

Marston Moreteyne Action Group (formerly MMETAG) is a non-political group of volunteers who joined forces in July 2008. Our original focus was to stop plans to build a so called 'Eco-Town' in the Marston Vale area. We proved highly effective in co-ordinating opposition to those plans including getting over 700 villagers to march on the A421 (now C94). The Action Group was re-launched in 2009 to fight inappropriate development that would swamp and urbanise our individual and distinct rural communities. Over the years we successfully engaged the community in these external threats to their environment and village based way of life.

MMAG objects to the entire O&H Properties proposal as it contradicts assurances the local community were given by their local Councillors and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) that the village would be given a respite from development following the substantial village expansions at Marston Park and Moreteyne Fields.

The proposals concrete over a large area of countryside and farmland including arable land that contributes to food production. The proposals utilise no brown field land at all, instead concreting overgreen fields contrary to nationwide commitments for sustainable development that focuses on brown field use primarily. Local communities are angry at the loss of night sky and the unique quiet and tranquillity of the area currently; a haven between Milton Keynes and Bedford. When local communities came together to fight off the eco-town proposals a significant issue for people was not wanting to see coalescence of Milton Keynes and Bedford through the Marston Vale. Sadly these proposals do exactly that joining Bedford Borough developments through Wootton and Stewartby to the Milton Keynes approved expansion to J13.

The fact that CBC appear to promoting the development on behalf of O&H Properties raises questions on process and the legitimacy of decision making. In addition, CBC's preference for this location designed with convoluted links to Ridgemont Station, the key stopping station on the proposed East West Rail, further indicates unhealthy collusion between land owner and Council. Land immediately to the side of Ridgemont station would have created a single sustainable new town, without engulfing current homes and communities into an urban area. However, that land is not owned by O&H Properties. The fact CBC is currently supportive of the proposal does not mean this community accepts this is a done deal.

New Town dressed up as 'villages'

It is a misnomer to describe Marston Valley as four new villages and an expansion of Marston Moreteyne. In reality it is a new town of six suburbs two established (Marston Moreteyne and Lidlington) and four new. The token amounts of green space proposed between the settlements are not dissimilar to Milton Keynes. No where else in the UK would there be or are there six 'villages' in such close proximity to each other. Engagement with local communities is disingenuous when disguised around 'villages'. Local residents live here now because they have made a choice to live in a real village and live a village life style. The proposal, like the eco-town proposals before, offers nothing but forced urbanisation and town living with all the negative elements offset by some additional parkland and tiny canal between two existing lakes.

The scale of development may on paper not count as overdevelopment due to green space and tree cover. However, in local peoples eyes it is over development as the 'villages' will be so close to each other you'll be able to see and hear them. People will literally step from one into another with no distinction and sense of 'place'.

Design concepts

The much pushed 'benefits' of commitments to infrastructure are words that may never be realised. There is no guarantee that any of the infrastructure will happen or can be operational beyond an empty building. The current village GP surgery has been based on locums for many years. The local paper has a constant stream of adverts for teaching staff at all levels alongside articles on the difficulty of securing teachers in a range of subjects. The proposals hold the potential of pushing local infrastructure to breaking point, or at the very least creating years of significant difficulty for existing communities before any potential benefits begin to show.

The location of the proposal encompasses a number of level crossings on the proposed East West Rail. Network Rail has formally objected to the location being included in the CBC development allocation. The concerns raised relate to the material change that the proposals will have on the volume and character of usage on these level crossing.

Despite the proposed scale swamping existing communities, it is perversely not of a scale to warrant a sustainable public transport system. Concepts of bus commuters to Ridgmont station and into Flitwick are fanciful. They fail to recognise that movement to Bedford and Milton Keynes is more normal. In addition, that local bus and train services are already subsidised even in Ampthill and Flitwick. Patterns of travel locally are well established based on cars. New residents will arrive with cars and with an expectation that they will use these not switch to buses. Despite promises of road improvements, the proposals will overwhelm the road network causing further gridlock and travel misery for key parts of the day than is already experienced.

Timetable

The proposal condemns residents to being surrounded by building sites and major construction works for 20 years with all the additional vehicle movements associated with this. There is no clear schedule of work or mitigation plans for the noise, light and traffic pollution that will blight residents lives for a time period that might be an entire retirement or period of having and bringing up a family.

It is unclear if key infrastructure promised such as roads and the canal would be delivered early in the build cycle and in doing offering some short-term benefits for local residents. In addition, when instigated e.g. the canal –no clarity on where the substantial earth works generated will be moved to and how?

Transport

Whilst we know the justification of the Marston Vale Linkroad is an attempt to re-direct lorry traffic out of the centre of Marston Moreteyne, it needs to be emphasised

that the preferred route for lorry traffic is already off the B530. A more radical approach would be to divert the entire Proving Ground traffic through a new access road from the A507. Where is the commercial sense of redirecting lorry traffic from one village into another village yet to be built?

Improvements to J13 are unclear and there is no commitment to these (if they happen) being in place early in any developmental stages.

Impact on the Parish of Marston Moreteyne

The proposals overly, directly and negatively affect the few rural houses at the Jubilee Cottages end of Station Road through to Millbrook Station. Residents seeing these plans at the consultations had the shock of seeing their homes engulfed in development. There was no attempt at the events to be prepared for those residents, to actively seek them out or to quickly and proactively engage with them. There would have been value in doing so and seeking to reassure them of any desire by the land owner to explore how to substantially mitigate the negative impact of being (without agreement) engulfed in development, built all round and subsumed with an urban environment and associated permanent noise and light pollution.

The proposals make no reference to local engagement and local community governance. What approach will be taken during the 20 year build? What approach will be taken if the proposed new town is built spanning two current Parish Councils?

MMAG also wishes to register its disappointment that O&H Properties, as with the eco-town proposals, opted for very late notification of public consultations and failed again to ensure leaflets drops reached all properties.