

# MILTON KEYNES STRATEGY FOR 2050

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENT, NOVEMBER 2020

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This document has been prepared to support the adoption of the Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050 in order to explain the engagement process and changes that have been made to the Strategy post-engagement, and the process moving forward.

### 1. CONTEXT

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In 2015, Milton Keynes Council established the MK Futures 2050 Commission to help it plan for the next phase of the city's journey.<sup>1</sup> The Commission's report "Making a Great City Greater" was published in July 2016 and recommended the council took forward Six Big Projects and the preparation of the Strategy for 2050 in order to put the city in the best possible position for the future. The 'Making a Great City Greater' report proposed a high rate of growth to 2050 as the best way of providing the greatest benefit for the city's population and included a broad approach for how that development might be distributed and this has provided core assumptions used in the development of the Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

The Strategy for 2050 sets out how the long-term future of the city is about achieving quality of life and success that is shared across all our communities, in the context of a scale of growth that would take our borough population to around 410,000 people by 2050.

#### Geographical Coverage

The Strategy for 2050 has its main focus the future development of the borough of Milton Keynes. But it also considers the wider area and its economy, and the way that people travel day-to-day to access work, shops, leisure and other services in different areas and towns across the wider area, across council boundaries. We think of this area as a 'Greater' Milton Keynes, including neighbouring parts of Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Central Bedfordshire. These areas each have their own unique character, independent of Milton Keynes, but many of their residents work, shop or visit MK on a daily basis and those towns and villages add to the overall attractiveness and prosperity of the wider area.

It is not our intention in the Strategy for 2050 to recommend a distribution of growth in our neighbouring areas; we know that is a job for the local plans of those individual planning authorities and that the homes that are delivered are counted towards their own housing targets. But in developing the Strategy for 2050 and the evidence base that sits behind it, we have sought to consider how growth might work best across boundaries, especially when thinking about how many of us lead

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<sup>1</sup> The MK Futures 2050 Commission comprised independent experts and local champions and conducted in-depth research and one of the largest programmes of public engagement in the city's history – direct engagement with 1,051 people and a further 23,105 through social media. The MK Futures 2050 website, [www.mkfutures2050.com](http://www.mkfutures2050.com) includes a range of background Commission Working Papers which were developed to inform the preparation of the full report.

<sup>2</sup> "Making a Great City Greater", July 2016, pages 36 and 37

our lives and the services we use regularly, and in thinking about the natural environment or other constraints and opportunities.

## Status of the Strategy

The Strategy is a non-statutory document (i.e. it is not a formal planning policy document prepared in accordance with statutory regulations), but it does create a context and vision for the development of Milton Keynes borough over the coming decades, which future local plans and other Council and partner plans, policies and strategies should respond to and help to deliver.

The Strategy for 2050 has been prepared in the context of a suite of other local plans and strategies, which have helped to guide its ambitions.

## 2. BACKGROUND EVIDENCE

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### Evidence Base

The Strategy for 2050 was prepared during 2019 and 2020, informed by a variety of evidence and data sources which are referenced within the document with hyperlinks where available. The evidence that was prepared specifically for the Strategy is available to download at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com), including the comprehensive Strategic Growth Study and supporting studies that were prepared using a grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Following the publication of the Engagement Draft Strategy for 2050 in January 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK has subsequently gone into recession. This inevitably led to questions about the evidence that was prepared during 2018 and 2019 and the way that has been interpreted in the Strategy. During summer 2020 we commissioned work to review core assumptions in the Strategy and what the pandemic and resulting recession could mean for delivery. These evidence reviews looked closely at our proposed mass rapid transit system and how we can deliver our aim of mobility for all in the light of suppressed levels of commuting and use of public transport, and also the implications of the recession for jobs and housing growth. We also undertook public and stakeholder engagement to seek views on the impact of the pandemic on any aspect of the Strategy (see section 3 below).

