

## **CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES: THE VISION FOR THE 'CITY CORE'**

Accountable Cabinet Member: Councillor I McCall

Contact Officer: Bruce Stewart (Senior Planning Officer) - 01908 254635

### **1. Purpose**

1.1 To agree a vision to guide investment and development in the "City Core" quarter, at the heart of Central Milton Keynes.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 That the Vision for the City Core, as set out in Paragraph 4.6 of the report, be approved for discussion with partners and stakeholders,.

### **3. Background**

Planning Policy:

3.1 Despite the current economic climate, the planned growth of Milton Keynes means that CMK is a centre that will undergo further significant change over the next 20 years.<sup>1</sup>

3.2 There is a well-formulated, comprehensive, clear and explicit policy framework in place that sets out the Council's development objectives for CMK, including the City Core Quarter<sup>2</sup> that comprises the main destination for visitors and centre for shopping. These include:

(a) The South East Plan and Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy.

(b) The Adopted Local Plan.

(c) The CMK Development Framework and supporting guidance.

(d) The emerging Core Strategy for the Borough.

3.3 CMK is a very successful regional centre that attracts customers from a wide area for a wide range of activities such as work, shopping, leisure and culture. It is the principal focus and destination for local and regional visitors to the city. It offers traditional city centre functions and activities but in a unique, modern, high quality environment. As an emerging centre of major regional importance<sup>3</sup>, CMK can play a complimentary role to other centres within and outside the Borough, offering attractions and services that are not available or viable in smaller town centres.

3.4 CMK is ranked 30<sup>th</sup> in the national retail destinations table<sup>4</sup> and has continuously improved its position over the past 10 years. Building on this success, outline planning permission was granted in 2005 for a major extension to the centre:mk but this permission lapsed recently. However, the planned growth of the City means that it is essential to maintain the momentum of development in the City Centre, including the City Core.

3.5 The City Core is the central block in CMK that is most closely identified as the "city centre" running from Saxon Gate to Marlborough Gate and from Silbury Boulevard to Childs Way, and focussed on Midsummer Boulevard. Included in this area is the centre:mk, Midsummer Place, The Point, the Food Centre, Xscape, the Milton Keynes Theatre, the Milton Keynes Gallery and the Theatre District. Attached, as **Annex A**, is a map showing the extent of the City Core. A summary of the broad characteristics of the City Core (what it is and what it is made up of) is set out in **Annex B**.

3.6 The CMK Partnership (CMKP) produced the current Vision for CMK in 1998. CMKP is an independent members organisation of the users (stakeholders) and official bodies of the City Centre, including the Council, the shopping centres, businesses, community and voluntary organisations, residents and residents organisations and the police.

- 3.7 The CMK Vision was reviewed, tested and endorsed during the preparation of the CMK Development Framework in 2001. The 2001 Vision in the CMK Development Framework defined CMK as:
- (a) The cultural and business heart of our community, a delightful and stimulating urban place pulsing with activity and regional in its reach.
  - (b) A regional centre with a healthy economy, which is also a successful District Centre for its inhabitants, and is able to manage the competing demands that arise.
  - (c) A vibrant centre that welcomes, surprises and delights the visitor, providing a varied residential environment as well as the best in business, shopping, sports, leisure and cultural facilities.
  - (d) A prestigious City Centre with the highest quality of design and materials both in its buildings and in the series of interconnecting attractive and varied public spaces between its buildings. A place of fine, inspiring, stimulating architecture and townscape.
  - (e) A friendly and bustling place that can be experienced on a pedestrian scale with an exciting street life and diverse nightlife.
  - (f) A convenient and safe place to visit, live and work with information systems that help support easy, affordable and sustainable access for all.
- 3.8 The 2001 Vision in the CMK Development Framework was influential in the preparation of the Adopted Local Plan and the CMK Development Framework and remains equally relevant in the preparation of the emerging Core Strategy for the Borough - the first of the formal, statutory planning policy documents that over time will replace the Local Plan.

#### **4. Issues and Choices**

4.1 A number of factors have combined to support refocusing attention on the City Core area:

- (a) Planning permission has lapsed for the approved extensions to the Centre:MK.
- (b) The Centre:MK (or Shopping Building) is currently being considered for listing as a building of special architectural or historic interest, a status which if confirmed, would make it unique amongst modern shopping centres. A decision is expected from government in the New Year, but even if listed status is not confirmed, the serious consideration that has been given to it reflects the high quality and design of the building.
- (c) There are opportunities and interest from developers in sites within the City Core, including both redevelopment and new development proposals.

4.2 The Milton Keynes City Core will continue to maintain its dominant regional retail, leisure and cultural position, concentrating on modern intensive large-scale developments not provided elsewhere in the wider region or in Milton Keynes itself. Notwithstanding its regional importance, Milton Keynes will serve a complementary, rather than a competitive, function with the smaller, more intimate, historic town centres in the wider region (such as Bedford, Northampton and Aylesbury) and in Milton Keynes itself (such as Bletchley and Wolverton).

4.3 The Vision for CMK as a whole, and the policy context set out in the Local Plan and CMK Development Framework, remain valid. They provide the context for a more focussed vision for the City Core Quarter that sets out the Council's ambitions and aspirations for

the future of this part of the City Centre, principally as a shopping destination but also as leisure and cultural destination.

4.4 The Vision will enable the Council to be in control, to drive and to manage the development process in the City Core, working with partners and stakeholders to promote development that will benefit the city and the surrounding area. It will also help to promote, maintain and enhance the role of CMK as a major regional retail, cultural and leisure destination – not just locally but also regionally, nationally and at a European level.

