to the original consented scheme. It secured new network connection principles and an extension of grid roads into the scheme, with protected grid road corridors extending right across it.

The non-binding agreement stated: "Grid roads will be extended into the development at V4 junctions with H2 and H3. These junctions will be roundabouts. The grid road extensions will initially be constructed as single carriageway, with development set back from the road as elsewhere in Milton Keynes. The

roads will include a landscaped corridor. Space will be available to both widen these roads and to extend further into the development should the need arise. Land required to do this will be made available to the council initially as highway verge land or public open space. The existing V2 grid road will be extended along the reserved corridor west of Grange Farm and will be connected to the WEA transport corridor at a new junction with the H4."

How innocent was I... Grid roads were and are a distinctive feature of the Milton Keynes masterplan. Indeed the council's policy is now that the space taken up by grid road and ancillary land between properties either side should be 80 metres as advised in *The Milton Keynes Planning Manual*. The grid road corridor reservation for H2 Millers Way into that area is 27 metres from house front to house front, and that includes front gardens.

In October 2016, the council asked that residents be consulted on options for the J4 crossing point on the V4 Watling Street, at the Kiln Farm roundabout between Fullers Slade and the new Fairfields development. In June last year a consultation was carried out and found that 67 per cent of residents preferred an underpass, 20pc a bridge. So effectively no one wanted dangerous, traffic-slowing, at-grade (street-level) crossings. A petition was submitted in December from residents in Whitehouse for safe road crossing facilities on H4 Danstead Way.

Until recently there was hope that underpasses on the V4 in particular would still be built. Indeed on October 11 2016 Cabinet (Minute C60) approved the recommendation for:

- The construction of a pedestrian underpass at J25, the roundabout between Two Mile Ash and the new Whitehouse development;
- A decision on the type of pedestrian crossing to be installed at J4 (Kiln Farm) to be deferred to allow residents likely to be affected by the crossing to be consulted on the type.

Recently however, the council in its outline feasibility design study determined that there are "insufficient funds for an underpass at J4". In addition, the design of the underpass at J25 (Two Mile Ash) shows that "the overall costs for the underpass have been calculated to exceed the budget available".

Meanwhile the council clings to the innumerate madness that building at-grade crossings at J4 and J24 on Danstead Way does not preclude building underpasses at each location should funding become available in the future.

Nevertheless, it states that it is vitally important and urgent to "provide safe and affordable pedestrian crossings on the V4 and H4 for residents. As there is insufficient budget available to construct underpasses, it is proposed to urgently install pedestrian crossings at J4 Kiln

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Farm Roundabout between Fullers Slade and Fairfields; and J24 of the H4 Danstead Way, Whitehouse. It is also essential that future safe crossing provision is planned for as the development progresses."

At the council's Delegated Decisions meeting on January 30, they accepted the recommendation for approval of further crossings in the Western Expansion Area at J24 V4 and 3/26, V4; at-grade pedestrian crossings along the V4 and H4 corridors at J4 V4 and J24 H4, with implementation as quickly as possible; spend for the two identified at-grade crossings and the value engineering and design completion of Whitehouse underpass at J25 V4.

They also approved that the value engineering exercise for J25 V4 for the Whitehouse underpass be noted and a decision to consider this crossing and the location and type of crossing of J3/26, V4 be considered at a later date. In order to "ensure the safety of the pedestrian crossings" they also agreed to reduce the speed limits along the V4 and H4 from 60 mph to 40 mph. So further grid lock beckons.

Essentially this means that Milton Keynes Council will be building pedestrian crossings on Watling Street and Danstead Way - reducing the speed limit on both grid roads from 60mph to 40mph - and will be going against the wishes of 87pc of residents.

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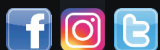
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