### Differences between the Strategy and the Strategic Growth Study

While the Strategy takes forward many of the propositions made in the evidence studies, there are some cases where the Strategy takes a slightly different stance, and where that is the case, the approach in the Strategy for 2050 should take precedence as the Council's proposed direction.

### Further Evidence

It is important to note that in order to deliver the Strategy, including in how it is translated into future Local Plans, there will be further evidence prepared to test the propositions contained within it in more detail and meet the robust challenges of the Local Plan examination. Examples of this further work

include more detailed modelling and preparation of a full business case for the proposed mass transit system, and a comprehensive, long-term infrastructure assessment.

### 3. ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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#### Pre-publication Engagement

There has been ongoing stakeholder and public engagement which has informed the development of the Strategy for 2050, culminating in an extended engagement period in early 2020. This is in addition to the extensive programme that took place as part of the MK Futures 2050 Commission process in 2015 and 2016 which is explained in detail in a Commission Working Paper that informed their final report.<sup>3</sup>

Through 2018 and 2019, the ongoing engagement programme that informed the drafting of the Strategy for 2050 included

- regular roundtable discussions with civic and city stakeholders
- presentations and discussions with various interest groups including MK Arts and Heritage Alliance, MK Secondary Heads group, MK Business Council, voluntary and community sector, and town and parish councils.
- “Forging the Future” programme with secondary school students
- workshop sessions at MK YCAB (Youth Cabinet) and MySayMK conference
- presentation and discussion at conferences and seminars, including MK Sustainability Conference, Fred Roche Foundation talks, Groundwork Weekender, MK Business Leaders and MK Geek Night.
- Journey to 2050 four-day public exhibition in Middleton Hall, Central Milton Keynes in July 2019.

#### Engagement Draft – January – May 2020

The Engagement Draft Strategy for 2050 was published in January 2020. Initially, this was intended to be for a ten-week period, due to end on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020. At the start of the engagement period, we used the following engagement methods;

- document published online at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com)<sup>4</sup>
- hard copies of the Strategy held in libraries, including in neighbouring towns, and in MKC children’s centres
- emails sent to known stakeholders, with encouragement to share widely across their networks
- social media used to pull out bite-size issues and themes – Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter
- a short YouTube animation shared through social media channels<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Commission Working Paper 2 “Results from the Commission’s Engagement Programme” at [www.MKFutures2050.com/read-our-report](http://www.MKFutures2050.com/read-our-report)

<sup>4</sup> Strategy for 2050 Engagement Page <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/strategy-for-2050-engagement-page>

<sup>5</sup> YouTube video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d6TvsmNpgE>

- series of public meetings in communities within MK and in neighbouring areas
- discussion sessions with stakeholder groups, e.g. civic and city groups, business community, council staff.

However, by mid-March it was obvious that our programme of public meetings would no longer be feasible due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and the final sessions were cancelled. The engagement period was extended to Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May to allow time for responding via other means, creating an engagement period of 18 weeks in total from the initial publication on 20<sup>th</sup> January. We also added a narrated version of the presentation that had been used at our public meetings to the website, offered on line briefings, and published answers to the ‘frequently asked questions’ we had received from the meetings that had gone ahead.<sup>6</sup>

Through this January – May 2020 engagement period, we received around 250 emails in addition to the comments made during public meetings and via social media. The headlines from this feedback are presented in Section 5 of this statement, and a more comprehensive summary of the points raised and a brief description of how this has influenced the final Strategy is available online at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com).

## COVID-19 Engagement – June – July 2020

Following the main engagement period, we took the decision to ask for views on the potential implications for the Strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to understand people’s thoughts on the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on the future development of Milton Keynes and any aspect of the draft Strategy we had published. To that end, a note was prepared describing emergent thinking about potential impacts, including a set of questions to help respondents frame their thoughts.<sup>7</sup> The note was published online on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 with a deadline for comments of Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July. Emails were sent to the original mailing list plus all those who responded to the earlier engagement draft, with details shared through our social media channels.

Through this five-week engagement period, around 55 responses were received. The headline summary of these comments is included in Section 5, and a more comprehensive summary online at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com).

