

FAQs

South East Milton Keynes Strategic Urban Extension Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SEMK SPD)

What is South East Milton Keynes?

South East Milton Keynes is a strategic allocation within Milton Keynes Local Plan, Plan:MK 2016-203, which was adopted by the Council in March 2019. The strategic allocation covers land between Bow Brickhill, Woburn Sands, Wavendon and Walton. The strategic allocation is for around 3,000 homes, seven Gypsy and Traveller pitches, supporting social infrastructure including a secondary school and two primary schools, local centres, a network of green open spaces and new walking, cycling and road links. The strategic allocation indicates that the principle of such growth on this land is acceptable, subject to the details of specific development proposals (made via planning applications) being acceptable.

Why is the Council preparing the SEMK SPD?

Plan:MK Policy SD10 requires Development Framework Supplementary Planning Documents for strategic sites to be adopted before any planning permissions can be granted.

The draft SEMK SPD has been prepared to support the implementation of Policies SD11 and SD10 within Plan:MK and it considers other relevant policies within Plan:MK, notably Policies SD1, SD9 and INF1. The SEMK SPD seeks to establish how the requirements of Policy SD11 will be met. This has focussed on the spatial distribution of strategic infrastructure and main land uses (typically the strategic movement network, green infrastructure network, housing, education and local centres).

Once adopted, the SEMK SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications submitted to the Council in relation to the SEMK strategic allocation.

Why is the Council progressing work on the SEMK SPD at this time?

South East Milton Keynes is an integral part of the Council's planned approach to the growth of Milton Keynes through to 2031. When Plan:MK was adopted in 2019, it was envisaged that homes within South East Milton Keynes would start being built by the mid-2020s to ensure a satisfactory supply of new homes in Milton Keynes. As noted above, there are a number of steps that need to happen before homes can be built there, first of which is the

preparation and adoption of a Development Framework SPD (the SEMK SPD) followed by planning applications. In order to ensure homes will start to be built by the mid-2020s, it is necessary to progress the SEMK SPD toward adoption in 2021.

The Council considered the possibility of delaying progress on the SEMK SPD in order to align it with the East West Rail Company's statutory consultation on their proposals for the railway line (see Question 5 for further details). However, on balance, it was felt that this was not appropriate given previous delays to the East West Rail Company's consultation which had originally been expected to occur in autumn/winter 2020. Also, the SEMK SPD had already been delayed in 2019 and 2020 by uncertainty surrounding the Government's Oxford to Cambridge Expressway road proposal.

In the absence of further clarity over the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, the Council recommenced work on the SEMK SPD in mid-2020 to ensure the timely delivery of the allocation through a planned approach to development of the site and to help maintain the Council's housing land supply through the plan period to 2031.

Any further delays to the preparation of the SPD would potentially result in a shortfall of planned housing growth and an increase in unplanned developer-led planning applications which would be a matter of concern for local communities across the borough.

What elements are still to be defined within the SEMK SPD before it will be adopted?

The draft SEMK SPD does not propose a preferred strategic movement network as uncertainty still exists over the East West Rail Company's proposals for the existing railway and its associated stations and level crossings (see question 5 for further detail). The draft SEMK SPD therefore outlines three strategic movement scenarios that respond to what the Council anticipates the East West Rail Company's proposals are likely to contain.

The draft SEMK SPD fixes as much detail as possible, for example the location of main land uses, key elements of the green infrastructure and open space network, patterns of housing density, character typologies, as well as a significant amount of the pedestrian and cycle network. Given the 3 strategic movement network responses as well as option locations for the gypsy and traveller site, some land use locations may vary (such as the playing fields) depending on the East West Rail Company's proposals and the associated strategic movement network response put forward by the Council in the draft SEMK SPD.

How will East West Rail (EWR) affect South East Milton Keynes?

As part of the consideration of highway connectivity and place making objectives for SEMK, the Council has had to consider potential changes to the existing railway between Bow Brickhill and Woburn Sands associated with plans to deliver a comprehensive East West Rail service between Oxford and Cambridge by 2028.

