

8 CONCLUSIONS

Summary

- 8.1 Milton Keynes and the South Midlands is a varied area which straddles three different regions and covers an extensive and diverse range of different types of urban settlement in an environment of varying quality.
- 8.2 The most successful economies are those of Milton Keynes and Northampton. Bedford, Corby and Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis are in need of regeneration. Throughout the study area there is a wish to upgrade the skills base whilst retaining a broad employment base to provide choice of employment for local residents.
- 8.3 Reflecting established Regional Planning Guidance the area has considerable potential for economic growth which will be of benefit both locally and nationally. This will lead to significant requirements for additional development. We estimate that the study area could grow at a rate which would generate from 230-300,000 jobs (300-360,000 households) by 2031 compared with 150,000 jobs (210,000 households) if current planning policy continues.
- 8.4 At a strategic level, the extent of growth identified is not exceptional in relation to past trends. From 1987-2000 the annual rate of growth in jobs was 10,600 which compares with about 10,000 jobs p.a. under our Higher Growth scenario. Nor is there any overriding strategic environmental constraint which means that the scale of development required could not be accommodated satisfactorily (subject to more detailed local assessments). This is not to say that all parts of Milton Keynes and the South Midlands should be developed; it is simply that most locations could be developed in a sustainable manner without resulting in environmental damage.
- 8.5 In order to achieve development which is truly sustainable, considerable emphasis should be given to reducing the predominance of car based journeys. Currently the pattern of urbanisation and the characteristics of the main urban centres which act as the prime employment locations, do not encourage the use of public transport. If the scale of potential growth which we set out is to be attained then current patterns of car usage will need to change and there should be a step change in the provision of public transport.
- 8.6 Present planning policies, if continued, will worsen existing problems of an imbalance between jobs and workers in most districts of the study area. This will lead to increased commuting generally by private transport. Potential growth strategies should seek to minimise commuting by encouraging an appropriate balance of new jobs and new housing at district level.
- 8.7 The spatial development options which we have developed have been derived from principles of sustainable development. A key ingredient in our thinking has been a vision of improving public transport connectivity between key places within the study area and enabling growing settlements to benefit from a more effective internal transport infrastructure. We have evaluated four spatial options:
 - **Current Planning Policy** - continued (dispersed growth)
 - **Urban Concentration** - based on four key settlements, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Bedford and Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis
 - **Corridor** - based on the Midland Main Line and a potential East West rail corridor across the south of the study area
 - **Metropolitan Double Centre** - growth focused on Northampton and Milton Keynes.

- 8.8 We conclude that strategies of Urban Concentration and Corridor development best achieve sustainable development principles. There are difficulties with both, however, principally related to the extensive potential land requirements in the the study area between Northampton, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Luton. This could lead to an unacceptable degree of coalescence and overly large intrusions into the Green Belt around Luton. For this reason we have developed a Preferred Option which seeks to maximise the best elements of the Urban Concentration and Corridor options.
- 8.9 The Preferred Option focuses growth on the following settlements:
- Northampton
 - Milton Keynes
 - Bedford
 - Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis
 - Kettering/Wellingborough/Corby
- 8.10 The Preferred option provides strong economic growth with a focus on those centres which are either strong potential engines of growth or have been identified for regeneration. It offers a better balance between the location of jobs and workers and the ability to deliver significant improvements to public transport, with real opportunities for achieving a shift away from car borne journeys.
- 8.11 At Northampton, Milton Keynes, Luton and Bedford some development in the form of urban extensions would be required in adjoining districts. At Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis there would also need to be a review of the existing Green Belt in order to allow urban extensions to Luton. This would need to be balanced by the establishment of new Green Belt elsewhere within the study area.
- 8.12 Anticipated residential densities in the study area are generally modest. The requirement for development on greenfield land in the future would be reduced if development densities were increased, both on greenfield and brownfield/urban sites. Given our emphasis on improved intra urban public transport we believe that more challenging densities (even than the minimum 35 dwellings per hectare on greenfield sites and 45 dph on brownfield land we used) could be sought.
- 8.13 The key to the success of any Sub-regional Planning Strategy for this study area is for the authorities to agree on key elements of a common vision for a Sub-region and then to ensure that an agreed strategy is progressed into Regional Planning Guidance and adopted as a formal Sub-regional Planning Strategy. There is more to the strategy than the statutory planning process, however.
- 8.14 The strategy should incorporate statements and criteria for improved standards of development together with appropriate mechanisms for environmental management. There must also be a clear commitment to the funding of the full range of infrastructure and community facilities that will be needed to support the scale of development postulated. Without this commitment, development is likely to result in adverse consequences. The broad estimated cost of infrastructure and services is some £8.3 billion over the next 30 years (or £277 million per annum). This will need to be funded by central government, transport and utility operators, PFI packages, local government and Section 106 contributions.
- 8.15 Special delivery mechanisms are required to implement the strategy We propose a two tier implementation structure. At the upper tier we recommend the formation of a Sub-regional Milton Keynes and South Midlands Infrastructure Delivery Board with special responsibility for co-ordination of key infrastructural requirements. At the lower tier, we propose a series of five locally based Project Delivery Companies similar to Urban Regeneration Companies which would co-ordinate development in the key settlements identified for growth under the Preferred Option.

- 8.16 We were asked to prepare a thirty year strategy for the study area. In the early years of that period patterns of potential development are largely determined by existing guidance contained in RPG, structure and local plans. Whilst we anticipate that action should commence immediately in putting together the building blocks for our proposed strategy, we think it unlikely that there will be much physical evidence on the ground before 2011, although it might be possible to see some limited fast tracked projects between 2006-2011. One key activity during the intervening period will be to secure funding for the necessary major infrastructure projects. Other short term work could include:
- Joint working by RDAs and local authorities in the regeneration areas of Corby, Bedford and Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis to prepare appropriate regeneration strategies.
 - Development of plans for Rapid Transit Systems in Northampton, Bedford, the Luton area and in Milton Keynes.
 - Preparation by the local authorities in the five main growth areas of supplementary planning guidance on (a) Section 106 Agreements following the Government's announcement on this issue when the current ODPM study on developer contributions has been completed (b) higher density development and (c) a review of the need for Sub-regional standards of development and environmental management.
- 8.17 Ultimately, success in securing sustainable patterns of long term growth in Milton Keynes and South Midlands will be as much about devising the right spatial strategy as it will be about getting effective delivery mechanisms in place.

