

New chiefs have plenty of work to do

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I RECENTLY attended a meeting organised by those fine folks at MK Forum at which Ann Limb and John Lewis, the new chair and chief executive respectively of Milton Keynes Partnership were to present their Milton Keynes Partnership Business Plan. Afterwards they were to take questions. You can imagine how keen I was to attend.

Both gave a short presentation accompanied by slides, none of which had anything very much to do with the business plan.

Ms Limb started hers by insisting on telling us that, as she was a teacher, we would have to excuse her if she spoke to us like a class of naughty children... and then proceeded to speak to us like a class of naughty children, complete with a 'very gruff voice' for when she was being very serious and an 'ickle girly voice' when not.

I did not know whether to be more concerned for her personal credibility - of which more later - or for what that 'very gruff voice' might mean for the people of Milton Keynes, given the huge power she now wields.

I noted that she said "MKP is not an instrument of government", that it was "independently established" and that it was "only involved in the expansion areas", all of which statements were challenged by members of the audience. She then stated that she was "voluntary", could not be expected to know everything (despite being on the MKP committee before becoming its chair) and only worked for MKP two days a week.

John Lewis rode to her rescue and began his somewhat longer, more detailed slide show. In it, he explained that MKP's team of 48 people was "here to invest in Milton Keynes" and had built 10,500 homes and 400,000 sq metres of commercial space.

Planners have to move with the times

THERE is always a great deal of debate locally about planning in Milton Keynes writes Lindsay Richards, of Milton Keynes Partnership. People feel passionately about their city and, quite rightly, want to know how planning decisions are made and who is responsible for granting planning permission.

When reading many of the articles and letters that have appeared in the press over the last few months, it has occurred to me that there is some confusion about the planning system in Milton Keynes and I thought it might be helpful to clarify how the process works in the city.

Many people have asked why we cannot simply continue to follow the original Master Plan for Milton Keynes. Putting it simply, we are living in a very different world from when the Master Plan was conceived and planning regulations have changed over the years to reflect this. Planners must operate within the parameters of national, regional and local regulations and have to go through due process.

If we did not follow this system, we would lose credibility and end up with piecemeal development that would benefit neither the city nor its people in the longer term.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 introduced a new two-tiered system in England operating at a regional level (with Regional Spatial Strategies) and at a local level (with Local Development

Frameworks).

A Regional Spatial Strategy is prepared by a regional planning body and outlines government's planning and transport policy for each region for a 15- to 20-year period. It sets out things such as how many homes are needed to meet the future needs of people in the region, what key infrastructure is required and priorities for the environment.

In our region, the RSS is known as the South East Plan. Following extensive work over the last few years, including an examination in public, proposed changes to the South East Plan are being published and will be further consulted on. Once this plan is approved by the Secretary of State, it will form a statutory document that will give a framework for determining planning applications as well as for preparing Local Development Documents and Local Transport Plans.

Local authorities are also preparing their Local Development Framework - a folder of documents that sets out how the area might change over the next few years and how development will be managed. In Milton Keynes, the LDF is in its very early stages so planning decisions are currently guided by the adopted Local Plan - the starting point for all planning advice and decisions in the whole borough.

The plan covers the period up to 2011 and policies within it should be used to assess planning applications

until December this year.

The Local Plan is a very robust document that looks at the bigger picture for Milton Keynes and aims to deliver sustainable development that contributes to the economic, environmental and social well-being of the city. Its vision builds on the original goals of the Master Plan and takes into consideration the outcome of important consultation such as the Community Plan. Before it was adopted it went through a stringent process which included public consultation, a Local Plan Inquiry and recommendations from an impartial planning inspector.

Within Milton Keynes we have two local planning authorities - Milton Keynes Council and Milton Keynes Partnership - and they have different boundaries and roles.

Milton Keynes Partnership is the local planning authority for determining major planning applications in the eastern, western and northern expansion areas of Milton Keynes, although Milton Keynes Council will determine minor applications in the expansion areas).