As part of plans for extending the East West Rail service from Oxford to Bedford, Network Rail are already implementing some changes to the railway in the area, including a new agricultural bridge associated with Woodleys Farm to the eastern end of SEMK, and some minor improvements to the Woburn Sands level crossing. However, the Council understands that the East West Rail Company who are taking over responsibility from Network Rail for delivering a full East West Rail service from Oxford to Cambridge, are reappraising what changes need to be made to the existing railway to accommodate the full service, alongside an entirely new railway line between Bedford and Cambridge.

The Council understands that substantial engineering works to the existing railway will be required to accommodate the full Oxford to Cambridge service. However, detailed proposals are yet to emerge from the East West Rail Company and so the Council has considered different options or responses to the layout of South East Milton Keynes based on reasonable assumptions about possible changes, primarily the possible closure of level crossings and the creation of new road bridges over the railway at different locations between Bow Brickhill and Woburn Sands. In considering this, the Council has developed comprehensive scenarios for the strategic movement network through and around the site that can provide benefits to the wider area, rather than just East West Rail or South East Milton Keynes in isolation.

The Council understands that EWR is planning non-statutory public consultation early this year and what will be in that consultation is yet to be determined. As part of their work the East West Rail Company are reviewing various service patterns as to whether there will be existing stopping services along the line or not and variations of which stations would potentially be served by that service. This will determine train service patterns on that line which then determines which level crossings will be closing and whether stations remain open/any changes required to stations, and what mitigations will be proposed.

It is understood that upgrades will need to be undertaken to the railway line between Bletchley and Bedford such will be the frequency of trains. East West Rail Company's consultation early this year should provide information around what is necessary in terms of engineering works for the upgrade and what the mitigations would be. It is likely that a lot of level crossings along the railway line between Oxford and Bedford line will need to close to operate safely or they will be down because of the level of frequency of trains and the travel disruption will cause too many knock-on effects. Some stations might be served and some not, station relocations and potential closures are likely to be considered. If level crossings close there likely will be a need for bridges. Once this information is known the Council will be able to arrive at a final preferred movement network for SEMK. The SEMK

SPD being consulted upon now contains various scenarios at this stage because it cannot be confirmed what the strategic movement network for the site will be whilst there is still uncertainty surrounding infrastructure changes to the railway line.

What studies or evidence exist to support the SEMK SPD proposals, in particular transport evidence?

As part of preparing Plan:MK, the Council prepared various evidence studies to inform and assess the allocations being proposed including South East Milton Keynes. These are all available at <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/plan-mk-evidence-base>. Studies covered a range of issues, including sustainability appraisal, housing needs assessments (including Gypsy and Traveller accommodation), transport modelling, landscape sensitivity, infrastructure (social, green and grey infrastructure) and flooding. Taken as a whole, it was concluded that South East MK represented a sustainable location for growth, and that any adverse impacts arising for development of the site could be adequately mitigated.

With regard to traffic impacts, the Council undertook extensive strategic transport modelling through the preparation of Plan:MK. This modelled the growth of South East Milton Keynes (alongside other growth already occurring or planned) and the impact it would likely have on the existing road network, factoring in the additional rail services to Bedford resulting in longer closures of level of crossings. This was discussed at the Examination in Public of Plan:MK in 2018 and the Inspector was satisfied that the traffic impacts associated with South East Milton Keynes could be mitigated.

To complement and develop further the Plan:MK modelling, and other internal modelling work carried out in 2018, the Council commenced work on a local transport study in 2019 to provide (amongst other things) an assessment of the options for improving connectivity across the railway in line with Plan:MK. This was to be cognisant of the growth occurring in the South East Milton Keynes allocation and other transport projects that would have a bearing on movement in the area. The study was to consider the current and future traffic levels on the routes affected by the level crossings, assess the likely impacts on traffic of the increased closure of level crossings with the full East West Rail service, and assess whether the level crossing could continue to operate safely. The aim was to publish the results of this work in 2020.

However, soon after work on the local transport study commenced the Council was approached by the East West Rail Company to discuss very similar work that they were aiming to undertake to inform the extension of East West Rail services from Bedford to Cambridge that would have implications for rail infrastructure back to Bletchley, namely level crossings. Considering the links between the East West Rail project and the allocated growth in South East Milton Keynes, the Council decided to informally support the work of the East West Rail Company on these matters rather than progress a transport study alone. However, the East West Rail Company has been delayed in carrying out this work and still

has not published any results. The East West Rail Company may publish this work when it launches its non-statutory consultation later in 2021, however this is not guaranteed. With this in mind, the Council has restarted its own transport study focussing on the feasibility of bridges at different locations along the railway line in the area.