## Respondents

Through both the engagement periods, we received comments from a wide range of sources. The respondents included members of the public, Town and Parish Councils, local planning authorities, local Ward Members and political parties, planning consultants, landowners and developers, council officers, city and civic stakeholder groups and other local interest groups, government agencies, voluntary and community sector organisations, and business groups.

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<sup>6</sup> The FAQs are available at <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/strategy-faqs> and the narrated presentation is on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCaXFvgyJ6o>

<sup>7</sup> The “Strategic Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic” note is available at <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/strategy-for-2050-engagement-page>

## 4. WIDER CONTEXT

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As is inevitable in the development of a long-term strategy, there is uncertainty about the status or potential outcomes of a range of variables that could impact on its preparation and delivery. For the Strategy for 2050, these uncertainties include;

- the COVID-19 pandemic and the major changes it has made to the way we live our lives, including new travel and working patterns, increased online shopping and declining city centre footfall, and changing lifestyles and priorities
- the economic recession resulting from the pandemic, including the possible impact on the housing market or increases in unemployment and business failure
- Brexit and a new relationship with the European Union
- the government's intentions for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, including a proposed cross-corridor long-term, strategic spatial framework
- the "pausing" of the proposed A421 expressway by Highways England and timing of delivery of East-West Rail
- potential changes to the planning system following the Planning White Paper, "Planning for the future" which was published in August 2020 and is likely to have major implications for the way local plans are prepared and operate
- the creation of unitary councils in neighbouring local authority areas.

The Strategy for 2050 has been prepared with the best available knowledge at the time of drafting and is designed to provide the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

In drafting the Strategy, it has also been important to balance a range of interests and aims. For example, we need to ensure that detail is provided on a wide range of issues whilst maintaining a document length that is concise and suitably strategic. Similarly, we have tried to use language that is accessible and easily understood by a range of readers, whilst trying to convey sometimes complex issues.

## 5. HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

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This summary reflects the headline points that were made. The comments are broadly grouped by topic rather than listing by respondent and repeating similar points. A more comprehensive summary of the feedback received during both the January – May 2020 and June – July 2020 engagement periods is available online at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com).

### Feedback on the Engagement Draft Strategy for 2050

- Growth should be within the Milton Keynes boundary; lack of justification for cross-boundary development. Cross-boundary development is unlikely to be deliverable
- Approach to working with neighbouring areas is not clear, has been inadequate, does not align with Neighbourhood Plans or Local Plans or meet the Duty to Cooperate

- Support a boundary blind, strategic approach but it needs political buy-in from partners
- Any future joint working or development of proposals across boundaries needs to be done on the basis of a shared vision, developed by all partners, and with better understanding of governance structures. Not logical for each council to plan alone, but there has been insufficient agreement in developing the approach
- Level of growth is not supported or evidenced. Not credible to plan for growth at this scale. Growth to a population of 400k is far more acceptable.
- Growth target or quality of development is not achievable without a new delivery mechanism. Support consideration of new mechanism
- Do not support a new delivery vehicle, including with powers outside MK boundary
- Strategy should be flexible
- Viability needs to be factored into development assumptions. Make it clear the Council will pursue Government funding for infrastructure
- Lack of targets or detail, including numbers of homes intended in each growth location or type of development
- Support the Strategy in principle
- Support the Strategy and laudable principles, but success will come down to implementation and ensuring there are benefits for all
- COVID-19 and recession will impact the underlying evidence and how we will live in the future
- We need to sort out some of the weaknesses and challenges. Should look after what we already have first
- Ambitions need to be reconsidered and better inter-linked. MK Futures 2050 Six Big Projects should also be included
- Climate change and sustainability aspirations are not sufficiently embedded through the Strategy or ambitious enough
- Develop a comprehensive plan for CMK that considers design, investment, (re)development opportunities, parking and mobility, and takes into account the original city centre principles
- Importance of culture not reflected in the Strategy; should be given greater emphasis throughout and in Ambitions
- Limited scope for densification in the city. Compact communities mustn't be just about maximising development space and profits; consider 'gentle density'.
- Place-making agenda should promote better design, identify and retain MK's unique nature and be sensitive to existing communities
- Recent developments have not been sensitive to existing communities or original principles
- Character of different parts of the area should be reflected, not just all classed as the city
- Support development of a variety of sites, including smaller sites in addition to larger development sites
- Focus on CMK and new areas is at expense of dealing with issues in existing communities. Other places and communities are forgotten about
- Development strategy should prioritise urban development and brownfield sites rather than greenfield and edge-blobbing
- Development on greenfield sites, areas of open countryside and in small villages would irreparably damage those places

