

# Don't turn our heaven into hell

OH MY GOD, what have I done?

Last month I wrote, more out of sadness than anger, how Milton Keynes, a city designed from scratch to be an urban Eden and admired world-wide was being deliberately ruined in the name of profit and misguided social engineering by central and, to some lesser extent, local government.

It seems I'm not alone. From the letters, e-mails and countless conversations I've had, it seems that the groundswell of opinion is growing. There's a general panic that this really is our last chance to uphold the glorious original vision of Milton Keynes before it is swept away for ever.

All agree that if we do nothing now; the infrastructure designed to support the original plan will be torn apart forever, and overlaid with a new, and utterly feeble, grand 'scheme'.

More vital roads will be closed; no new grid roads will be built to support the expansion; more desperately cramped estates with nowhere for residents to park will be thrown up; all the leafy green borders to our grid system will be built on; cheap and ugly 60s-style tower blocks will sprout in the city centre purely to maximise profit; roundabouts will be replaced with traffic lights; pedestrian underpasses will be filled in; overpasses will be demolished and pedestrians will have to take their chances on the roads.

In short, no more Urban Eden; welcome to Urban Hell.

How can this be happening? The answer is simple; it's a combination of sheer greed from the Exchequer raping Milton Keynes for all it is worth and its servants' blind adherence to a misguided dogma.

Let's face it, the temptation to scrap the original plan is now so strong. Building land in Milton Keynes is fetching almost £2million an acre. If the agencies that control it can create even more for development by taking it away from the uses for which it was planned - ie by filling in every acre, even by closing the very roads themselves - they'll do it, won't they?

Forget the consequences, forget about you and me, forget about our urban Eden.

The real truth is that they don't care about our quality of life. So desperate are they, however, to persuade us otherwise that they'll pay thousands for public consultations which simply pay lip service to the community, and thousands more to come up with a sexy strapline

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promoting themselves as 'thinking differently'.

Thinking differently would be having the courage to further develop Milton Keynes along its original lines; wide boulevards, lots of trees, decent homes and ease of use. Simple isn't it?

And there really is no excuse not to do that, except that the hundreds of millions of pounds they raise - which is only attracted to Milton Keynes in the first place because it's currently an urban Eden - is not spent here.

The money does not go to extend the grid, to build new hospitals, or to construct a tram/monorail system - now that would show a bit of thinking differently. No, much of it goes, via the Exchequer, to prop up failing ex-mining towns in Derbyshire or to build grandiose, self-congratulatory schemes in Liverpool, Essex, Cambridge, Norfolk or London, such as the seven, doomed-to-fail, Millennium Communities.

Would the people who plan these squalid boxes live in one, I wonder? Would you? Look at the sales pitch; oh, yippee, they'll be wired to the internet. What an advance, an instant slum with a chance to surf the web to see where you should have gone! Still I suppose it'll help tell you where the last parking space in Milton Keynes is.

Which brings me to the main point. Either we fight the changes or we have already lost. I've been encouraged to start a movement and here I humbly

present it to you, in fledgling form, for your opinion, feedback and to see if this fledgling can fly.

Unsurprisingly, it's called Urban Eden™. If you need it to be an acronym it could stand for; Undo Road Blocks, Abandon New Estates, Demand Extended Network. Or you tell me what it stands for. I'll give a bottle of champagne for the best, useable, acronym.

If you'd like this fledgling to fly, it'll need all the help it can get, including yours. I'm under no illusions that it will be easy. I know that most people who agree with its aims will simply sit there and do nothing until Milton Keynes is a sorry shadow of its once great promise.

So if you are one of those people, join Urban Eden now before you put this paper down and help save the city you love.

Please drop me a line at my e-mail address ([t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk](mailto:t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk)) saying you'd like to become a founder member. It'll be free of charge. When we've got enough interest, we can vote for a committee and really get started with a letter-writing, street-protesting, poster-displaying and getting-our-voices-heard campaign.

I'd also like to see offers of help from printers for car stickers and posters saying something like: 'Join URBAN EDEN: We have heaven, we don't want

hell' or 'URBAN EDEN Says Leave Milton Keynes Alone' or even 'URBAN EDEN: We could have (picture of stunning architecture here), We've got (picture of ugly, soulless new developments here)'.

I also want to hear from people willing to put posters up in their offices; from those willing to spread the word by blog, e-mail and letter writing and from others willing to form street protest posses to protest at the most outrageous encroachments on our beautiful city. With the right will, we can win and save the original dream of MK before it's too late. We have heaven, we don't want hell. Cheerio.