

# Saving paradise before it's lost

I HAVE been fairly absorbed of late with the way in which the original dream of Milton Keynes has been scrapped and how this is the last chance to save our Urban Eden. It seems many of you agree.

I've had e-mails of support and offers of help for Urban Eden. Here's some examples but I've not been able to contact everyone to ask permission to use their quotes, so I'll mostly use first names only.

One couple who gave me permission were retired university lecturer Susan Napleton and her husband John, who was director of the Commission for New Towns in Milton Keynes until 1998. Susan writes:

"Congratulations on your excellent articles in Business MK. I would like to offer my support for Urban Eden. Unlike other organisations, this appears to be a response to a genuine groundswell of concern.

"John and I are looking at

developments in our city with increasing horror and the attempts to make our extraordinary city ordinary. This may be the opportunity for those of us who care deeply for Milton Keynes and who feel powerless in the face of uncaring bureaucracy to do something to make a difference."

John, who worked for Milton Keynes Development Corporation from 1974 and as director and assistant general manager between 1983 and 1992, believes that the development has no strategy for transport, open spaces nor quality of life. "The new work is being driven by an unholy alliance of edicts from central government and highly motivated consultants and council officers who are trying to 'normalise' Milton Keynes. Quite why anyone would try to convert our city into a replica of the post-war disaster of urban Britain is beyond me.

"Locally the development is being guided by a mixture of local politicians and experienced Milton Keynes professionals who were once the strongest supporters of both MKDC and CNT policies. While I am certain their motivation is to carry on the expansion of the city to its former high standards, they seem to have fallen into the trap of giving credence to the current vogue for high-density housing, reduced car parking and the obsession with public transport."

The success of Milton Keynes goes back to the days when central government guidance was adapted to the Master Plan to suit Milton Keynes' needs, John adds, citing the example of Milton Keynes Parks Trust.

"Its establishment was resisted by the local authority but it now stands as a vital bastion against those who seek to destroy our precious parks and open spaces."

In similar vein, Paul says: "There are a number of us who treasure what we have. We would like to support your campaign to keep what is good here, to improve it and to plan properly (not as cheaply as possible) the expansion that the government wants so badly."

Brian adds: "Please sign me up for Urban Eden. I am appalled by the poor quality of thinking being applied to the future of Milton Keynes.

"Almost every aspect of the city is being considered as an opportunity to change for the worse, change to the less convenient, change to urban mess. I read your piece in Business MK, a journal I got when I was self-employed. It is the only way of finding out what is going on in MK. I wish your campaign well."

On traffic, Richard writes: "If MK becomes grid roads of 30mph with traffic lights instead of roundabouts, I'll be gone well before it's finished."

L, an urban designer, reflects: "The built environment is my job, but it's also my passion and I have a very special place for MK in my heart. I'd like to join you. I think there is incredible

## Theo Chalmers



support here and I'd like to help as much as I can. All the best - we're behind you."

Julie promises her active support. She declares: "We will win - we must."

David, who came to Milton Keynes in 1978, says: "Count me in. There are many who feel very strongly that first CNT and then EP whittled away at the quality of MK for some years. However, mere incompetence seems more recently to have turned into vengeful and wilful destruction especially in CMK.

"It is a most dangerous set of forces at work: little people who are jealous of the greatness of CMK's boulevards; ignorant people who are frightened because MK is different and unfamiliar; lazy people who believe what they are told by consultants who have no feel nor love for MK and its differences. No one seems to be aware that it works a treat and everyone who lives here likes it."

Dennis agrees: "We must not let the 'powers that be' tread all over our dream. I changed my life over 30 years ago because I believed in MK and wanted to be part of something fine."

Another David, resident in MK for 20 years, says: "I'm appalled by what the planners are dishing up in the name of continued sustainable growth. I've seen more appetizing dogs' dinners."

Yet another David has invited me to speak at his Rotary Club, while Tim writes: "Perhaps there should be an inaugural meeting of like-minded persons to highlight all contentious planning issues."

Perhaps there should, Tim. Watch this space. Cheerio.