

AGENDA ITEM 10

Milton Keynes and South Midlands Development

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 26th March 2003

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A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To advise the Forum of the emerging proposals for a “major growth area” in Milton Keynes/South Midlands (MKSM) sub-region and their possible implications for the historic environment. To recommend an appropriate response.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

2 The Committee is invited to:

- a) **ENDORSE** the “Key issues for the Historic Environment”¹ identified by the joint English Heritage/Local Government Archaeological Officers working party regarding the potential implications for the historic environment of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Study.
- b) **AGREE** the priorities for action as outlined in paragraph 11 namely –
 - I. The need to recognise Historic Landscape Characterisation.
 - II. The need to identify and promote enhancements to the historic environment.
 - III. The need to recognise and protect unscheduled archaeological sites as well as scheduled ancient monuments.
 - IV. The need to protect historic villages and communities from damaging development and loss of historic character.
- c) **REQUEST** the Chairman to write to the Cabinet Member for Planned Development at Aylesbury Vale District Council, for Planning and Transportation at Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council and to Buckinghamshire’s representative on the SEERA Regional Planning Committee detailing the issues raised in this paper.
- d) **AUTHORISE** the establishment of a working party comprising representatives from Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and English Heritage to formulate a response to proposed revisions to RPG9 on behalf of the Forum. In the event that the working party consider that a formal

¹ See appendix

objection should be lodged by the Forum itself then an Extraordinary Meeting of the Forum is to be convened to consider the proposal.

C. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3 Full assessment of the implications of development options for the historic environment cannot be contained within established budgets without major implications for other commitments. English Heritage are supporting the Historic Landscape Characterisation project but additional support would be required to undertake more detailed sustainability assessments similar to the one recently completed for “North-West of Aylesbury”. This is under consideration.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9, March 2001) published by the Government identified the general area of Milton Keynes and the South Midlands as one of four potential major growth areas in the wider South East. (The others are London-Stansted-Cambridge, Ashford and the Thames Gateway). It proposed that a sub-regional study should be undertaken to investigate what the nature, possible extent and location of future growth might be within the Milton Keynes and South Midlands area.
- 5 This sub-regional study has now been completed by consultants and has reported (Milton Keynes and South Midlands Study, Final Report, Roger Tym, Halcrow and Three Dragons, September 2002). It considers the future spatial development of the sub-region up to 2030. A key recommendation of the study is that future housing and economic development in the Milton Keynes and South Midlands area should be focused on five urban areas:
- a. Milton Keynes;
 - b. Northampton;
 - c. Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis;
 - d. Corby/Kettering/Wellingborough; and
 - e. Bedford.
- 6 The MKSM study examined the opportunities and constraints affecting Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale. It concluded that that Milton Keynes has potential for significant growth but that not all growth could be accommodated within the existing urban area. The study therefore identified possible directions for urban expansion. These focus mainly on the area to the southwest of the city including expansion into Aylesbury Vale district with some limited expansion to the east. The study also indicated the potential for significant growth in and around the town of Aylesbury. Under the MKSM study “Preferred Spatial Option” Milton Keynes would accommodate 500 hectares of new development whilst Aylesbury Vale would have about 500 hectares around Aylesbury and another 600 – 1,100 hectares to the west of Milton Keynes. Road improvements will be required, most notably dualling of the A421 between Buckingham and Milton Keynes, a Milton Keynes

Southern Bypass and widening of the M1 to junction 14. Reinstatement of an East-West rail link is also proposed. Special delivery mechanisms are envisaged involving a sub-regional Infrastructure Delivery Board and local Project Delivery Companies.

- 7 A follow up study (*The Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale Growth Area Assessment*) has recently been commissioned by the South East England Regional Assembly to test the forecast levels of growth against the capacity of Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale to accommodate it. The Consultants are asked to come to a view on the most sustainable level of growth that could reasonably be accommodated to 2016 without undermining environmental and residential quality, social inclusion and the economic performance of the area. The study is due to present its final report by the end of April/early May 2003.
- 8 The Government's commitment to the strategy outlined above has recently been confirmed by John Prescott's Ministerial Statement: "*Sustainable communities: building for the future*" which outlines a fast-track timescale involving a partial review of RPG9 commencing with a consultation draft in spring/summer 2003; public examination in late 2003/early 2004; proposed changes in spring/summer 2004 leading to adoption by the end of 2004.
- 9 Treatment of the historic environment, and indeed of the wider environment in general, in the MKSM study was notably weak. Consideration of environmental impacts was almost wholly restricted to statutorily designated sites, and failed to take consistent account of even these. In places the "environment" seemed to be synonymous with "wildlife" in the writer's mind. In response to this perceived weakness of the MKSM study, a joint statement has been agreed by English Heritage and the four local government archaeological services affected by the study – see appendix. This statement has been made available to the Strategic Planning teams in Aylesbury Vale, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and to SEERA's Client Study Manager for the *Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale Growth Area Assessment*. The County Archaeological Service has been identified as a key stakeholder for the latter study.

