

# **MILTON KEYNES AND SOUTH MIDLANDS**

**Final Report of Study**

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This Study was undertaken for the following consortium of clients:

- GOSE, GOEast and GOEM
- South East England Regional Assembly
- East of England Local Government Conference
- East Midlands Regional Local Government Association
- SEEDA, EEDA and EMDA
- English Partnerships
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Bedfordshire County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Luton Borough Council

We are grateful to the Steering Group under the Chairmanship of Mike Gwilliam for its assistance and advice in managing the Study.

We would also like to thank the many stakeholders in the study area with whom we consulted for their time and the ideas and opinions which they have provided. These have helped us greatly.

- highlight those instances where development allocated to one authority can only be accommodated by urban extensions within an adjoining district; and
- consider the effect of employment land requirements for individual districts.

5.68 Given the strategic nature of this Study, the broad locations that we have identified for future growth and our assessment of the patterns of development which will require the extension of one settlement into an adjoining district can only serve as a very general guide to the future. We cannot, nor would we want to, be definitive. Detailed surveys and testing at the local level are required in order to provide a detailed, comprehensive assessment of local development capacity within district boundaries.

5.69 We set out below an overview of the main constraints affecting each of the four largest settlements:

*Milton Keynes*

5.70 Whilst expansion to the north and south of the City is constrained by high grade agricultural land and landscape designations, (see Figure 5.7) there are large areas of land lying to the west, south west and east of the City which are free from environmental designations. In deciding the balance to be struck between easterly and westerly expansion, there are a number of complex factors which must be considered in detail at the local level. However, in this Study we have assumed expansion of the City based on the following principles:

- Expansion to the north or south of the City would entail conflict with environmental designations related to the intrinsic quality of land and would require the loss of high-grade agricultural land and necessitate development beyond the floodplain. These are not preferred directions for immediate growth, although it might be necessary to consider expansion either north or south of the City in the longer term beyond 2031.
- Westerly or south westerly expansion of the Milton Keynes City should take place in preference to the major expansion of the City to the east of the M1 continuously alongside both sides of the motorway. This is because of the divisive and detrimental effect of the motorway. In particular, there are noise and pollution concerns which will be exacerbated by proposals for the widening of the motorway and a new Junction 13a. Therefore, in all cases we have assumed no continuous development of the City east of the M1 within Mid Bedfordshire district.
- However, where large-scale expansion to the west or south west would unacceptably distort the geography and infrastructure base of the City, we have assumed some more limited and focused development east of the M1 within Milton Keynes District in the area south of Newport Pagnell. Our reason for this is that development to the east of the motorway within the Milton Keynes boundaries could help create a high density public transport corridor along the Central Milton Keynes-Campbell Park axis to the western part of the City. A bus based mass transit system along this axis could also potentially be extended to the west to Buckingham and Winslow and, to the north east, to Newport Pagnell, Olney and Cranfield. We have taken the view that the promotion of this sustainable, relatively focused pattern of development could outweigh concerns regarding the impact of the motorway when the alternative is excessively elongated westerly expansion of Milton Keynes, but only if sufficient development land cannot be found adjacent to Milton Keynes on its west and south west and immediate eastern flank.
- There is potential for more limited development to the east of Milton Keynes up to the motorway and north of the Bletchley to Bedford rail line with provision for noise attenuation set backs and screening. The full extent of the capability for expansion in this direction will need to be the subjected of detailed local study taking account of the requirements for a new Junction 13a and the need to avoid coalescence with any existing settlements.

- Whilst there may be opportunities for some growth to be accommodated in other settlements in the Milton Keynes Council area, we have assumed (for the purposes of this Study) that all growth allocated to the Milton Keynes Council area is accommodated in or on the periphery of the City.

#### *Northampton*

- 5.71 Because of its tight administrative boundaries any major expansion of Northampton must be accommodated within the adjoining districts of Daventry, South Northamptonshire and Wellingborough. Expansion to west and north west of the town is constrained by a Special Landscape Area (see Figure 5.8) and easterly expansion of the town would lie within the floodplain of the River Nene. Land to the north, north-east and south of Northampton is designated as "Area of Restraint" or "Green Wedge". These are local designations whose primary purpose is urban containment and which do not reflect landscape quality. Expansion in any of these three directions would require the loss or re-alignment of these "areas of restraint" surrounding the town.

#### *Bedford*

- 5.72 The least environmentally constrained direction of potential future growth of Bedford (see Figure 5.9) is to the south-west of the town, along the A421/Marston Vale corridor. This corridor, which comprises land in both Bedford Borough and Mid Bedfordshire District, is already identified in the current Bedfordshire County Structure Plan as a strategic location for future growth, and includes the new settlement of Elstow. The Vale runs from the south west of Bedford to Junction 13 of the M1. Although centred on the A421 and the Bletchley to Bedford rail line, the Vale also extends north west of the A421 towards Cranfield and east of the rail line towards the A6. The Vale includes the Marston Vale Community Forest. Expansion of the town in other directions is limited by agricultural land quality, "Areas of Restraint" and floodplain constraints.

#### *Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis*

- 5.73 This conurbation is the most constrained of the four largest settlements in the Study area (see Figure 5.10). The conurbation is surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lying to the north-east and south-west. Therefore, any peripheral growth of the conurbation can only be achieved by the release of Green Belt land. Furthermore, because Luton is developed up to its administrative boundaries, expansion can only take place into South Bedfordshire District, or beyond the study area into Hertfordshire. In this report we have discounted the possibility of expansion into Hertfordshire, although a more detailed local study might indicate that there are easterly expansion options to be considered.

#### *Corby/Kettering/Wellingborough*

- 5.74 There are limited constraints to these towns and in relation to the scale of development to be accommodated there are few major environmental restrictions to their expansion. Corby could expand to the north east, south east or west. Kettering could expand to the north west or south east. Wellingborough could expand to the south west and east, although on the south eastern flank of the town there is a significant flood plain constraint which needs to be respected.