

# Matter 8F/South East England Regional Assembly



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**Matter 8F: Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale**

**8Fi: Strategy and Implementation**

**8Fi.1 Are the interrelationships between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale, and with adjoining sub-regions and regions, particularly in terms of economic prospects and travel patterns, sufficiently recognised in the draft RSS?**

1. The Assembly refers the Panel to the response to this question in the Joint Statement of Common Ground submitted by the Assembly on behalf of Milton Keynes Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Bedfordshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council and Milton Keynes Partnership.

**8Fi.2 How workable is the concept of monitoring new housing delivery against district-wide job gains at the rate of one for one, and how would this be applied (section E8, paragraph 5.2)?**

1. The levels of development in the Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale (MKAV) sub regional policies are based on the need to plan for the levels of employment growth set out in the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy (MKSM SRS, March 2005)<sup>1</sup>. The strategy is therefore employment and not housing led. The monitoring of housing delivery against job gains is essential to ascertain whether the strategy is delivering against its economic and regeneration objectives. A sustained and significant spatial imbalance between housing delivery and employment growth across or within the MKSM area would indicate that policy adjustments may be required.
2. This monitoring activity is most appropriately undertaken at the MKSM level as the MKAV policies must be viewed within the wider inter-regional strategy within which they are framed. The implications of sustained imbalances between housing delivery and employment growth should also be considered at this inter-regional level so as to determine whether there is a need for a review of the overall MKSM SRS in terms of the assumptions upon which it is based or the policies it promotes. It would not be appropriate for any fundamental review of the overall balance of housing and employment in the MKAV area in isolation from the wider MKSM sub-region.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goem.gov.uk/goem/docs/191913/237644/mksm.pdf>

**8Fi.3 Have realistic assumptions been made about transport and infrastructure provision in the proposed strategy?**

1. The assumptions about transport and infrastructure provision in the proposed strategy build upon those set out in the MKSM SRS and are based upon advice received from the principal authorities, informed by the work of the relevant Local Delivery Vehicles (LDVs): Milton Keynes Partnership and Aylesbury Vale Advantage. Further detail on the process is included in the Joint Statement of Common Ground.
2. Inevitably the assumptions will be most accurate for the period covered by existing local development plans which provide a high level of certainty about the location of short to medium term growth. Longer term assumptions will be more indicative of the broad quantum and type of investment required and will need ongoing refinement in the light of local development frameworks. For example in the case of Milton Keynes, the schedule of infrastructure needs to 2016 has been costed as part of the development of a business planning approach to infrastructure developed by Milton Keynes Partnership. Longer term assumptions will require review in the light of a decision on the overall directions of growth post 2016.
3. A strategically important item of infrastructure for MKAV and the wider area is East West Rail (EWR). This is acknowledged in the MKSM SRS which identifies improvements to east-west movement by public transport as a strategic objective and supports the further investigation of East West Rail in this respect. Since the adoption of the MKSM SRS in March 2005 the business case for the route has been further developed by the EWR consortium and facilitated by regional partners including the Assembly. This work clearly demonstrates the sound business case for the restoration of the route between Oxford and Milton Keynes. The Assembly considers the EWR corridor offers considerable strategic benefits which the Panel may wish to take into account in their consideration of the appropriate spatial strategy for Milton Keynes including:
  - Enhanced intra and inter-regional public transport connectivity between major growth areas;
  - Support for the wider spatial and economic policy objectives associated with Oxford to Cambridge Arc;
  - Opportunities to make best use of land through higher density development at rail nodes and interchanges thereby potentially reducing overall land take.

