

Milton Keynes pledges to extend grid roads and revamp bus routes

POLICY

by Andrew Forster

COUNCILLORS IN Milton Keynes this week agreed to extend the city's famous grid road network into new development areas and revamp the city's bus network, with main services on the grids linking into feeder routes serving housing estates.

Milton Keynes developed in the 1970s/1980s to a masterplan based on good car access. The network of grid roads – urban clearways with no direct building frontages or at-grade pedestrian crossings – generally have 60mph speed limits on single carriageway sections and 70mph on the dual carriageways. Pedestrians and cyclists use the network of Redways that cross the grid roads in underpasses.

In recent years Milton Keynes Partnership, part of the Government's Homes and Community Agency, has promoted the concept of 'city streets' – rather than grids – for new housing areas. City streets are mixed-mode streets that can include features such as frontage development, at-grade pedestrian crossings and bus priority.



Milton Keynes: plans to revamp bus network

Planning permission has already been granted for city streets as the main traffic route in the Western Expansion Area, which will have 6,600 dwellings, and the concept features in the Eastern Expansion Area where 4,000 dwellings are being built.

This week, however, the Liberal Democrat cabinet pledged to extend the grid road network and Redways into and through future housing expansion areas where planning permission has not already been approved.

"We are all committed to extending the grid road system – it's very important we state that in black and white," cabinet member for transport Vanessa McPake told *LTT*. "We like the

system; its unique and does a very good job." She added: "We are also committed to roundabouts not traffic lights – we are a city of roundabouts."

The cabinet's endorsement for grid roads failed to satisfy Theo Chalmers, chair of local pressure group Urban Eden, which campaigns for the city's expansion to reflect the original city masterplan. He said the council should go further and scrap the city streets plan for the Western Expansion Area, pointing out that the land had not yet been sold to developer Gallaghers. "They [the council] are overseeing the wilful destruction of the grid system and to say otherwise is a lie," Chalmers told *LTT*.

McPake dismissed Chalmers' proposal. "We can't start overturning planning permissions, Milton Keynes is an expanding city," she said. She described Urban Eden as "one small pressure group".

The cabinet has also resolved that there will be no reductions in car parking in Central Milton Keynes. Indeed, as employment, retail and other commercial land uses in the central area increase, the council says it is "important that the level of car parking increases commensurately".

The council's new local transport plan proposes a 'STAR' bus network – a high frequency network of routes along many of the city's grid roads, with six buses an hour in the peak and three at other times. These are expected to be largely commercially operated, though some subsidy may be needed to kick-start services.

Interchange points are proposed where STAR services would meet fixed route and semi-flexible dial-a-ride services using smaller vehicles that would serve the city's housing estates.

Consultant Steer Davies Gleave helped prepare the LTP.