

# Briefing Note



## City Wide Infrastructure Study to 2050 Pre Procurement Market Engagement

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Thank you for expressing your interest in providing consultancy services to us as part of our market engagement process.

This document will provide further information to you and a series of questions that we would appreciate you providing feedback on. The feedback will be used by us as part of its due diligence process and in assisting to develop an appropriate procurement strategy.

### City Wide Infrastructure Study: Objectives

We anticipate that the objectives and overall purpose of the work would be to:

- **Be innovative, creative and ground-breaking in approach.**
- Provide enough understanding of infrastructure implications in a thorough yet proportionate way to support and inform the development of policies (including decision on growth locations/sites) to 2050.
- Provide robust evidence in respect of overall infrastructure implications relating to the final version of the new Local Plan to 2040 (as submitted for Examination) future proofing, where needed, to 2050.
- Align fully with the requirements of Government policy and practice (at the time) in relation to the preparation of Local Plans and associated evidence gathering.
- Be aware of potential future changes to the process of plan making and evidence gathering and (as best as possible) be flexible to align with any amendments that may emerge over the course of delivering the work.
- Enable us to understand the prioritisation of specific infrastructure and its relationship to growth (both in the short and longer term), which can also be used to support bidding for funding.
- Direct us to funding and delivery mechanisms that will work in the local context.
- Ensure positive and active engagement with a full range of key stakeholders. This includes neighbouring Authorities and infrastructure providers (such as health, utilities, emergency services, etc.) on cross-boundary matters.

- Produce outputs and products that are understandable and usable by us and a range of stakeholders (including local communities) through digital means.

## Background

We intend to commission a '**City Wide Infrastructure Study**' as part of a comprehensive suite of background evidence studies that can inform and support future policy making. The Study will need to analyse and determine the infrastructure implications and requirements from the significant housing and employment growth anticipated in our Strategy for 2050, and delivered initially through our new Local Plan to 2040.

The work will also need to consider and align with a range of other important influences such as the recent Planning White Paper, the emerging Spatial Framework for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, cross-boundary infrastructure projects of sub-regional significance, and any other strategies and proposals which may come forward in adjoining authorities.

**The scale of our growth ambition is large;** between now and 2050 we could be planning for up to 60,000 new homes and 90,000 new jobs; our city centre will undergo a Renaissance; our cultural draw will extend; the urban area will physically grow, be regenerated, and intensify. However alongside that growth we also want to become carbon negative over the same period.

**To meet this challenge we need an Infrastructure Study that breaks the mould and looks to this long term ambition as well as the nearer term local plan horizon.** The Study is expected to understand:

- The widest scope of infrastructure considerations, from our perspective (for example social and cultural infrastructure as well as 'blue, green and grey' infrastructure);
- What is required and where (city-scale/sub-regional scale, site specific, expansion of existing capacity).
- When is it required by and likely to be delivered.
- Who will provide it.
- How much will it cost.
- How can it be funded.

It is anticipated that the Study will need to be delivered in a flexible and forward-thinking way. As well as the shifting national and sub-regional context, this work will have direct interrelationships with our other local plan evidence studies and commissions (such as for a Mass Rapid Transit system) and our work to explore options for a new delivery mechanism.

## Strategy for 2050

Building on the recommendation of the MK Futures 2050 commission, the **Strategy for 2050**<sup>1</sup> was adopted by Milton Keynes Council on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021, as an annex to the Council Plan. The Strategy provides a vision and framework for the future growth of the city over the coming

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/>

decades and includes a recommended spatial strategy for how that growth should be distributed. While the Strategy is not a statutory planning document, it will inform the development of the next Local Plan.

**It is within this context that the City Wide Infrastructure Study needs to be framed.**

## **Local Plan Review**

The current Local Plan was adopted in 2019 and a review is just getting started with the commissioning of various evidence base studies. The new Local Plan will have a time horizon to 2040 with the Strategy for 2050 and spatial strategy a key part of the underpinning evidence. Work on the new Local Plan, including this commission, will help test the spatial strategy to 2050. This is to ensure the spatial strategy set out in the Local Plan meets the national planning policy requirements (below). **We anticipate the new Local Plan being submitted for examination during 2024.**

## **Policy Requirements & Influences**

The Government's revised **National Planning Policy Framework**<sup>2</sup> (NPPF) was updated in June 2019 and provides the national planning context for this commission.

The Planning Practice Guidance provides detailed guidance for the requirements set out in the NPPF.

It is expected that this commission will have due regard to the necessary requirements for plan-making **but to be clear we are seeking a more innovative and ground breaking approach.**

## **Planning White Paper**

Any work being commissioned will need to be mindful of forthcoming changes that are expected coming out of the Governments' consultation on the **Planning White Paper**<sup>3</sup>. It is too early to understand which of the changes may be taken forward given the extent of responses that were submitted. The clear message from Government has been for Councils not to delay progressing current work. **We are already on that train; our Strategy for 2050 is not a planning policy document but it sets out our ambition and a clear direction of travel for the next Local Plan. This commission is as much about supporting that longer-term goal as it is about progressing the Local Plan.**

Local Plans will still need to be informed by infrastructure – there is no real change to the core need to understand infrastructure needs and the implications of future development, and ultimately for there to be enough confidence that future strategies are robust. There are however some elements which it is worth including an appreciation of when commissioning significant work on infrastructure.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

The proposal to remove the test for ‘soundness’ to be replaced by a single and consolidated statutory “sustainable development” test. Currently a Local Plan can only be adopted if it is found to be legally and procedurally ‘sound’ in accordance with the four tests set out in the NPPF, one of which with relevance to infrastructure is that of ‘deliverability’. This must be evidenced in a number of ways including through an ‘Infrastructure Delivery Plan’ and viability assessments. Several recent Local Plans that have included long term growth ambitions have not been able to pass the ‘deliverability’ test under the current process, mainly as uncertainties will exist given the scale and nature of proposals, their associated infrastructure needs and the timescales involved. **This commission will need to ensure we get over that hurdle.**

The NPPF and PPG have been amended over recent years to better acknowledge the need for greater flexibility in infrastructure planning and the consideration of deliverability. It is likely however that some form of simpler approach will be introduced to ensure plans strike the right balance between environmental, social and economic objectives, and do not get bound by unrealistic expectations of detail or certainty.