**8Fii: Milton Keynes**

**8Fii.1 Does the level of housing provision proposed for Milton Keynes post 2021 take appropriate account of its growth area status, local constraints and opportunities, and current build rates?**

1. The housing provision proposed in the South East Plan for Milton Keynes urban area post 2021 represents a roll forward of the proposals contained in the MKSM SRS in accordance with the indicative longer term rates of development provided in the SRS Part A Statement (paragraph 22).
2. It is notable that none of the local authorities in the MKAV sub region are challenging the overall level of growth proposed for the period 2006-2026. The key areas of debate centre around the direction of growth and the phasing of growth.
3. The issue of direction is addressed in matter 8Fii.2 below. The issue of phasing was discussed in some detail at the MKSM SRS public examination in 2004 with the Panel's recommendations for Milton Keynes being taken forward into the adopted MKSM SRS and the draft South East Plan. Despite significant increases, recent housing delivery rates in Milton Keynes Council area and historic completions do call into question to deliverability of the phasing proposed in MKAV1. Consequently both Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council have put forward alternative proposals in their submissions on this Matter.

**8Fii.2 To what extent should the RSS incorporate the findings of the Strategy for Growth to 2031 by the Milton Keynes Partnership, including the implied housing apportionment by district post 2016 (Policy MKAV1)?**

1. The Strategy for Growth was commissioned by Milton Keynes Partnership to develop a (non statutory) long term vision and strategy for the growth of Milton Keynes up to 2031, in accordance with guidance in the MKSM Part B Statement for Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale (paragraph 101).
2. The formal responsibility for the provision of advice to the Assembly under Section 4(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act rests with the principal authorities. In relation to the South East Plan this responsibility lies with Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Council. Both have been represented on the member and officer steering groups for the Strategy for Growth.
3. Both Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council have worked closely with the Assembly on the roll forward of the sub-regional strategy for Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale, providing advice on the level of growth 2021-2026 and associated infrastructure requirements. This advice has been reflected in the draft MKAV strategy in the draft South East Plan.

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4. However both authorities declined to provide advice to the Assembly on the district apportionment of growth around Milton Keynes prior to the publication and subsequent consultation on the Strategy for Growth to 2031. The advice submitted to the Panel by the Principal Authorities on this issue has not therefore been formally submitted to the Assembly under Section 4 (4) of the Act.
5. The Assembly is mindful of the fact that despite extensive informal partnership working both Principal Authorities take different views on the district apportionment of the growth around Milton Keynes urban area. Milton Keynes Council accepts the conclusions of the Strategy for Growth in this respect (although not in relation to its phasing) and Buckinghamshire County Council does not. The latter has put forward two alternative distributions based upon a technical review of the Strategy for Growth. It is understood that Milton Keynes Council has subsequently commissioned a review of Buckinghamshire County Council/ Aylesbury Vale District Council technical work, the results of which will be available in time for the Panel sessions on this matter.
6. The Assembly does not wish to enter into the debate about the technical robustness of the Strategy for Growth nor of the alternative evidence put forward by Buckinghamshire CC and Aylesbury Vale DC. However, it is notable that the Milton Keynes Partnership led Strategy for Growth process was inclusive of all the relevant authorities at officer and member level and incorporated a significant level of public consultation and engagement.
7. More fundamentally, it is clear that the growth of Milton Keynes urban area will involve some development beyond Milton Keynes Council boundaries into one or more of its adjacent authorities, and that the planning of this growth must be done on a partnership basis. The South East Plan will provide the strategic framework for this growth. In doing so it should go further than the current Regional Spatial Strategy (as expressed in the MKSM SRS Part B Statement for Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale), and provide a definitive steer on the appropriate location for the urban expansion areas around Milton Keynes, to provide greater certainty and avoid delay in delivery of subsequent LDDs.
8. In considering the appropriate directions of growth the Assembly encourages the Panel to assess the alternative proposals against the following criteria:
  - The accessibility of the development to strategic and local road and public transport networks including the ability to enhance the viability of existing or proposed routes including East West Rail;
  - The ability to integrate the development areas into the existing urban form and avoid them functioning as dormitories to a larger settlement;
  - The relative costs and deliverability of providing infrastructure required to support the development and make it accessible by sustainable modes;

- The potential to avoid adverse impacts of development on the character of existing peripheral towns and villages;
- The potential to promote the regeneration of more deprived communities within Milton Keynes urban area;
- The scope for extending the green infrastructure network within and around Milton Keynes for the purposes of managing flood risk, maximising recreational opportunities, enhancing biodiversity as well as creating a natural defensible development boundary.

