

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL

Children & Young People Committee

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON PLAN:MK

INTRODUCTION

- 1 At its meeting on 8 February 2017 the Committee agreed that a response be prepared to the Council's consultative draft on Plan:MK.
- 2 Education and Skills do not merit a chapter of their own in a report of sixteen chapters. **The Committee regrets this**, believing that it gives a misleading impression of how the Council views their importance. It considers that paras 6.9, 6.10, and 14.40 - 53 should be restructured as a new chapter, and should refer to paragraphs 13.19 and 13.20 with regard to student accommodation.

REFERENCES

Education and Skills

- 3 Reference is made to the Milton Keynes Skills Strategy (approved by the Council in February 2016) in paragraphs 6.9 and 6.10. This is in the context of ensuring that the remaining stock of vacant employment land and proposed new employment allocations will provide a sufficient number of jobs to cater not only for the growth of the Borough's labour forces to 2031 but will also provide jobs for in-commuters. Plan:MK concludes that the Council has sufficient land to meet its needs for office and industrial floor space but has a shortfall in the amount of land allocated for warehousing. It therefore designates an additional 57 ha for this purpose. **The Committee has no comment on this section.**

Further and Higher Education – Education space

- 4 In Paragraph 13.20 and 14.50 - 53 the Plan discusses the MK2050 Commission's proposals for a new university preferably within Central Milton Keynes attracting around 10,000 students within 5 years of its establishment. Thus there is likely to be a need to provide purpose built on-campus student accommodation within Central Milton Keynes with the possibility of off-campus provision also being required.

The Committee welcomes the emerging and proposed concentration of further and higher education (other than the University Hospital academic centre and the Open University) within Central Milton Keynes. **It proposes** that Site B4 near the railway station be identified for the new University but that its associated student accommodation blocks be situated elsewhere within the centre so as not to overcrowd the campus. This would also have the advantage of locating young people closer to the retail and leisure locations within CMK.

- 5 **The Committee urges** that immediate discussions also be undertaken with Milton Keynes College to provide for its city centre plans.

Further and Higher Education – Accommodation Space

- 6 In paragraphs 13.18 and 13.19 the Plan quotes the 2011 census as identifying 12,840 students aged 16 to 24 living in the borough, some 8% of the total population. There are no halls of residence for these students most of whom are aged 16 – 18 and live with parents. And, as described above, the Plan also notes in paragraphs 14.44 and 14.45 the MK2050 Commission proposal for the establishment of an undergraduate university preferably within Central Milton Keynes. There is likely to be a need to provide purpose built student accommodation within Central Milton Keynes on campus with the possibility of off-campus provision also being required.
- 7 **The Committee is concerned** that the census figures quoted are six years out of date, and refer only to Milton Keynes College and to the University of Bedfordshire (UCMK) at a very early stage of its development. There is no reference at all to the University of Buckingham who work with Milton Keynes University Hospital, nor to the residential doctoral students of the Open University. It would also treat with caution the aspiration to achieve 10,000 students for the proposed new university and notes that this figure has already been scaled back to 8,500 within this Local Plan period. However, with such a large number of students expected, and with an estimated 50% needing accommodation, large scale provision must be made for student accommodation in MK. As above, **it would propose** that student accommodation blocks within CMK be situated close to retail or leisure areas. The needs of other institutions for student accommodation should also be investigated and the data fed into a revised Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and housing numbers.
- 8 Due to the eventual size of the University, **the Committee also recommends** that the Plan zone sufficient areas for student accommodation outside of CMK as well as the off-campus CMK accommodation area referred to above. Such accommodation might also be needed elsewhere by other facilities. **The Committee would therefore support** the inclusion of a Policy on off-campus student accommodation covering sites totally dedicated to students and other young people aged between 18 and 30 living independently. **The Committee also notes** that it is increasingly difficult for young people to find accommodation in the city, and **recommends** that the Council and the universities consider the early establishment of such premises, with a view to using them as temporary accommodation for homeless people, or for commercial rent to companies welcoming new young staff, until needed by the universities.

School provision

- 9 Early years, primary and secondary education are dealt with in paragraphs 14.40 to 14.43 together with 14.46 to 14.49. There are two associated policies:

CC6 - Provision of new Schools - planning considerations

CC7 - Provision of new Schools - site size

The Committee has no comment on Policy CC6.

In respect of Policy CC7 **it welcomes** the recognition that forecasts of demand and pupil yields have been inadequate, and that sites provided from now on must be capable of accommodating future expansion. It notes that many of the homes proposed in this plan are in CMK and will be in large blocks of flats, and that the child yield of such blocks may well be different from that of suburban houses. **It recommends** that the yield of such blocks should be investigated and, if different, target provision quoted separately.

10 **The Committee also has reservations** about the expectation in paragraph 14.43 that all new school provision will be provided through the Department of Education and Education Funding Agency 'Wave' process. This is because:

(1) Previous Government choices of sponsor or management have typically been institutions which were performing adequately at best, rather than the Outstanding or Good schools that we require locally to improve our education.

(2) The Council would have no control over the proposed type of school, whereas our need is for community schools.

(3) The Council has recently confirmed its opposition to grammar schools,

(4) The 'Wave' procedure reduces the Council's control over the timetable, which could lead to unacceptable delays, or the need to prepare bids a long time in advance, and only then negotiate over actual start dates and pupil profiles.

(5) No alternative *modus operandi* is proposed should a government abandon the 'Wave' procedure which is quite possible in the context of a 15 year Plan.

The Committee believes it would be better in Plan:MK to refer to the current mechanisms, and leave the choice of which to use within the Education area. This would have the advantage of allowing adjustments to be made more easily as circumstances change.

11 This section also proposes in Statement CC3 the allocation of reserve sites adjacent to school sites to ensure that there is sufficient land available to allow for the expansion of new and existing schools. A series of questions are posed *viz*:

(1) Should such a policy be adopted – **the Committee believes so.**

(2) For how long should such sites be retained – **the Committee suggests** 20 years as some new developments take that long to complete. Furthermore they should only be made available for a use other than community after the Council has satisfied itself that no community facilities are needed or viable.

(3) What size would be appropriate – **the Committee notes** that a different size will be required for primary and secondary schools. In both instances it urges that sufficient provision is made for sports fields.

12 In view of the current shortfall, **the Committee feels** that any new sites, currently anticipated as required, should be allocated at this stage. This would clarify expectations in respect of such sites, where existing provision cannot be expanded.

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