Submission by Wavendon Parish Council

The village of Wavendon is named in the Domesday Book

Wauendene is the Doomsday name of this place.

Matter 1 – Overview (processes and justification, legal compliance, national policy, sub-regional and wider contest.

Wavendon Parish Council is in complete support with the Milton Keynes Core Strategy as submitted by Milton Keynes Council for Inspection. The Parish Council makes the following observations in terms of Matter 1.

- Milton Keynes Council has been keen to ensure the fullest possible public involvement in the development of the Core Strategy. That was certainly not the case in terms of the South East Plan and ‘officer only’ led work in connection with the Regional Spatial implications was abandoned in 2010 following the announcement by the incoming government of the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies and the focus on Localism, Neighbourhood Planning, Locally lead plan making and the then emerging NPPF.

- The Core Strategy is linked entirely to the vision contained within the Milton Keynes Council Corporate Plan (adopted January 2012) to embrace its role in the SEMLEP sub region as an area of growth whilst safeguarding its green and historic environmental assets and addressing the challenges from climate change. This appropriately encapsulates the challenge for the Borough in the future. The importance of Milton Keynes, described in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East (RS) as a Strategically Significant City, is fully addressed in the plan. Its significance within the wider sub-region remains ‘a factor’ for future planning and development.

- Remembering of course that the NPPF is much more than simply about housing numbers, the Core Strategy meets and exceeds the main points in the NPPF in that the council has identified considerably more than the required five years plus 20% of deliverable sites for residential development – indeed focusing on early delivery of sites in the east and west flanks and the early delivery of the SLA sites (formally the Local Plan Strategic Reserve Areas) for which formal planning applications for approximately 2500 dwellings are expected early in 2013.

- Senior Planning Officers at MK Council estimate that at present land is available with planning permissions or assumptions for permissions for a minimum of (*1) 28,000 dwellings

- The current development average per year over the past five years has been (*2)1400 housing completions per annum – still well short of the 1750 target figure contained within the Core Strategy and even further behind the fanciful 2300+ figure contained within the now abandoned South East Plan, a figure based on dubious evidence, never consulted upon locally and conceived at a time of the housing credit boom and pre banking crisis.
- The Core Strategy therefore meets and is consistent with the principles and policies of the now adopted NPPF. In addition it sets out a vision of the future of Milton Keynes that is aspirational, sustainable, deliverable and underpinned by real world economics.

- Indeed a key feature of the Core Strategy is that it sets out clearly a vision for sustainable development that is achievable over the plan period of fifteen years, supported by improved infrastructure on the ‘I before E’ (infrastructure before expansion) principal and phased in ways that will achieve a natural extension of the built environment, area on area (an example of which being the SRA’s / SLA) as natural extensions of the previous built environment, close to rapid transit public transport and requiring comparatively minimal infrastructure enhancements.

- The Core Strategy takes into account social, economic and environmental dimensions.

- The South East Plan, the examination of which was held in 2006 (prior to the so called ‘banking crisis’ and subsequent and ongoing economic downturn) is now seriously dated and has negligible relevance to the determination of appropriate levels for housing and employment provision in Milton Keynes to 2026. Work on what was the emerging RS has long since ceased. For it to progress, more technical and administrative work would have to be carried out (work MK Council would, in current circumstances, have no intention of undertaking) and it would need to be endorsed by the Secretary of State. It is our understanding that there is no mechanism by which these can be done and the governments clearly signalled intention is to do away with the RS entirely within weeks of these deliberations (if it has not done so already). There is, therefore, little prospect of what was the emerging RS becoming part of the development plan, which, I would submit, reduces to a minimum the weight that should be given to it within this Examination.

- The Core Strategy identifies clearly broad locations for strategic development. The economic downturn, with restrictions on available finance, has undoubtedly affected the numbers of sites being brought forward for housing development. However, as evidenced by recent applications to Milton Keynes Partnership Planning Committee and minutes of the various Strategic Land Area (SRA) Key Stakeholder Group meetings more than sufficient land is coming forward for early development to meet the NPPF criteria and beyond.

- Whilst the Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicated a higher need for housing, this was totally unachievable. The changes made to the Core Strategy (the Plan) in respect of housing targets are fully justified as set out in the Housing Technical Paper submitted to this enquiry by MK Council, and whilst the annual completion rate of 1750 is higher than has been achieved in the last five years, it is more realistic and allows for an improved economic situation over the coming few years and is far more realistic than the annual target of 2,300 that would have been required under the original SE Plan housing target.

- Milton Keynes Council Corporate Strategy priorities are underpinned by all the elements of the Core Strategy (the Plan) as submitted. Likewise the Milton Keynes Council Economic Development Strategy adopted by MK Council in 2011. The key elements of the Corporate Strategy 2012-16 are as follows;
(a) To ensure Milton Keynes is the premier ‘can do’ place of the 21st century. The city, together with the rural parts of our Borough, will continue to be a wonderful place to live, work, learn, shop and relax

(b) To secure sustainable housing and employment growth that is advantageous for Milton Keynes subject to the timely provision of infrastructure and proactive regeneration to ensure no areas are left behind and that a two-speed city does not result

(c) That people and firms will want to move here and stay here, and visitors will want to come here and come back often. Milton Keynes will have a compelling “offer” that includes rising standards of living and a safe and good quality of life for all

(d) To create homes and neighbourhoods in new areas or through regeneration that help make our compelling “offer” a reality

(e) That our residents have access to all the services they need and have the support to access opportunities and enjoy a healthy and good quality of life. Above all we must ensure that Milton Keynes offers job and career opportunities for all through an enterprising and thriving economy.

