

Cabinet report



15 December 2020

Strategy for 2050

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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Ref number 33
Wards affected	All wards

Executive summary

The Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050 sets the way forward for the next era of making our great city greater. Creating a long-term strategy was a recommendation of the MK Futures 2050 Commission. Public and stakeholder engagement has been extensive and included a draft strategy published for comment in January 2020 for 18-weeks and a subsequent 5-week long review of the impacts of COVID-19. The Strategy sets out a long-term approach to spatial development. It aims for a steady population increase to around 410,000 people in the borough by 2050 as the best means of achieving Seven Big Ambitions.

The Strategy includes a commitment to provide essential infrastructure and services, including a Mass Rapid Transit System. It also commits to keep and strengthen those things that make Milton Keynes special – green spaces and trees, being able to move around easily using grid roads and redways, a vibrant economy and diverse communities and a strong community spirit. It includes proposals to help achieve the council's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 and to support the mental and physical health of the community. The Strategy has been prepared to provide ambition and focus at a time of great uncertainty but to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances. A revised MK Futures 2050 programme is recommended to re-focus effort on delivery of the strategy, as is a partnership approach with national government.

1. Decisions to be made

- 1.1 That the Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050 be approved.
- 1.2 That Cabinet recommends to Council that the Strategy become an Annex to the Council Plan and is approved as such.
- 1.3 That Cabinet commits to receiving a revised MK Futures 2050 programme by the end of June 2021.
- 1.4 That a partnership approach to implementing the strategy with government and its agencies, including Homes England, be agreed.

2. Why is the decision needed?

Background

- 2.1 The Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050 sets the way forward for the next era of making our great city greater. It is a strategy for everyone living in Milton Keynes today, especially the children and young people who will be our future citizens, as well as those who will choose to move here to be part of a globally leading green city.
- 2.2 The need for a new strategy was identified by the MK Futures 2050 Commission established by the council in 2015 to help create a vision for the next phase of our city's journey. The Commission's report, Making a Great City Greater, was published in July 2016 and proposed that Milton Keynes should grow to a population of around 400,000 people by 2050 and set out a broad approach for where that development could happen. The vision and direction of their findings received unanimous support from the different political groups on Milton Keynes Council and have provided the basis for the Strategy.

Why is a strategy required - now?

- 2.3 Milton Keynes is a living example of how well-planned growth can produce better lives and better places. Effective planning allows us to strengthen what works well and make sure every resident in every part of Milton Keynes can benefit from the city's economic prosperity. This includes making available the infrastructure and services that are essential for both existing and new communities. The Strategy for 2050 includes a commitment to provide city-wide green space alongside other essential infrastructure and services so that development does not put pressure on our communities and environment. It includes proposals that will help achieve the council's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030, deliver inclusive development that helps reduce poverty, and support the mental and physical health of the community.

- 2.4 By planning upfront and over the long-term we can make the case for investments that will serve us well into the future, rather than reacting as pressures arise. This is especially important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic recession. Having a clear vision and commitment to sustained growth will help attract investment from both public and private sector sources in projects such as MK:U, the new city centre university in partnership with Cranfield University. Our strategic ambition has already proved important in helping attract Government investment into the expansion of Milton Keynes University Hospital.
- 2.5 A clear plan created by the council provides more local democratic control over development so we can ensure it is done well and that local people are involved in decisions about their communities. If we lack a clear vision then housebuilders would have greater influence over the timing and location of development, and this would mean unplanned growth without all the infrastructure our communities need.
- 2.6 Failure to build enough homes will lead to even greater increases in house prices than in recent years, making it ever more difficult for our residents and their children to afford a home to buy or rent. Aiming to slow or stop the city from growing would undermine our economy so fewer jobs would be created and we would have less to invest in public services and the upkeep of our existing infrastructure. The heaviest burdens would fall on our most disadvantaged people, a risk that is even more severe as we face the economic challenges triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The process for creating the Strategy for 2050