- Focus on the local economy and providing access to good jobs as an important route out of poverty, but needs strategic view
- Education system is failing local people. Not enough focus on education outside of MK:U
- Focus on CMK as location for new jobs should be reconsidered
- Green infrastructure issues should be integrated throughout the whole strategy, and be more ambitious. Environmental gains for the city should be included just as they are for transport, skills etc, with a comprehensive landscape and green infrastructure strategy
- Avoid development on existing green spaces. New green space needs to be provided to the same quality and quantity
- Design of homes should meet minimum space standards, with outdoor space and space for home working
- Importance of providing necessary infrastructure at the right time; further work needed to understand what is needed
- Infrastructure costs may not be affordable. And existing infrastructure requires renewal
- Inadequate landscape character and capacity assessment, and water-related infrastructure evidence
- Basing growth strategy around MRT is inappropriate
- Strategy isn't ambitious enough on mobility including walking and cycling. It won't deliver mobility for all principles
- Should provide better options for walking and cycling, but redways might not be the answer in all cases
- Do not perpetuate the grid road structure without considering options
- Maintain the grid roads and dual roads where possible, but new mobility options should not be at the expense of car drivers
- Proposed MRT network needs flexibility and revised routes to reach key locations. CMK-centric/radial network not appropriate
- MRT analysis has not considered full options or is an inappropriate solution
- Further information needed on funding and governance/legislative changes needed to run MRT system
- Support the reinstatement of East West Rail with appropriate improvements, but need to understand implications for some settlements/stations
- Do not support the East West Expressway
- Premature to prepare Strategy ahead of regional decisions and further evidence
- Engagement should have been halted during COVID-19 lockdown
- Strategy preparation and engagement process has not been appropriate; a new approach is needed
- Support for development across a range of specific sites/growth locations
- Against development across a range of specific sites/growth locations
- Detailed proposals for re-wording of sections

## Feedback on the Strategic Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Challenges in the public transport sector from need for social distancing reducing capacity, lack of confidence in safety, fewer journeys being made and use of private cars
- Impact of more online shopping and how to deal with the 'last mile' of delivery journeys
- Walking and cycling increase may be minimal; requires investment in infrastructure maintenance
- Changing travel patterns will impact on demand for car parking and the way people use their cars
- Changing travel patterns and the impact on commuting levels and congestion; impact on the environment, noise and pollution
- All new homes must have gardens or accessible outside space
- New homes should include homeworking space
- Impact of increased home-working and changing need for office space, which may be put to alternative use; opportunities for CMK as a regional office location; need for flexible office/meeting spaces
- High street decline will be accelerated and alternative uses found for shops and ways of attracting people to the city centre
- Still a need for local food shops and local centres, in addition to more online retailing
- Impact on leisure, food and drink, cultural and tourism sectors
- Importance of local facilities near to people's homes that provide a range of services; growing importance of local high streets and hubs
- Opportunities to change the use of existing buildings, but potential impacts on quality of life, including impact of density of development and need to maintain city centre vitality
- Investment in the city may now be very uncertain and the delivery of the Strategy is even more uncertain
- Need for UK-wide strategic action on the economy, but also need to consider changes to local economic structures to build more resilience and focus on new priorities, including green recovery
- Should consider alternative education models, e.g. forest schools, and consider implications for MK:U project
- Investment strategy needed for CMK to address decline
- Need to maintain investment in connectivity and enabling high speed broadband
- Government approach to energy will not deliver carbon neutrality; local policy should go further
- Impact is likely to exacerbate inequality
- Importance of community spirit and local support networks. People's priorities have changed
- Public Health and Voluntary Sector need proper funding and support
- Opportunities to address housing need and affordability, including rough sleepers
- Need to consider other methods for true engagement. Solutions need to be driven by citizens and stakeholder specialists
- Benefit of open spaces for outdoor recreation in lockdown
- Need spaces in the public realm that allow people to come together
- Original principles for MK have meant the city has fared well compared to other places during the pandemic, and those principles should be maintained
- There is still a need for a long-term strategy for the future of Milton Keynes
- Premature to finalise the Strategy for 2050
- Remain opposed to the Strategy and its principles
- Impact on housing market; already unachievable targets should be revised

