

Fight for Urban Eden: let battle commence

AS PROMISED, Urban Eden - the movement to promote a sustainable extension of the original master plan for Milton Keynes - has had its first meeting, attended by a far better-than-expected cross-section of concerned citizens, including many who've been involved in its development and foundation.

One of our tasks was to determine what our priorities would be. After discussion, it was agreed that we need to concentrate on the following to make sure that we don't sleepwalk through the planned rape of Milton Keynes by powerful vested interests determined to suck our beautiful city dry.

Those priorities are:

1 Green City We urgently need to preserve and extend our green environment and the linear parks. There are advanced plans to cut it all down and build right up to the roadways. And worst of all, the money gained from this desecration goes to central Government to be spent elsewhere while important infrastructure necessities here go underfunded.

2 CMK Boulevards Again, they are under imminent threat. David Lock, who was voted on to our committee with several others, has stressed that the public boulevard structure is about to be demolished; we will lose the porte cocheres; many of the trees will be cut down; there is already a new planting plan for junctions where the mighty plane trees, which are just beginning to join at the crowns as originally planned, are to be replaced with tiny flowering cherries as 'signature' trees.

We must prevent this action. However, before we plan an appropriate campaign, we need to ensure we are certain of our facts. To date, it has been impossible to get English Partnerships to confirm what is planned. What has it got to hide?

3. Grid roads and the natural expansion of the system We all know that the grid roads are one of the key factors that make living in Milton Keynes unique in Britain. Indeed both travel times and ease of use figure in the adverts that EP propagates in overcrowded, user-unfriendly cities elsewhere.

Ironic, then, that greed for development land and the money it brings to the exchequer is placing it under such threat. The grid system must not only be preserved - it must be extended to make sure that the expansion is viable. And let's not allow the desperate excuse that we must use our cars less to prevail.

In a few years we may all have carbon-neutral, hydrogen-powered cars which expire only water vapour. What will these Philistines tell us then, when we have no roads to use them on?

Theo Chalmers



4 Public transport system that suits MK

The original plan for Milton Keynes included large central reservations on the grid roads to take a tram or monorail system. Milton Keynes Council chief executive John Best told me at a business breakfast the other morning that it would never happen here as it would not be used or would cost too much.

And yet, where trams have been built, such as Central Manchester, they are enormously popular and successful. People who would never travel on a bus love to get on a tram. There's something exciting about it.

Look at cities like Prague where they preserved theirs and now promote them as a tourist attraction in their own right. Is Milton Keynes not worthy of its own tram system? Whose heart would not leap to see one running down Midsummer Boulevard to the station, right through the Midsummer Place glass-walled shopping centre?

5 Redways Our redways have been studied, admired and emulated all over the world. So why are ours under threat? Surely the very fact that they separate pedestrians and cyclists from motorised vehicles means they have saved countless lives here.

Let's protect and extend them. While we're at it let's stop EP filling in any more pedestrian underpasses such as the one near the Hub; recently infilled so that they can force people to cross a busy road.

6 Principles of the original Master Plan

The original Master Plan was the most successful example of the new towns movement. If it ain't broke, why fix it? Once it is all swept away we will live to regret it.

We Urban Edenites love Milton Keynes and yes, we are happy for it to expand, but we are not happy for the very things that make Milton Keynes a uniquely easy-to-use city be swept away.

We must all fight for it before it is too late.

We have a 'Nice To Have' list too:

1. Architecture fit for Milton Keynes - Urban Eden does not necessarily object to taller buildings, even though the original Master Plan stipulated that no building should be taller than a tree.

Yet, surely we can do something about the quality of our buildings, particularly if they are in prominent position? Several new structures in CMK look like they were designed to be as cheap as possible to build in order to maximise the revenue for the land.

In other words EP could have demanded world-class signature buildings, perhaps the result of an international architectural competition. But they simply don't have the vision, the passion or the belief.

Instead we get architecture that would embarrass the planners of the 1960s. Shame on you EP.

2. Dwellings that are not 'instant slums' The new high-density residential areas they are building or planning to build outside CMK, where there is nowhere to park a car, are a blot on our lovely landscape too.

There is nothing inherently wrong with high density, look at London's Mayfair or Pimlico, but its outputs have to be desirable, user-friendly, practical. Not the product of half-baked, quasi-scientific, muddled-ideological thinking. Just ask the end-users what they want. Simple isn't it?

It was agreed that we needed a website: www.urbaneden.org. John Napleton has agreed to fund this. Peter Renn and David Lock also offered to help. The website has been registered and is under construction.

We decided that rather than have a system of meeting subs or donations people should feel free to express their outrage on a voluntary basis and donations should be sent to Paul Davis (our treasurer) at Keens Shay Keens Chartered Accountants, Sovereign Court, 230 Upper Fifth Street, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 2HR (tel: Milton Keynes 674484), payable to Urban Eden.

The meeting also decided that preservation of the still-under-threat V10 needs to be prioritised. We cannot just leave it to the Parks Trust to fight it. It needs to be our fight too.

Anyone interested in becoming involved in Urban Eden, please e-mail me. Please stand up and be counted.

Love Milton Keynes? Love Urban Eden. Cheerio.