

Changing face of our city landscape

'What was once a glorious invocation of the original master plan has been changed into a narrow, sunless, pinch-point hemmed in by buildings only their creators could, in Urban Eden's opinion, describe as beautiful...'



◆ From glorious invocation to narrow pinch-point: eastbound Midsummer Boulevard (far left) and Avebury Boulevard, pictured from Witan Gate.

SOBEL McCall is the current leader of Milton Keynes Council and, I'm certain, a woman of the very highest integrity who would never knowingly deceive.

An e-mail she recently sent to a member of Urban Eden, the movement to promote a sustainable extension of the original masterplan for Milton Keynes, (visit www.urbaneden.org) stated that: "A major component of the original masterplan for CMK was the inclusion of a formal tree planting structure: the most strategic element was the creation of tree lined boulevards. There is no intention to destroy this structure and as development takes place most of the boulevard trees remain."

On the surface, so far so good then, but she continues: "However, there will be situations, for instance around the new Hub scheme and the new Sainsbury site, where the existing positions of the plane trees need to be adjusted."

"Where possible the existing trees will be replanted (*can she seriously be suggesting they'll replant 30- to 40-year-old mature plane trees?*) however, in order to ensure the long-term survival of the trees it may be better to plant new semi-mature trees...

"The most significant change to the landscaping will be alongside the gates (these are the cross routes through CMK, between the church and Marks & Spencer for example). In this situation, as development comes forward the existing plane trees will be replaced with trees *better suited to being close to buildings*: for example, species that grow up rather than spread out. A fastigate hornbeam is recommended,



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however the use of a plane tree with a 'narrow habit' is currently being investigated."

Interpret

Sounds OK on the surface, and of course, we know that Mrs McCall would never tell lies. However, she may just be mistaken. So let's start to compare the words to the facts and look at the tally of wanton destruction so far.

Urban Eden is fortunate to number among its members town planners, architects and tree care specialists with years of experience who can read and accurately interpret plans, sections and ele-

So how do Urban Eden's experts interpret the true impact of these plans? For some trees in some boulevard areas, it's already too late. I present the Urban Eden 'tree death toll' of those already cut down, mostly impossible or unlikely to be replaced.

Midsummer Place	94 plane trees, 104 other species
The Hub/Jury's/Ramada	41 plane trees, 10 other species
Sainsbury's/MKOne	78 plane trees, 64 other species
Railway station area	0 plane trees, 820 other species
Block west of Sainsbury's (B4)	82 plane trees, 0 other species
Theatre district phase 1	0 plane trees, 12 other species
South of Saxon Court (D4)	10 plane trees, 0 other species
TOTAL DEFORESTATION	305 plane trees, 1,010 other species

And there are three official documents where the truth cannot be disguised.

They are: The CMK Development Framework; The Central Milton Keynes Framework and the CMK Handbook - all produced by English Partnerships and all officially adopted by the council even though the last one, alarmingly, was not subject to any public consultation of any kind and the cabinet decided not to publicise it at all.

In addition to the table above, there are areas on the boulevards where plane trees were always intended to be but they have not yet been planted. These are the

'ghost trees' that we will also be fighting for. Numbers for these are being calculated now.

One of Urban Eden's members met recently with a very senior member of several influential committees who spoke 'non-attributively'.

Mitigate

Our member showed that person our interpretation of the plans. That person was able to confirm that our fears and calculations are broadly correct and the only interpretation that person would use to mitigate it was that the destruction would not happen all at once. Some destruc-

Urban Eden has also counted the trees in danger and produced a 'trees in danger' toll

RED ALERT

Planning permission already given and likely to require cutting down.

406 plane trees, 347 other species

BLUE ALERT

English Partnership or Milton Keynes Council projects - trees at serious risk.

166 plane trees, 121 other species

AMBER ALERT

Designated development sites - trees at strong potential risk

1,837 plane trees, 371 other species

TOTALS

Plane trees in danger	2,409
Other species in danger	839
Total: trees lost in CMK	1,315
Total: trees in danger in CMK	3,248

tion had already occurred, some was currently under way, other destruction would take place over months, or possibly years.

But, as I've said, Cllr McCall is a woman of the highest integrity. So when she says: "...the most strategic element was the creation of tree lined boulevards. There is no intention to destroy this structure..." she cannot have been referring to the wanton destruction of the once wide-open boulevard at the junction of Avebury Boulevard and Witan Gate as compared with the junction of Midsummer Boulevard and Witan Gate (as seen in these photos) or the planned desecration of the boulevards around

thecentre:MK.

In the case of the former, what was once a glorious invocation of the original master plan has been changed into a narrow, sunless, pinch-point hemmed in by buildings only their creators could, in Urban Eden's opinion, describe as beautiful and where pedestrians are now forced to cross a busy dual carriageway because the council saw fit to fill in the underpass.

Cllr McCall's final words on the subject were; "Hopefully, the above will demonstrate that rather than 'raping CMK' (*can that be a reference to Urban Eden's campaign?*) its landscaping structure will be reinforced, enhanced and extended. The current campaign to "save the trees" is based on total, and in some cases deliberate, misinformation."

Oh, Mrs McCall, how could you? Are 1,315 trees already lost and the imminent destruction of 3,248 not enough to convince her? May I humbly suggest to Mrs. McCall that it's not too late to reassess the facts we have marshalled and stand firmly behind her council's number one (out of ten) stated aim, namely to: Improve the quality of the environment in which we live (*source: Milton Keynes Council Plan 2006-2009, Council Priorities 2006/09, page 15*).

Come on Isobel, join Urban Eden now. Love Milton Keynes, Love Urban Eden. Cheerio.

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