

## **DLA wins at the 2020 Planning Awards!**

By Heather Pugh

### **We are delighted to have been awarded the 2020 *Planning Awards* Award for Plan-Making for our work on the MK2050 Strategic Growth Study.**

Milton Keynes has a stated ambition to grow to a metropolitan area of half a million people by 2050. The Growth Study is a detailed piece of evidence and analysis which tackles head-on the complex question of how to plan for truly long term strategic growth to 2050 in a way which achieves transformational outcomes for both existing and new communities living in areas in and around Milton Keynes at the heart of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Jointly commissioned by three of the Central Arc authorities, our Study took as a starting point the long-term growth objectives identified in the work of the MK Futures 2050 Commission<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of the Study was to explore how these objectives could be realised through the creation of a spatial framework for growth. The Study brief was deliberately cast wider than 'planning policy', engaging stakeholders from housing, education, health, environmental groups, business communities and the voluntary sector to work together to explore how a plan for 'good growth' can build in and shape each of their own future growth and investment policies for the area as much as inform future rounds of development plan making.

Recent decisions on joint strategic local plans illustrate the difficulties local authorities face when pursuing statutory strategic long term plans for this scale of growth through our current planning system.

Our Growth Study – and the emerging Milton Keynes Council Growth Strategy<sup>2</sup> it informs – do not form part of the formal development plan but adopt a visionary rather than a 'business as usual' approach to growth planning. This 'freed' us to examine the relationships between population, economy, infrastructure and the environment within a cross-boundary study area based on functional geography rather than administrative boundaries.

Working with economists and transport mobility specialists, we were able to analyse how future patterns of employment, movement and technological change might shape where and how people want to live and work.

A need to rebalance some current characteristics of the study area – most notably the increasing 'two-tier' nature of the population in and around MK and the gap between those who can access transport, jobs, education and nature and those who cannot – helped us prioritise inclusive growth strategies.

Marrying these inclusive growth strategies with strategic masterplanning generated a Spatial Framework for Growth – a framework within which a wide range of spatial growth opportunities can be tested through statutory plan-making against Growth Strategy objectives to look at how planned growth at scale can best safeguard or deliver benefits back to existing communities as well as meet future development needs year on year to 2050.

Building on MK's world-renowned green infrastructure model, the Growth Study sets out how new regional-scale green and blue infrastructure could be delivered alongside strategic growth at scale. The iconic grid corridor framework in MK – futureproofed to accommodate change – forms the basis of a move to smart shared mobility across the new city which would achieve a step-change to sustainable transport for new places whilst transforming public transport services within the existing New Town.

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mkfutures2050.com/strategy-for-2050-engagement-page>

For the first time since the original Plan for Milton Keynes was prepared, the Growth Study represents a body of evidence, analysis and spatial interpretation bringing together 'futures thinking' and cross-sector policy to create a truly integrated growth plan.

Development plans and policies, investment strategies and regeneration plans can draw on this single body of evidence to evaluate schemes and proposals against agreed 'good growth objectives'.

At a time when development plans and housing delivery requirements are constantly in flux, as a non-statutory plan the Growth Strategy can remain in force long-term as a reference point for subsequent local plan-making and interpretation of policy. The evidence base in the Study includes best practice on how to deliver location-specific growth objectives, and including a spatial component in the 2050 Growth Strategy will provide local communities with long term certainty over potential future growth locations but also the infrastructure required in support.