- 2.7 The strategy has been developed through the MK Futures 2050 programme that has been responsible for delivering the Six Big Projects recommended by the MK Futures Commission. The programme of work has included a series of detailed evidence studies covering issues such as growth locations, Mass Rapid Transit and the city's future economy. Key evidence studies have recently been reviewed to test their assumptions against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full range of studies has been published on the MK Futures 2050 website (www.MKFutures2050.com).
- 2.8 Public and stakeholder engagement has been a central feature of the MK Futures programme since it was established in 2016. A communications strategy has been delivered over the period of its operation, including regular briefings for city stakeholders and public engagement via social media, regular local radio slots and presentations at numerous public events. A major exhibition was held in Middleton Hall during 4-7 July 2019 and seen by 121,000 people, a 41% uplift in visitors to that part of the shopping building over the same weekend in 2018. A dedicated project stream was created to engage young people which included "Forging the Future", a series of sessions attended by three local secondary schools to look at different aspects of the MK Futures 2050 programme. Outputs from these sessions are included in the Strategy for 2050.

- 2.9 A draft strategy was published on 20th January 2020 for an engagement period that was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic to 22nd May 2020. This included a programme of public meetings within the borough and immediately neighbouring areas that was largely completed prior to COVID-19 restrictions being implemented. Meetings were subsequently held virtually, where requested, and a narrated version of the engagement presentation was posted on the MK Futures website. A further 5-week long round of engagement was held during June-July 2020 to seek views on the impact of COVID-19 on key elements of the strategy. Dedicated reviews were also undertaken of the potential impact of COVID-19 and the associated economic recession on key policy elements including the prospects for housing and jobs growth, the operation of Mass Rapid Transit, and the design of homes and communities.
- 2.10 A Supporting Statement (Annex B) has been prepared to summarise the engagement process undertaken on the Strategy for 2050 and includes a high-level summary of the comments received during the two engagement periods during 2020. It also explains how this has been used to revise and refine the final Strategy. A more comprehensive summary of the comments received has also been prepared with details of how these have been considered in the final Strategy (available at MKFutures2050.com).

Strategy focus

- 2.11 The Strategy for 2050 offers Seven Big Ambitions which together act as our promise to those living here today and those who wish to make their homes here in future. We will:
- strengthen those qualities that make Milton Keynes **special**;
 - make Milton Keynes a **leading green city** – by global standards;
 - ensure everyone has their own **decent home** to rent or buy;
 - build safe communities that support **health and wellbeing**;
 - **provide jobs for everyone** by supporting our businesses, and attracting new ones;
 - offer better opportunities for everyone **to learn** and develop their skills; and
 - make it **easier for everyone to travel** on foot, by bike and with better public transport.
- 2.12 The Strategy aims for growth by a steady population increase to around 410,000 people living in the borough by 2050 as the best means of achieving the Seven Big Ambitions. The flexible development framework of the Strategy can support growth beyond this total under the right conditions, including a strong working partnership with the government that provides investment in the services and infrastructure that a larger city would require.

2.13 The Strategy for 2050 does not specify development sites in our neighbouring areas as that is a decision for the relevant councils and any homes built are counted towards their housing targets. It does anticipate that growth in immediately neighbouring areas, coupled with the growth of the Borough, will see a “Greater Milton Keynes” population of around half a million people by 2050. We hope to work with our neighbours to develop plans that create high quality development and joined up infrastructure and services.

Implementing the strategy

2.14 The Strategy has been prepared during a time of uncertainty in various projects and events which we know could have an impact on its contents and delivery, including the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession, a new relationship with the European Union, the government’s intentions for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the “pausing” of the proposed A421 expressway, likely changes to the planning system following the Planning White Paper, and the creation of unitary councils in neighbouring areas. We have used the best available knowledge at the time in preparing the Strategy, which is designed to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances. At a time of great uncertainty and volatility it is even more important for us to have a vision of what we are trying to achieve for Milton Keynes.

2.15 The Strategy for 2050 is not a statutory planning document. If adopted, it will provide a high-level policy framework for future statutory local plans. Cabinet are recommended to adopt the Strategy, but to then additionally recommend that the Strategy becomes an Annex to the Council Plan and be approved as such on 20 January 2021. This will have the effect of making the Strategy for 2050 a policy framework document.

2.16 The Strategy for 2050 has been produced through the MK Futures 2050 programme that includes the Six Big Projects recommended by the MK Futures Commission. Having achieved this important milestone of publication of the Strategy it is an appropriate time to review that programme to ensure it is now more strongly focused on action to implement the Strategy.

