

CAMBRIDGE-MILTON KEYNES- OXFORD ARC

ONE MILLION NEW HOMES



INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

A recent study by the National Infrastructure Commission has proposed significant new development along a broad corridor linking Oxford in the west with Cambridge in the east. This could extend to one million new homes by the year 2050.

London is significantly constrained by its Green Belt and demand for new homes in the south east is soaring. As a result there is a requirement to provide development land further afield. Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford and other towns in the arc are economically vibrant but currently lack the infrastructure investment to fully capitalise on this activity. The proposal therefore is to open up a broad tract of land through road and rail schemes.

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The East-West Rail scheme has already commenced with a service from Oxford to Bicester Village via Oxford Parkway. Work is underway now to extend from Bicester Village to the West Coast Mainline at Milton Keynes which would lead into the existing Milton Keynes to Bedford line. The route from Bedford to the east as far as Cambridge is more difficult with a range of routes being proposed including options which pass either to the north or to the south of Bedford, and either to the north or the south of Sandy, ultimately connecting with the southern end of Cambridge.

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The HS2 rail route from London to Birmingham crosses the east-west line between Milton Keynes and Bicester. While no services will stop in the region, there is a need for this scheme to provide economic benefit to the districts which it passes through.

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The main road scheme in the region will be the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Large sections of this expressway are already in existence as a dual carriageway between Milton Keynes and the A1 and further east on the approach to Cambridge. There are a number of missing sections and a range of routes have been proposed. The section from Milton Keynes to Oxford could follow the existing A421 in the north or could follow the route of the East-West Railway or could pass further south near to Aylesbury. The National Infrastructure Commission report favours a route which broadly follows the East-West Rail route which would open up the land between Bletchley, Winslow and Bicester.

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Finally, we should not forget the waterway link which is proposed to connect the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes with the River Great Ouse at Bedford.



DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The National Infrastructure Commission report proposes that this important corridor can support significant development. It highlights six broad areas of search as follows:

1. A continued expansion of Milton Keynes to a population of at least 500,000.
2. City scale development with a population in the hundreds of thousands between Milton Keynes and Bicester.
3. Concentrated growth in the Marston Vale between Bedford and Milton Keynes, focussed on the railway.
4. Major expansion around Bedford supported by the East-West Rail services and the existing Midland Mainline.
5. Development of a large town in the Sandy area and along the A1 corridor.
6. A new garden town west of Cambridge supported by East-West Rail.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

These are extremely ambitious proposals. One million homes will equate to ten new towns of the size of Milton Keynes, all to be built in a 33 year period. History would suggest that such a pace of delivery is not achievable due to a combination of a burdensome decision making process, interfering local politics and landownership issues. The National Infrastructure Commission report proposes to tackle these historical impediments head on by taking the decision making process away from local authorities and, if necessary, by stepping in with powerful compulsory purchase powers. In addition, it is proposed that schemes should seek to capture a significant proportion of the escalation of land value in order to assist in the funding of the required infrastructure.

All of the above provides opportunities and threats for landowners in the region.

Clearly, development schemes have the potential to significantly increase land values. At present, demand continues to outstrip supply and the housing market in this region continues to perform well.

However, the infrastructure burden on large schemes is enormous and it is easy for the unwary to end up with very little for their efforts. Compulsory purchase at agricultural values would clearly be seen as a wasted opportunity.

Promotion of such schemes is beyond the capacity of most and it will almost certainly be necessary to enter into an arrangement with a professional promoter and also with neighbours. Such agreements are very complicated and have the potential to last for years, or even decades. Great care is needed.



ROBINSON & HALL

Robinson & Hall is uniquely placed to assist farmers and landowners between Oxford and Cambridge. Established in 1882, and with offices at Bedford and Buckingham, our knowledge of the area is second to none.

For decades, this region has been economically vibrant, which in turn has driven significant development schemes in our core area of operation. We have been involved in the establishment and growth of Milton Keynes from its early days through to present times. We have guided clients through option agreements and promotion agreements on schemes large and small including the new villages at the Wixams and Northstowe and also the significant urban expansions at Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis.

We are well placed to lead farmers and landowners through the many opportunities and threats which the National Infrastructure Commission report offers.

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