- Since the adoption of the Milton Keynes Local Plan in 2005 there have been considerable improvements made to local (and sub regional) road and rail infrastructure. Most notably, the completion of the duelling of the A421 from the Black Cat Roundabout (A1) in Bedfordshire to J13 of the M1 and further improvements westwards along that core road link into Milton Keynes. In addition, investment over many years on West Coast rail line is now complete and has enhanced links between Milton Keynes and London and the Midlands and North West of England and beyond. Improvements to the capacity (road widening) to the M1 motorway are close to completion making access to Central Milton Keynes as a primary employment area from new housing developments in Bedford, Northampton and Leighton Buzzard more accessible for public and private transport than many of the previously indentified ‘housing sites’ on the distant edges of the Borough of MK. The Local Plan Inspector (2004) also advised Milton Keynes Council that beyond the sites identified in that plan it should be looking east of the M1 and to sites north of the M1 (but close to J14 of the M1) for future housing and employment areas rather than to the south east of the Borough.

- Woburn Sands (all of which is within the Borough of Milton Keynes) will have experienced a 54% increase in its housing stock once the Parklands (former Nampak – Brownfield development site) is completed with impacts on neighbouring communities in Central Bedfordshire as well as imposing stretched demands on local services (notably education and health – provided by Bedfordshire facilities) within that community.

- Wavendon Parish Council would submit that areas beyond the Borough boundaries are already contributing in terms of new housing sites to the sub regional (SEMLEP area) housing demands and that that contribution should be acknowledged in assessing the Milton Keynes growth patterns as the Core Strategy (the Plan) is reviewed – the Parish Council would suggest - on a five yearly basis.
• Milton Keynes Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Northampton Borough Council, Luton Borough Council, Bedford Borough Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, and South Northants DC meet on a regular basis at a political level and through the auspices of the SEMLEP (South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership) to discuss and agree on a range of Growth and Economic Development issues – and these discussions will become more formalised and detailed once the Core Strategy for Milton Keynes has been finally adopted and joint working on developing processes for reviewing and updating the Strategy across the whole of the SEMLEP area agreed. A SEMLEP ‘planners group’ also meets on a regular basis.

• There is not, nor was there ever, any cross boundary support between Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire Council to develop a so-called MKSEDA - the Central Bedfordshire Council, soon to be superseded CBC core strategy, recognising that there were previously published South East Regional Government demands for growth into Central Bedfordshire (which was in the Eastern Region) and that reluctantly Central Bedfordshire Council has committed to working with MKC to take forward the MKSEDA. There is certainly no political commitment within either authority to any joint preparation of any future development framework to guide such development.

• Town and Parish Councils (including Woburn Sands Town Council and Wavendon Parish Council) are well advanced in the production of their respective Neighbourhood Plans and the preparation process has involved communities on both sides of the MK/Bedfordshire boundary. These emerging documents have already identified the need for these communities to have a period of consolidation with no additional strain placed upon these settled communities by the allocation of any unsettling and disruptive additional housing demands during the period of the Core Strategy (i.e. to 2026). Wavendon Parish will see its housing stock grow seven fold by 2030 and its population grow nearly ten fold over the same period whilst, as previously stated, Woburn Sands housing stock will have grown from 984 dwellings in 205 to 1511 by the time the ‘Parklands development’ is completed (estimated 2015).

• The Core Strategy is in general conformity with the South East Plan the only changes made to the Core Strategy post 2010 have been;
  1. Removal of reference to the SWDA which was wholly within another planning authority area (Aylesbury Vale DC) and was and is no way certain of delivery as that District reviews its own Core Strategy (Plan) situation.
  2. Reduction in the overall housing target and therefore the required size of the South East Milton Keynes Development Area, the justification for which is fully detailed within the Housing Technical paper.

These changes do not undermine in any way the statement that the Core Strategy is in general conformity with the SE Plan

• There are no specific policy deficits once the Regional Strategy is abolished.
• The Core Strategy has been positively prepared based on objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements adapted to realistically deliverable targets. The only requirements from neighbouring authorities are retail, their own plans meet their development and infrastructure requirements and there is no known unmet need.

• The Core Strategy recommendations are justified as the process considered in detail alternative sites to deliver the unmet additional target of 2,500 dwellings, it has also considered whether the SE Plan housing targets are realistically achievable, given the outstanding permissions and foreseeable slow improvement of the economic environment

• The Core Strategy is based on evidence of its effective deliverability over the plan period and does not require cross boundary joint working (with the possible exception of any proposed Junction 13A or the like). However The Highways Agency does not support a J13A so that aspiration remains just that, an aspiration, for the period of the Strategy. Neither do neighbouring authorities have requirements beyond what is provided in the plan (with the possible exception of excluding Junction 13a which is not supported by the neighbouring authority)

• Finally, the Core Strategy is consistent with national policy – in that it is broadly consistent with both the NPPF and national policy, and is realistically deliverable in terms of sustainable development. It takes fully into account Social, Economic and Environmental dimensions and its relationship to the Borough Council Corporate Plan, the local councils emerging Neighbourhood Plans, the policy drive towards a broad localism agenda and the much repeated intent to remove Regional Spatial Strategies and the impacts of unsupported Regional Planning. More importantly it is a plan that meets the Milton Keynes local community needs and aspirations based on local political, cross party consensus, local consultation and realistic ambitions that underpin a Milton Keynes is Open for Business agenda.

_Alan Kemp_
_Clerk to Wavendon Parish Council (and Danesborough Ward)_
_May 2012_

(*1) Bob Wilson MK Council Development Plans Manager (Presentation to Milton Keynes Council members and supporting documentation)
(*2) source: MK Council - Observatory