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## 'Dambuster' MPs restrain the development tide

FOLLOWING my recent articles about ill-planned expansion in and of Milton Keynes, it seems that the dam holding back a tsunami of righteous objections may have finally been breached. And the somewhat unlikely dambusters concerned, according to a recent story in The Sunday Telegraph and elsewhere, are Milton Keynes' two Conservative MPs; defence minister Mark (bomber) Lancaster and Government whip Iain Stewart.

At the last minute they are said to have persuaded Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond MP to drop a planned announcement within his budget speech for approximately 100,000 new houses to be built in Milton Keynes.

This may be because they realise, correctly, that virtually no real thought has been put to 'I before E' (infrastructure before expansion) such as road capacity, hospital beds, schools, emergency services in a city designed for 250,000 whose population already exceeds that number by some 20,000 and counting.

Readers of this column will recall that Kit Malthouse MP, the Minister for Housing, gave Milton Keynes Council and other authorities on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Arc just six weeks in the 'everyone-is-on-holiday' summer to identify where

to build one million new homes by 2050, at least 100,000 of which would have been in Milton Keynes, doubling its population to over 500,000.

Milton Keynes Council's own plans to double the city's size had been put forward to Messrs Hammond and Malthouse without, it transpires, any real discussion with the local MPs - even though Iain Stewart is the government's 'champion' of the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge

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Arc - nor with the full council nor consultation with residents. So it seems we were all to be sold down the river for a mess of pottage.

Meanwhile the scandal of some 20,000 new homes within our borders already with planning permission - some unreasonably extended by the council - but not being built out by developers continues. It is easy to see how the well-funded and well-advised developers maintain this drip-drip housing supply in order to artificially inflate prices and buyer demand as well as giving them perfect leverage for appeals against on-going planning

refusals because Milton Keynes Council has failed to meet its five-year housing target.

It is like big fat cats toying with a tiny, scared mouse, isn't it?

However, our local MPs' dambusting, while promising, may not have stopped the expand-Milton-Keynes juggernaut just yet. It seems Housing Minister Malthouse is still ploughing ahead with plans to build those 100,000 new homes here, as is the council. They have even thrown a couple of little sweeteners into the pot, firstly promising that a new Milton Keynes Development Corporation - not necessarily a bad thing - would be set up to mastermind the expansion.

The second sweetener would be funding for a new mass transit system in Milton Keynes such as a tram - something for which I and Urban Eden have been calling for years. I dubbed it TraM:K.

My very real fear though is that just as the massive infill expansion is finished, there will be news that there is no money left for the tram system. Just as there was suddenly no money for the promised underpasses on the V4 or new grid roads in the Western Expansion Area.

Council leader Pete Marland must think we are all mugs. Perhaps we are. Cheerio.

### ...and a welcome to council's new chief executive

MILTON Keynes Council has a new chief executive, this time promoted internally. Former corporate director of people **Michael Bracey** pictured is now on the magnificent salary of £176,000 a year plus benefits.

His salary boasts a splendid uplift of just over 12 per cent - considerably higher than inflation - from the chief executive's salary in the last financial year when it was £157,095.

For comparison, the Prime Minister Theresa May is paid £149,440 a year.

So while many sleep in the underpasses and the council slashes services hither and thither, its new



chief executive enjoys an annual salary which exceeds the Prime Minister's by £26,560.

This seems entirely reasonable. Someone has to scrap (sorry,

'recycle') hundreds of perfectly good brown desks and replace them with 943 tiny white 'hot-desks' at a cost of £63,687, as he did while corporate director of people. Although how people are supposed to work effectively when there are only six tiny desks for every ten office-based employees, literally, I have no idea.

Perhaps the deskless four in every ten are busy penalising the other six for daring to leave items on the micro-desks for more than two hours or for daring to eat food at them (both banned activities).

Still I have no doubt whatsoever that he will be just as good as his predecessor Carole Mills.

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