- Should also think about other behavioural and attitude changes as a result of other calls for change, e.g. BLM movement, as well as impact of Brexit
- Changes to the national planning system are likely to have an impact. Also need local guidance on how spaces could be adapted
- Seize opportunities created, not just try to return to normal
- Government and local authorities need to give confidence to communities; MKC could take a stronger lead.

## 6. KEY CHANGES SINCE THE ENGAGEMENT DRAFT STRATEGY

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Following the feedback received during the two engagement periods and using the outputs of our work to refresh the evidence base in the light of COVID-19, we have made several changes to the structure of the strategy, and further detailed changes throughout the document. The changes described below are not exhaustive; there are many smaller changes to the wording within the Strategy for 2050 that improve clarity or consistency, and update data or references within the document where new information is available. A comprehensive summary of comments is available online at [www.MKFutures2050.com](http://www.MKFutures2050.com) and includes further detail of the changes made to the document in response to the comments received, in addition to the more fundamental changes list below.

### Changes to the structure of the Strategy for 2050

Many people commented that there was insufficient coverage of issues relating to green infrastructure and the city's green character; sustainability and meeting the city's challenging carbon neutrality agenda; and culture and the creative industries. In order to address these weaknesses, a new chapter has been added in the final Strategy for 2050 called "A Sustainable and Green City" which provides greater detail on green and blue infrastructure and sustainability issues, and more references have been threaded through the document.

A chapter has been added called "Healthy and Creative Places" which now covers our placemaking principles and adds some further focus on cultural issues. We have also added further information within the "Our Diverse and Inclusive Economy" chapter to reference the importance of the cultural and creative sector in our local economy and quality of life. Within the "Healthy and Creative Places" chapter we have explained our placemaking approach with a greater focus on our residents' health and wellbeing, and have removed the extended list of principles. The chapter "Affordable and High-Quality Homes" is now focussed on housing affordability and quality.

The Engagement Draft Strategy for 2050 included an Annex called the "Growth Options Assessment" which included a brief assessment of the potential growth locations that had been assessed as part of the development of the Strategy. This section has now been removed from the final Strategy as originally intended.

The Engagement Draft included a chapter that focussed on Central Milton Keynes and Central Bletchley as two priority areas of change. We received feedback that this section should be expanded

as it meant some parts of the borough were not covered by this approach. This chapter is now called “Central Milton Keynes and Our Centres” and includes discussion about other centres and the opportunities available, including as locations for sensitive intensification, for flexible working space and as nodes on a much improved mobility network.

We have also included an introductory section for each chapter that summarises our vision and approach. These sections also form an Executive Summary which is available separately from the main Strategy for 2050 document.

## **Major changes to content or approach**

### **Cross boundary growth**

The Engagement Draft Strategy for 2050 was prepared on the basis of a metropolitan Milton Keynes area, working on a ‘boundary blind’ basis which recognised the opportunity for growth on a more strategic geography. It was always the intention that growth in those neighbouring authority areas would come forward through the relevant councils’ own local plan processes, but through the Strategy we made a suggestion, on the basis of the Strategic Growth Study prepared in support of the work, for how that wider cross boundary growth could be distributed.

