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Plan:MK - what about the people?

THE NEW development plan for Milton Keynes, Plan:MK, is currently undergoing a Public Examination by inspector David Spencer. As you read this, the Plan:MK Examination Hearings Stage One were due to have taken place on July 10-20. My feeling, having read the *Inspector's Matters, Issues, Questions* is that there is no way this will be easily concluded.

The inspector has a good grasp of contentious issues. To say that every element of the plan is subject to fundamental review and vigilance would be an understatement. And that, I contend, is admirable.

As the examination started, serried ranks of housing developers occupied many seats as the inspector, a thoughtful gentleman with a sense of humour, set about establishing the soundness of the plan. The examination was public and it would have been good if more members of the public were there. And yet, it ploughed ever on, with developers making representations despite the ongoing uncertainties over the route of the East West Expressway.

Plan:MK was formally submitted to the Secretary of State on March 29 this year after a consultation process in November and December 2017. The main areas for Plan:MK

development are:

- Central Milton Keynes;
- Uncompleted city estates;
- Existing expansion areas and strategic land allocations;
- New strategic growth areas such as South-East Milton Keynes;
- Land east of the M1 and at Eaton Leys;
- Selective infill, brownfield, regeneration and redevelopment opportunities, including on key estates by the council via Your:MK;
- Newport Pagnell, Olney, Woburn Sands and other villages in compliance with adopted local neighbourhood plans and within defined settlement boundaries.

Courage

If formally adopted, Plan:MK will replace the Core Strategy adopted in 2013 and saved policies from the Local Plan (adopted 2005). Milton Keynes Council has been under pressure from central government which requires it to build a minimum 26,500 new homes by 2031. No one at the council had the foresight or courage to object to this madness despite it threatening to permanently destroy everything that makes Milton Keynes different.

Indeed, the council had introduced a paid-for 'Select a

Planning Officer' service until the obvious potential pitfalls and 'administrative irregularities' were brought to its attention. Thankfully, the initiative is now scrapped.

The inspector has to consider whether the plan meets the requirements of relevant legislation and complies with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Framework indicates that a sound plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. Whatever the inspector decides, however, nothing will be permanent, no red lines will be laid down that cannot be crossed and no 'up-with-this-we-will-not-put's will be spoken. Plan:MK will be reviewed every five years. Thus even once decided, things may easily change in 2023.

At the end of this process very little will have been about the people of Milton Keynes. The vast majority of it will have been about its legal compliance, developer profits and the council's desire for economic and developmental growth.

Sadly, the things that make life great here will only count where they touch upon legal compliance. Is this really the Milton Keynes we want? Cheerio.

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