4.5 A clear vision will help the Council co-ordinate development of the City Core in a comprehensive and systematic way, so that development is integrated rather than isolated and separate. The outcome should be something that is greater than the sum of its parts: a place that everyone in the city and the surrounding area will be proud of and enjoy visiting for a variety of different purposes.

4.6 The draft 2008 Vision for the City Core is set out below.

**The City Core will be recognised as a major European lifestyle destination, which means:**

**(a) integrated, connected and comprehensive, with a mix of big scale retail, leisure, cultural and city living attractions;**

**(b) alive, friendly and welcoming;**

**(c) surprising, vibrant and exciting;**

**(d) safe and secure;**

**(e) enriched with striking architecture;**

**(f) modern and anchored by innovative design; and**

**(g) sustained by green credentials.**

4.7 In time, it may be appropriate to add more detailed guidance to implement the Vision.

4.8 In order to assist in the preparation of more detailed guidance to implement the Vision, key principles, as set out in **Annex C**, have been extrapolated from existing policy and guidance.

4.9 All other City Core partners and stakeholders will be invited by the Council to meet, discuss, review, refine and take ownership of the Vision. These partners include Milton Keynes Partnership, the CMK Town Council, the Parks Trust and the owners of the major shopping and leisure developments in the City Core (the centre:mk, the Food Centre, Midsummer Place, Xscape, The Point, the Theatre District, the Milton Keynes Theatre and Gallery Company).

4.10 In due course, further engagement and consultation will take place with the wider community involved in and affected by development in the City Core.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Policy**

The preparation of a Vision for the City Core does not change existing policy or introduce new policy.

## **CMK: A Vision for the City Core**

### **Annex B: Characteristics of the City Core**

- Approval was granted for the new Milton Keynes City Centre (CMK) in 1974.
- The Shopping Building – now the centre:mk – opened in 1979 and is being considered for listing as a building of historical or architectural interest, reflecting its unique and iconic status.
- Since then the shopping, leisure and cultural mix of the City Core has grown and expanded with the development of significant destinations such as The Point, the Food Court, Midsummer Place, Xscape, the Milton Keynes Theatre, the Milton Keynes Gallery and the Theatre District.
- The City Core has a strong defined grid road system. Priority is given to vehicular movement and pedestrian movement is secondary and generally not encouraged.
- The grid road system causes segregation and dispersal between developments rather than facilitating the integration of the City Core and the mixing of development and movement corridors.
- Midsummer Boulevard functions as the primary public transport spine and as a pedestrian corridor in the City Core.
- The City Core covers an area almost equivalent to a grid square and contains:
  - Retail Space
    - Over 300 stores including 5 national anchor stores
    - Various food courts with seating for over 1,000 people
  - Leisure Space
    - A wide mix of restaurants, cafes and bars
    - 2 multi-screen cinema complexes
    - Europe's largest indoor real snow ski-slope
    - An 18-lane bowling alley
  - Cultural Space
    - A world class theatre
    - A nationally recognised art gallery
- Major development opportunities remain within the City Core and offer the potential to integrate and introduce new activity and vitality in the heart of Milton Keynes.
- The primary catchment area for the City Core – the area within 45 minutes drive time – comprises almost 2-million people
- Potential retail expenditure for the City Core is estimated at £5-billion/year •There are over 15,000 available parking spaces in and nearby the City Core
- Over 10,000 people are directly employed in the City Core
- Over 50-million visitors arrive at the City Core each year
- The City Core has the highest retail rentals in the Milton Keynes sub region (£ 275/sqft)

## **CMK: A Vision for the City Core**

### **Annex C : 10 Key Principles**

1. A diverse mix of civic, community, shopping, entertainment, cultural, residential, commercial and market uses and activities.
2. A focus on comparison shopping, with a wide range of unit sizes; small scale food stores meeting local and specialist needs.
3. A perimeter block structure with a mix of open, outward looking buildings and covered, indoor areas - to provide choice and diversity, and access to both fresh air in summer and shelter in winter.
4. Active ground floor retail frontages, public uses and building entrances along 'Boulevards' and 'Streets'; colonnades on all frontages of all buildings on 'Gates' and 'Boulevards' with residential and commercial activities on upper floors.
5. Landmark buildings in strategic locations
6. New and improved civic spaces for people to enjoy sitting, meeting, reading and watching.
7. A network of safe, clear and attractive routes for people to walk and cycle to and around the City Centre and between different developments – particularly across the 'Gates' and 'Boulevards' and to Campbell Park.
8. Reduce the visual dominance of the car (roads and surface level parking) and improved facilities for public transport.
9. Eco-friendly and sustainable construction, making use of natural light, ventilation, and solar gain.
10. Innovative and high quality design for new buildings and public spaces, with well-designed and co-ordinated lighting, signage, street furniture, decoration, water features and public art.

5.3 Carbon and Energy Management No direct carbon and energy management implications to the Council. The inclusion of "green credentials" in the Vision and the inclusion of "eco-friendly and sustainable construction" in the Key Principles complement the Council's main carbon and energy management principles to maximise energy efficiency and carbon reduction, and the use of sustainable or renewable energy sources.

#### 5.4 Legal

None.

#### 5.5 Other Implications

##### (a) Equality

It is proposed that the Vision be subject to consultation with City Core partners and other relevant stakeholders after consideration by Cabinet.

##### (b) E-govt

The Vision will be made available through the Council's web pages.

##### (c) Users, partners and stakeholders

The Council and its City Core partners will be involved in the reformulation of the Vision to ensure development is encouraged in a proactive and forward-thinking way.

# Annex A - City Core Site Map

Also showing ownership of key properties/land