2.17 Milton Keynes was created with major national investment to meet national strategic priorities. We now need a new and powerful partnership with government. Working closely with government departments and agencies, such as Homes England, on our shared ambitions for long-term, high quality growth will help secure investment by aligning priorities and resources. It will give confidence to our communities that growth is being done properly. We will also aim to work on delivery in partnership with the housebuilding industry and landowners.

3. Implications of the decision

Financial	N	Human rights, equalities, diversity	Y
Legal	N	Policies or Council Plan	Y
Communication	Y	Procurement	N
Energy Efficiency	Y	Workforce	N

a) Financial implications

None directly from adopting the Strategy. The Strategy includes proposals for development models that will help to secure public and private investment for infrastructure, services and facilities. One-off MKC funding was allocated in the 2020/21 budget to MK Futures implementation studies.

b) Legal implications

The Strategy for 2050 is not a formal planning policy document and so has no weight in the planning process and is not a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

c) Other implications

Communications – the Strategy for 2050 has been produced through an extensive stakeholder and public engagement programme that is described in the body of the report.

Human rights/equalities. The Strategy for 2050 has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment that found the strategy advances equality of opportunity in numerous ways and mentions, and has regard to, the need for inclusivity, diversity and meeting the challenge of child poverty. The Strategy recognises the diversity of Milton Keynes as a great strength and sets out policies that will contribute to delivering inclusive growth that benefits everyone in Milton Keynes and helps address child poverty, including increasing the delivery of truly affordable homes, improving access to skills and better jobs, ensuring local facilities and services are accessible to everyone within easy reach of their homes, and delivering a much improved public transport network to aid mobility for all. These are interventions referenced in the final Milton Keynes Child Poverty Commission report. The Impact Assessment notes that as the Strategy is delivered, we will need to give attention to the factors that have led to persistent child poverty and focus on designing in access to all and developing a ‘welcoming spirit’. These themes are integral to our Strategy but there is a risk they could be disregarded as we deliver our ambitions if they aren’t given the right attention.

Energy efficiency. Chapter 3 of the Strategy for 2050 is titled “A sustainable and Green City” and describes strategic policies that will help reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption and require sustainable construction. Elsewhere, the Strategy promotes energy efficient transport and buildings.

Policies and Council Plan. The Strategy for 2050 helps deliver several actions within the Council Plan:

- Action 19 – Support the delivery of a fully electrified East-West Rail and continue to promote better connectivity and infrastructure across the Oxford-MK-Cambridge Arc.
- Action 23 – Continue to support the development for a Mass Rapid Transport system
- Action 33 – Take back control from developers, progressing a shared vision for the future of the City with MK Futures 2050 and securing proper funding for growth through a Housing Deal
- Action 34 – Progress Plan:MK2 to plan the growth for MK properly, and include appropriate zero carbon housing mix policies that address the needs of Milton Keynes
- Action 41 – Bring forward plans to improve Station Square.
- Action 42 – Bring forward plans to improve CMK market.
- Action 53 – Seek funding from Government for the development of MK:U

The adoption of the Policy is a two-stage process. Cabinet will formally approve its adoption by decision at this meeting, but also recommend that it become an Annex of the Council Plan, effectively becoming a Policy Framework document if agreed by Council in January 2021. Other policies/strategies should then respond accordingly as part of delivery.

4. Alternatives

4.1 The alternative option of delaying the publication of the Strategy has been considered and discounted. The Strategy is deliberately designed to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances. At a time of great uncertainty and volatility it is even more important for the council to have a vision of what we are trying to achieve for Milton Keynes.

5. Timetable for implementation

- Recommendation to Council for 20th January.
- Revised MK Futures 2050 programme by end April 2021.

List of annexes

Annex A – [Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050, November 2020](#)

Annex B – [Strategy for 2050 Supporting Statement, November 2020](#)

Note: Annex A not supplied printed with this report as previously supplied to all Councillors.

List of background papers

MK Futures 2050 Commission “Making a Great City Greater”, July 2016

Strategy for 2050 – Engagement Draft, January 2020

Available at www.MKFutures2050.com

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