Why is the SPD being progressed despite not yet knowing the route for the Oxford Cambridge Expressway which can potentially affect SEMK?

Criteria A of Plan:MK Policy SD11 states that “If the chosen corridor for the Oxford Cambridge Expressway (OCE) maintains the possibility that the OCE could be routed through the site, then planning permission for housing and associated uses will not be permitted until the detailed alignment of the OCE is known.” Early preparatory work on the SEMK SPD was paused by the Council in mid-2019 on the understanding that a route for the Expressway would be announced by Government in Autumn 2019. This followed an earlier announcement of the ‘preferred corridor’ in September 2018 which maintained the possibility that the Expressway could be routed through SEMK. No announcement was made in autumn 2019. However, as part of the Government’s March 2020 budget announcement, further work on the Expressway was paused by the Department for Transport. Since then no further announcements about the Expressway have been made by Government or the Department for Transport. In the absence of further clarity, the Council recommenced work on the SEMK SPD in mid-2020 to ensure the timely delivery of the allocation through a planned approach to development of the site and to help maintain the Council’s housing land supply through the plan period to 2031. If, however the OCE is progressed in a manner that would affect the development of the allocation, then the SPD will need to be reviewed. Due to the pause on the Expressway and potential delay to SEMK as a result, the Council would be progressing the SEMK allocation to ensure it could be delivered as intended in Plan:MK and to ensure the Council’s five-year housing land supply remains robust.

18/03/2021 Update: Please note that the Oxford to Cambridge expressway project has been cancelled by Transport Secretary Grant after analysis confirmed the proposed project was not cost-effective. Please see the announcement details here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway-project-cancelled-as-transport-secretary-looks-to-alternative-plans-for-improving-transport-in-the-region>

Who owns the land in question and does the Council work with landowners directly on the preparation of the SPD?

The allocation is owned by a range of landowners, some of which are directly promoting their land for development whilst others do so via developers or agents, often making use of 'options' to purchase land if certain criteria are met.

The Council does not have direct contact with all the landowners for the SEMK site. The planning process does not require contact with every single landowner and the Council often works with people who represent them. The Council has not allocated land that has not been promoted to the Council within the SEMK allocation. Control of land through options is often time limited and renegotiations do take place. Officers from MKC have had meetings with the group of land promoters/developers involved with SEMK to discuss the preparation of the SEMK SPD.

Why the draft proposes more than one possible location for the Gypsy and Travellers site?

In response to the policy framework within Plan:MK, technical evidence, stakeholder engagement and the Council's understanding of other material considerations affecting the site, the draft SEMK SPD proposes three options to provide seven permanent pitches for Gypsy and Travellers as per requirements of the Policy SD11.

The potential locations have been informed by a consideration of Policy HN11 (Gypsies and Travellers) which identifies the principles that inform the location of G&T sites including:

- the need for the site to be accessible to shops, schools, health and other local services and community facilities,
- site must be well related to the primary movement network and have adequate road access,
- the site is compatible with neighbouring land uses, and minimises impact on adjacent uses, built form and landscape character,
- there is space within the site for the provision of essential facilities including
- parking, and landscaping,
- the development complies with Plan:MK Policies NE1-6,
- the site would not affect a site of nature conservation interest.

Further guidance that should inform the location and design of G&T sites can be found at 'Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites Good Practice Guide' (now withdrawn by the Government) and 'Planning policy for traveller sites, August 2015'. Key points from these documents include:

- consideration of future management issues and pressure on existing infrastructure and services,
- creation of a safe environment,
- G&T sites should not be locations that are inappropriate for ordinary dwellings unless exceptional circumstances apply,

- sites should not be located on contaminated land and should be on relatively flat sites,
- the promotion of integrated co-existence between site and local community to be considered; relationship to surrounding community to improve community cohesion; where possible.
- sites to be developed near housing for settled community; some G&T communities prefer to be on the edges but not too isolated cause of fears of safety, tend to be located near to light industrial uses.