The council remains in charge of determining planning applications in the rest of the borough. It is also responsible for plan-making for the whole borough and for creating policy on all issues including transport, parking and open spaces to which Milton Keynes Partnership and other organisations must pay regard.



◆ Lindsay Richards

There are various ways in which you can be involved in development control decisions and this includes having your say in public consultations.

Another important way is to attend the planning meetings of Milton Keynes Partnership Committee. Dates of these meetings are published on our website www.miltonkeynespartnership.info and are advertised in the local press. If you are unable to attend in person you can submit a representation or a question by post or by email.

The development control section of our website contains information about the expansion areas, and further information on major projects around Milton Keynes can also be found on the website. You can also call in to our offices on Midsummer Boulevard to view plans and find out the status of planning applications.

Planning law is complex but the development control team at Milton Keynes Partnership is here to help answer any questions you have and guide you through the process.

Lindsay Richards is development control manager at Milton Keynes Partnership

He seemed very proud of the roof tariff scheme (where house builders pay a roof tax) which in any event is currently grinding to halt. Then, very obliquely, his slides admitted to MKP taking much more (£420 million) out of Milton Keynes than came back in (£250 million) and didn't mention at all that Milton Keynes land sales were propping up other English Partnerships 'regenerations' in places like Liverpool, Thames Gateway and Medon Valley on the Notts-Derbyshire border.

He finished by more or less accepting that MKP had no clear idea of its mission other than as directed by government. He suggested that what Milton Keynes really needed was another Pete Winkelman, a driven, capable champion for the expansion of the city. He also said, and then quickly corrected himself, that MKP was like Big Brother to Milton Keynes Council. So what did we learn?

- ◆ MKP is not an instrument of government (really?);
- ◆ It was independently established

(are you sure?);

- ◆ It is only involved in the expansion areas (actually it has overall planning powers in those areas but controls land and therefore heavily influences planning and policy throughout Milton Keynes, particularly in the city centre);

- ◆ It is here to invest in Milton Keynes (the figures say otherwise);

- ◆ Its chairwoman is 'voluntary' (actually she is paid, quite handsomely I believe);

When questioned further on what was meant in its business plan by 'visionary long-term growth plans for Milton Keynes', it became clear that MKP has no vision and no one to 'own' any vision. When Lewis and Limb were questioned on their attitude to the grid system, Lewis claimed that the grid roads are safe with MKP. I reminded him that it was MKP which had supported and/or instigated:

- ◆ Turning part of the V10 into a winding 30mph 'city street';

- ◆ Turning the A5130, which should have been the V12, into a winding 30mph 'city street';

- ◆ Not extending the grid roads into the new areas instead building only (you guessed it) winding 30mph 'city streets';

- ◆ The narrowing of the boulevards in Central Milton Keynes;

- ◆ Turning Midsummer Boulevard east into a single carriageway bus lane closed to private vehicles;

- ◆ Tearing down Secklow Gate;

- ◆ Forcing pedestrians to cross grid roads 'at grade' at Witan Gate and on Watling Street V4;

- ◆ Selling off service and access roads;

- ◆ Endless traffic lights instead of roundabouts.

He went a bit quiet.

One thing that came out of the meeting was that the new, sexy, improved MKP was attempting to draw a line

between it, its new chair and chief executive and the old 'outsiders' Jane Hamilton and Sir Bob Reid.

The only problem with that Damascene conversion is that John Lewis was previously Jane Hamilton's boss and Ann Limb has been a voting member of MKP for years.

I'm fairly certain John Lewis and maybe even Ann Limb mean well. To my mind, they are simply out of their depth and lack any direction except what central government tasks them with: to optimise treasury funds from Milton Keynes while dumping high-density, car-unfriendly housing on us.

I genuinely believe and hope that, because they both live here themselves and have personally invested in Milton Keynes, there is still hope. It is also clear that they want to be liked, even loved.

Sadly, I feel they have an 'ickle' way to go. Cheerio.

For more on MKP's business plan, visit www.miltonkeynespartnership.info/about_MKP/business_plans.php