**8Fii.3 Are the mechanisms for joint working across local authority boundaries to deliver the expansion of Milton Keynes adequately addressed in draft RSS? What, if any, tools are needed to manage the impact of Milton Keynes expansion on surrounding towns and villages?**

1. Effective joint working arrangements will be required to address key cross boundary issues arising as a result of the final agreed distribution of development between Milton Keynes and its adjacent authorities as set out in the final adopted RSS.
2. Given the economic, public service, infrastructure, cultural, environmental and physical dependencies that exist and will further deepen as a consequence of growth, the effective and integrated planning for the expansion of Milton Keynes urban area may benefit from the establishment of formal cross border planning arrangements between Milton Keynes, Aylesbury Vale and Mid Bedfordshire for the purposes of producing joint LDDs.
3. Future joint working will benefit considerably from the South East Plan providing a clear strategic policy framework on the district apportionment of growth. In consulting upon revisions to the district housing allocations for Milton Keynes and Aylesbury the Secretary of State should also make explicit any implications for the East of England Plan and the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy. As noted in the joint statement of common ground it will be important to ensure that differences in the timescales for progressing RSS reviews do not frustrate delivery on the ground.
4. One or more joint LDD(s) could be an appropriate vehicle for identifying tools for managing the impact of growth on surrounding towns and villages. Proactive planning of green infrastructure to support defensible development boundaries and to promote recreation and biodiversity will be an essential component of the expansion of the urban area.

**8Fii.4 What level of housing provision should be made for those parts of Milton Keynes unitary authority area which lie beyond Milton Keynes city and its planned and proposed urban extensions?**

1. The Assembly sees no reason for challenging the advice submitted by Milton Keynes Council on this matter. The Panel is encouraged to make a clear distinction between this provision and growth related provision associated with Milton Keynes urban area in their recommendations to the Secretary of State.

**8Fiii: Aylesbury Town and Aylesbury Vale**

**8Fiii.1 Does the draft RSS give sufficient priority to strengthening the economy of Aylesbury town, and how will this be achieved (section E8, paragraph 5.3)?**

1. The strengthening of the economy of Aylesbury Town is an essential component of the growth strategy for the MKAV sub region. The draft Plan proposes a monitoring reference of 21,200 employment growth over the period 2006-2026 for the district but emphasises that this should be focused on Aylesbury town to maximise the potential for the co-location of homes and jobs and to facilitate multi-modal accessibility to employment opportunities. This represents a significant increase on the monitoring reference figures of 12,690 for Aylesbury Vale over the period 2001-2021 in the adopted MKSM SRS. The proposed increase reflects recent economic performance and the strategic objective to reduce the need for residents of the Aylesbury town growth area to out-commute in search of employment. These represent neither target figures nor maxima not to be exceeded.
2. According to the MKSM Annual Monitoring Report (2004/05)<sup>2</sup> Aylesbury Vale District Council experienced a significant increase of 6,600 jobs between 2001/2 and 2004/05, over 50% of its monitoring reference value for the 20 year period covered by the MKSM SRS. (There are, however, doubts about the accuracy of this data and we understand that this is an issue explored in greater detail in the submission by Buckinghamshire County Council). Nevertheless there remains a concern that the highest levels of growth are experienced in the rural areas and small towns and not in Aylesbury urban area. Attracting new employment opportunities to the town is a priority for Aylesbury Vale Advantage, the local delivery vehicle for Aylesbury Town.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/publications/monitoring/mksm\\_mon\\_report\\_04-05.pdf](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/publications/monitoring/mksm_mon_report_04-05.pdf)

**8Fiii.2 Does the level of housing provision proposed for Aylesbury town post 2021 take appropriate account of its growth area status, local constraints and opportunities, and current build rates (Policy MKAV2)?**

- I. The levels of housing provision for Aylesbury Town for the period 2021-2026 are derived from the provisional long term planning assumptions set out in the MKSM SRS Part A Statement.