Next steps

- 10 The County Archaeological Service is undertaking several strategic studies which should inform these development studies:
 - We have completed a study of development issues to the North-West of Aylesbury, a highly constrained landscape including three registered historic parks, a large scheduled ancient monument and many unscheduled archaeological sites. The implications of six potential development options are assessed.
 - We are focusing on completing the Historic Landscape Characterisation study for main areas of development pressure in Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes and aim to complete mapping of both authorities by August 2003.

- We are updating our “planning notification maps” to identify important known sites which may be at risk prioritising Aylesbury Vale.
 - We are exploring with English Heritage prioritising the scheduling of some as yet unscheduled nationally important monuments in the Vale of Aylesbury.
 - We have met with the consultants for the Aylesbury and Milton Keynes Growth Area Study to explain our concerns and supply them with information on the above.
- 11 If one accepts the basic premise that there is a need for development of the scale proposed (or that it will happen anyway) then it is suggested that the role of the archaeology services, and our colleagues in built, natural and landscape conservation, is to ensure that development is located and designed in such a way as to minimise adverse impacts and also that opportunities to maximise benefits for the environment and local communities are identified and implemented. It is suggested that the following key priorities can be identified:
- I. The need to use Historic Landscape Characterisation to recognise the historic dimension of undesignated landscapes valued by local communities. HLC should be one of the suite of methods used to help assess development capacities and thresholds, to inform the location and design of development and to promote good design. For example, HLC could inform the debate on the relative merits of allocations East or West of Milton Keynes. More detailed studies of highly constrained areas would be desirable.
 - II. The need to identify and promote environmental enhancement based on local historic character, including improving public benefit – for example, it is suggested that the former Whaddon Chase could be promoted not as development land but instead as a restored “Community Forest”. Milton Keynes has shown that sometimes archaeological sites and historic places can be successfully integrated into sensitively designed modern development.
 - III. The need to recognise and protect unscheduled archaeological sites, as well as scheduled ancient monuments. Where development does occur these sites should not be investigated in isolation and piecemeal but within a wider research context and incorporating a public element, as pioneered locally by the former Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit. The possibility that the “standard” PPG16 approach could be improved upon to deliver a “better value” archaeological product through some form of special delivery mechanism – perhaps legal agreements, commissioning of a term contract by the delivery company or supplementary planning guidelines could all be considered.
 - IV. The need to protect historic villages and communities from damaging development and loss of character. The promotion of conservation area appraisals and village design statements could give local people some say in their own future.
- 12 Finally, the Forum could (if it were so minded) consider formally objecting to proposed revisions to RPG9 either in its own right or (perhaps more appropriately) through member authorities.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan Review. Northwest of Aylesbury Historic Environment Sustainability Assessment. BCC 2003.

Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale Growth Area Assessment. Project Brief for Consultants. SEERA , January 2003.

Milton Keynes and South Midlands. Final Report of Study. Roger Tym & Partners, September 2002.

Sustainable communities: building for the future. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, January 2003.

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Milton Keynes and South Midlands Study

Key issues for the Historic Environment

a) What is the historic environment?

The historic environment is not restricted to designated sites – it is all around us. It encompasses historic building, landscapes and archaeological sites. Unfortunately, the Roger Tym Study's treatment of the historic environment is very weak and largely restricted to a limited range of nationally designated sites. The five Growth Area Assessments, and the formal growth proposals emerging from them, should recognise this weakness and work with the historic environment sector to address it. If development is to be "sustainable" then it is essential that proper recognition is accorded to historic environment issues.

b) Why is the historic environment important?

It is essential to take proper account of the historic environment at the sub-regional level and in any revised RPG not least because, as the Roger Tym study recognises, the existing rural environment is attractive and highly valued by local residents. The Tym report concludes that future development should respect and enhance the character of the countryside for this reason alone. In addition, early and full consideration of the whole historic environment will also help to avoid and/or minimise conflicts which might otherwise emerge unforeseen at a later stage of development plan preparation or in Environmental Impact Assessments. Avoiding and minimising such conflicts should also help streamline implementation. Most importantly, early recognition of historic environment can ensure that it is properly protected and identify suitable opportunities for exploiting and reinforcing historic landscape character to enhancing quality of life and to make new developments successful and attractive places to live.

c) How can the historic environment sector assist?

The historic environment sector (local authority historic environment officers and English Heritage) can assist with strategic development studies. Local as well as nationally designated sites warrant recognition - conservation areas should be protected whilst Sites and Monuments Records contain information on unscheduled archaeological sites, some of which will be worthy of preservation (these more significant unscheduled sites should be regarded as broadly equivalent to County Wildlife Sites, indeed some of them will prove to be of national importance). The potential for new archaeological discoveries must also be appreciated. Each county is currently undertaking an Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (HLC) which will provide comprehensive mapping of the historic character of the modern landscape across the study area by 2004. HLC is a powerful new tool which should be used to inform the location and design of development.

Statement prepared jointly by English Heritage and the Local Authority Archaeological Officers for Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Northamptonshire. 6-Feb-03.