The move towards a digitally enabled and standardised process will undoubtedly be embraced by the sector. In this respect Local Plans and supporting studies should be (where possible) digitised and web-based rather than lengthy and complicated documents. **We are particularly interested in how this commission can be more digital in its approach – a possible exemplar for others.**

The suggested move towards a 30-month statutory timescale to produce Local Plans with specified timescales for each stage in the process would require a decent level of baseline information to be available to inform the development of the plans. Knowledge on infrastructure capacity, planned and potential improvements will always be important. **Equally as important to us though is an understanding of what matter to us locally, specifically, and in the context of Milton Keynes’ ‘specialness’.**

There are additional proposals to reform the existing regimes of CIL and Section 106 planning obligations and their replacement by a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy. There would be increased local authority flexibility to allow them to spend receipts on their policy priorities, once core infrastructure obligations have been met. Again, clear awareness of local infrastructure issues, needs and funding will be important to assess the implications of any change in policy approach here. **For example, we have not developed a CIL and have preferred our ‘Tariff’ approach to support the largest expansions to our city (below).**

## **Alignment with current work in MK on infrastructure**

We have a long history of considering infrastructure needs and managing a programme of funding, spend and delivery, partly as a legacy of its New Town status, and more recently as part of delivering the MK Tariff. The **Local Investment Plan**<sup>4</sup> set out how we were investing in infrastructure to support existing committed growth. The last published version is from 2015,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/growing-mk/local-investment-plan>

**but there may be an opportunity through this commission to revisit the value of this type of document.**

More recently work to support the examination and adoption of Plan:MK has considered infrastructure via the statutory planning process. In 2018, a (draft) **Infrastructure Delivery Plan<sup>5</sup>** (IDP) was prepared for the Plan:MK Examination in Public. The IDP covered the plan period up until 2031 but also acknowledged that wider growth was envisaged and that the document should be treated as ‘live’ needing to be monitored and updated to reflect changes over time. **There is currently no published update to the IDP and we are keen to explore ways in which our future IDP, flowing from this commission might be a more responsive and updateable document.**

## **Interdependencies & relationships to other studies**

We intend to progress a set of studies to inform the preparation of the new Local Plan. The relationships of these to the City-Wide Infrastructure Study will need to be considered such as in terms of sequencing, levels of detail and to make best use of resources. This is anticipated to include (but not be limited to)

- Mass Rapid Transit Study. To take forward initial work and be anticipated to include information on timing of need, costing and delivery mechanisms.
- Transport Modelling. To inform consideration of impacts on the highway network and the need for capacity and network improvements.
- Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. The consideration of this will inform the potential spatial approach and therefore influence where specific infrastructure measures would be required.
- Housing and Employment Needs Studies
- Low Carbon City/Sustainability Study
- Landscape Character & Open Space Assessments. Limited impact on the infrastructure study itself, but this will influence the spatial approach and potentially consideration of new green infrastructure.
- Integrated Water Management Study. This will cover specific consideration of impacts on wastewater including potential infrastructure improvements to/the need for new wastewater treatment works.

In common with many of the studies, the approach to the City Wide Infrastructure Study will need to interact both with the findings that emerge from other studies, and importantly with the progress on the new Local Plan in terms of the overall spatial approach to growth, as set out in the Strategy for 2050.

As well as our own emerging evidence this Study needs to consider the impact of plans in neighbouring authorities (what we might need to provide for them). Equally we need to consider the impact our growth will have on neighbouring authorities.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/3rkdJn4>

## **City Wide Infrastructure Study: Market Intelligence**

We recognise that we are setting a challenge for ourselves (and others) with this study. The following questions have been designed to seek the market's view on how to approach this work.

Any information provided will not be shared to any third party and will only be reviewed by the project team:

- 1. Please outline any general comments you have about this proposed commission from the perspective of a potential supplier. What would be innovative, creative or ground-breaking in your approach?**
- 2. How would you integrate the statutory process of evidence gathering for plan making purposes with the long term (non-statutory) ambition of the Strategy for 2050?**
- 3. How would you structure this work so that it meets the overall requirements but can respond to key influences, milestones and the need for a degree of flexibility? How would you avoid abortive or unnecessary work, given anticipated major changes to the planning system over coming years?**
- 4. Would this commission be best approached in separately procured phases? What alternative approaches could we consider to streamline procurement, yet retain flexibility on the actual scope of work?**
- 5. How would you integrate this study with other key evidence gathering studies, for example on future strategic transport aspirations?**
- 6. What role could digital play in this commission, for example in establishing a system to capture and present information in new, more engaging ways?**
- 7. Are you aware of and/or had experience of similar types of long-term infrastructure consultancy work involving both statutory and non-statutory time horizons and requirements?**
- 8. Do you have any suggestions or expertise you can provide that differs to our above requirements or approach?**

## **Timescales**

Please can you email Mark Culley directly using the email address shown above with a response to the questions above by March 8<sup>th</sup> 2021.

To confirm, this does not form any formal part of the procurement process and we may choose not to progress with any procurement in respect of this study.