**8Fiii.3 What is the justification for the proposed affordable housing target of 40% for Aylesbury town, and how deliverable will it be (Policy MKAV2)?**

- I. The level of affordable housing provision proposed in the MKAV sub regional strategy is identical to the figure for Aylesbury Town included in Policy MKAV2 of the adopted MKSM SRS, and is based on research undertaken to inform the SRS<sup>3</sup>, and subsequently endorsed by Buckinghamshire County Council in its advice to the Regional Assembly (December 2005). The figure includes an assumption about the tendency of the population of growth areas to contain greater levels of younger and newly forming households than the general population. This higher target rate of provision compared with that for Milton Keynes also reflects the very different distribution of tenure in the current housing stock between the two towns. It is acknowledged that this represents a very large increase on recent rates of delivery of affordable housing in Aylesbury which accounted for only 7% of total completions for the district as a whole during 2004/05, one of the lowest in the MKSM sub region. However, Milton Keynes demonstrates the potential for significant improvements in delivery rates if appropriate delivery mechanisms and funding streams are employed. It increased total affordable completions from 8% of all housing completions in 2001/02 to 42% in 2004/05.

**8Fiii.4 Does the proposed housing provision for the Rest of Aylesbury Vale post 2016 (excluding any growth associated with an expansion of Milton Keynes), provide sufficient allowance for these areas to meet cross border (Leighton Linlade) and local needs (Policy MKAV2)?**

- I. The housing provision proposed in Policy MKAV2 of the South East Plan for Aylesbury Vale specifically excludes any additional provision which may be required to meet the proposals for the expansion of the Milton Keynes or Leighton Linlade urban areas. The potential implications of the growth of Milton Keynes urban area for the level of housing provision in the neighbouring districts on Aylesbury Vale and Mid Bedfordshire have been addressed under Matter 8Fii.
2. The Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy identifies Leighton Linlade as one of four growth towns in southern part of Bedfordshire.

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<sup>3</sup> Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Growth Area Assessment, Roger Tym and Partners, 2003. [http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our\\_work/planning/area\\_studies/milton\\_midlands/mk\\_aylesbury\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/area_studies/milton_midlands/mk_aylesbury_final_report.pdf)

Policy 2(a) of the MKSM SRS Part B Statement for Bedfordshire and Luton requires the local planning authorities through their LDDs to review green belt boundaries around Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Linslade so that in combination sufficient land is made available to meet the levels of growth set out in Policy 2(b).

3. In the case of Leighton Linslade, Policy 2b of the MKSM SRS Part B Statement for Bedfordshire and Luton specifically requires a comprehensive review of the Green Belt and all options for urban extensions. It also states that proposals for compensating green belt extensions should be brought forward through the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England.
4. The SRS also states (at paragraph 84) that the required level of development at Leighton Linslade will depend on the scale of growth to be accommodated within urban extensions to Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis. This suggests a sequential approach whereby the capacity and scale of urban extensions around Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis will determine the level of provision sought around Leighton Linslade. It goes on to state that growth at Leighton Linslade 'would contribute towards the overall SRS provision for Luton and South Bedfordshire'.
5. A joint planning and transport committee for Luton and South Bedfordshire has recently been established to take forward this work, on which Aylesbury Vale District Council has observer status. It is therefore considered premature to include an indicative allocation for the level of housing provision to be provided within Aylesbury Vale District Council to accommodate the expansion of Leighton Linslade. However it is recognised that any implications of the ongoing review of green belt around Luton and South Bedfordshire for Aylesbury Vale will need to be reflected in a subsequent review of the South East Plan. In the interim there would be some merit in strengthening Section E8 of the South East Plan to make explicit reference to the MKSM SRS Part B Statement for Bedfordshire and Luton (Policies 2a and 2b).