In this final Strategy for 2050 we have only included a proposition for the Milton Keynes borough area and have included a broad ambition for a population of around 410,000 people in the borough by 2050. The final Strategy does include reference to the 10,000 homes that are already in adopted or emerging plans in the areas immediately adjoining the borough boundary, and that we expect that a further c.10,000 will be built in the decades to 2050 due to ongoing demand for new homes and the likely uplift in housing targets in neighbouring areas. It does not, however, put forward a recommendation for how that might be distributed (beyond identifying main settlements which are likely to be the most sustainable locations for future development), and reiterates that this will be an issue for the respective local plan in those areas to determine. Our view is that with the growth envisaged for Milton Keynes borough alongside the planned and probable growth in those neighbouring areas, the population across that greater Milton Keynes area is still likely to reach around half a million people in the middle of this century.

### **Population growth**

The comments on the Engagement Draft also demonstrated that we had not made it clear that the 500,000 population target it discussed was not for Milton Keynes borough alone; many people commented that the annual delivery rates that would be required would not be viable. The change discussed above – making it clear that the borough population ambition is around 410,000 people by 2050 – is intended to help clarify this position. This population is broadly in line with the MK Futures 2050 Commission recommendation in their report “Making a Great City Greater” and would require annual housebuilding rates at a level comparable with that in Plan:MK. It is important to remember that the detail of the phasing and delivery of future housing delivery will be determined through the Local Plan process and the annual housing target may change as a result of new planning requirements (following publication of the Planning White Paper).

## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Throughout the document, new wording has been added to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession where appropriate. We believe the impact will be most significant where the pandemic has accelerated existing trends. Within the “Our Diverse and Inclusive Economy”, for example, we have included discussion about the implications for the city and town centres from changing working patterns and reduced footfall, demand for employment space and the potential for companies to move out from London to regional centres like Milton Keynes. We have included a revised jobs growth target that has been determined using new evidence. Within the “Mobility for All” chapter, we have emphasised walking and cycling as the priority for most journeys and reframed our proposition for a mass rapid transit system in the light of our COVID-19 evidence refresh on mobility, to include a potential phased delivery. The importance of ready access to local neighbourhood services and facilities has always been a feature of Milton Keynes and has been reinforced during the pandemic.

## Amendments to images/plans

To reflect the changes mentioned above (in particular around cross boundary growth and phasing of the mass transit network), some changes and updates have taken place to the recommended growth strategy and mobility network plans.

## Other changes

In addition to the points raised above, in refining the Strategy for 2050 we have also included some highlights from our engagement with young people in the form of a section on “Postcards from the Future” using the output of our “Forging the Future” programme in local secondary schools.

We have made greater reference to our challenges around child poverty, the important role that placemaking can play in supporting the health of our residents and included more ambitious targets around issues like affordable homes and green space provision.

## 7. ADOPTION PROCESS

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As explained above, the Strategy for 2050 has been prepared and revised using the evidence and feedback collected over the last three years. The final Strategy for 2050 reflects the best available view of the issues and is intended to form a flexible framework for the future development of Milton Keynes, as discussed in section 4.

In order to move forward to delivery of the Strategy, it is intended that it is adopted as policy, as an annex to the Council Plan, and used to inform the development and delivery of other plans, policies and strategies across the authority and where appropriate, by partners. The mechanism for adopting the Strategy will be for the Cabinet to make a recommendation to Full Council. The timetable for this process is set out below, and includes early publication of the Strategy for 2050 ahead of the usual committee papers. Following adoption, the final Strategy for 2050 will be professionally designed and published.

Publication of Strategy for 2050 online	Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> November 2020
Cabinet report online on Council's CMIS committee papers system at <a href="https://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Home.aspx">https://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Home.aspx</a>	Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2020
Cabinet meeting to agree a recommendation to Full Council to adopt the Strategy for 2050	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2020
Council meeting to adopt the Strategy for 2050 as an Annex to the Council Plan	Wednesday 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2021