

Bottleneck may only get worse

WE ARE all familiar with the mess that our council has made of the 'improvements' to the area around junction 14 of the M1. Has anyone seen any bus ever using the so-called bus gates? Who hasn't almost been involved in an accident caused by the ridiculous 'disappearing lanes' or ludicrous traffic lights on some - not all - entrances and exits from roundabouts. It's a ludicrous waste of money and a tragically wasted opportunity.

Milton Keynes Council appeared to be about to do it again, this time at the bottleneck that is the 'B&Q junction' in Bletchley. If we are going to spend the seven-figure sum reported, surely the council can make sure it's done its homework and we are getting a real improvement.

However, as I prepare to press the 'Send' button and deliver my copy to the newsdesk, I hear that the council is not to proceed with its plans and is beginning work on a revised scheme to be put before the cabinet.

Hooray, say I. However, we must hope that the revised scheme will learn from the blatant errors of its predecessor, which in my view fundamentally failed to address the two overriding problems at the junction: traffic flow and anti-social driving.

The B&Q junction bottleneck has little to do with the two mini-roundabouts. It was created as a result of actions by the council some years ago. The V4 Watling Street leading towards Tesco used to have two lanes between the mini roundabouts and the Tesco roundabout, with dramatically more flow capacity. Then the exit was narrowed and a light-controlled crossing and mid-road haven built close to the mini roundabouts.

This change happened before either ASDA or IKEA were in

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place and therefore is nothing to do with increase in traffic generated from either's opening nor the opening of StadiumMK.

The current layout creates inevitable but unnecessary delays as the mini roundabouts have multiple entries. The main entry points are two or even three lanes wide and thus we have a bottleneck upon exit, especially when the pedestrian crossing is at red.

Logical solution: move the crossing nearer Tesco or extend the pedestrian underpass under Watling Street and widen the road to four lanes.

Wrong

Another serious issue is anti-social driving. Many drivers heading south along V7 Saxon Street who intend to turn left up Watling Street see the queues and decide that they are too important to wait. Instead of moving into the left-hand or middle lane, they shoot down the right hand lane, go right around the westerly of

We are heading in the right direction

ALL THE signs indicate that Milton Keynes has made a very confident and encouraging start to 2010 writes Milton Keynes Partnership chief executive John Lewis. The city has been hitting the headlines for all the right reasons.

National television, radio, both the broadsheet and tabloid press have been full of positive stories about Milton Keynes' inclusion in the England 2018 World Cup Bid. Our confirmation as a host city has pushed us into the big league in terms of profile as it puts us firmly on the map alongside much longer established cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Nottingham.

If England is selected to host the 2018 tournament, the world's top footballers will be playing in Milton Keynes before a global audience of millions and our local economy will receive a massive boost. For businesses, there will be major benefits in terms of inward investment, job creation and tourism. Milton Keynes will gain from the huge amount of prestige and profile-raising that the event inevitably brings with it. We will all enjoy much-improved local facilities and infrastructure and people of all ages will reap personal health rewards from the anticipated uptake in sports activities.

So what's next in terms of the bid process? Milton Keynes will be named as a candidate host city in the bid book being produced by England 2018, the company formed to lead England's bid to be part of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The Bid Book will be submitted in May this year, after

which FIFA will assess the bids before making a decision in December.

The Milton Keynes bid consortium will give its wholehearted support to England 2018 and ensure that we maintain the bid's profile through what we are doing in Milton Keynes. The local business community has an important part to play - we all need to be positive ambassadors for our city and for England.

Succeed

Another welcome boost to Milton Keynes has come in the thinktank Centre for Cities' annual report Cities Outlook 2010. It charts the economic fortunes of the biggest cities and towns in the UK by evaluating their performance on jobs, population, growth, skills and incomes. Milton Keynes was ranked in the top ten in six of the nine measured categories. Out of 64 cities, Milton Keynes had the highest employment growth between 2006 and 2008, the second highest number of people in employment in 2009, and the third highest number of new businesses created in 2008.

This flagship report is great news for the city and for all who live and work here. It identifies Milton Keynes as one of the top-performing cities to lead Britain back to growth in these very challenging times and categorised Milton Keynes as "one to watch", highlighting it as a place that is in a position to succeed in the recovery, despite having been relatively exposed to the recession.



● John Lewis

This type of independent endorsement of Milton Keynes will further support the city's continued development and broaden its global appeal.

Milton Keynes also plans to bid to be granted city status as part of the nationwide competition to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. The council is putting together a team to co-ordinate the bid for city status. Success would provide yet another boost to Milton Keynes.

Whatever the outcomes, I believe these projects demonstrate that Milton Keynes is a place with big ambitions. They show that Milton Keynes Partnership, the council and our other partners have worked hard to ensure that Milton Keynes is heading in the right direction as its natural development into a dynamic, exciting and ambitious city continues.

the two mini-roundabouts and cut across the head of the traffic attempting to turn left up Watling Street. These asocial souls may feel they have a divine right to do this but they are plain wrong. It's called driving without due consideration for other road users and is an offence.

Logical solution: a large sign in the central reservation of Saxon Street warning drivers not to attempt a 360° manoeuvre and the installation of a camera enforcement system. End of problem.

Most of the traffic flowing south through the junction normally turns east along Watling Street. Currently the queue forms to the Denbigh roundabout and occasionally to the twin roundabouts at Bond Avenue. The council's ill-thought out response is for a traffic lights-controlled junction and a traffic island, which will only allow one lane to turn left from Saxon Street. I can-

not see any improvement in volume flow however hard the council tries to sell the idea.

The revised roadway design east along Watling Street towards Tesco is seemingly two lanes wide on the plans (it is currently one lane) - though fed from the single lane - so we might expect some improvement in flow capacity. However, the plan still does not address the flow demands.

The traffic light design would split the traffic into three lanes, only one of which addresses the major flow demand. So no improvement - in fact, it makes the situation worse.

The existing twin roundabouts allow traffic travelling west from Tesco to do a 180° turn to enter the Beacon Retail Park. A viewing of the junction operation in the run-up to Christmas indicated a substantial number of vehicles undertaking this manoeuvre - around one in four at one point.

The planned traffic light controlled junction does not allow for that flow, forcing traffic on to Saxon Street and around the Denbigh roundabout to join the queue forming to turn right down Watling Street towards Beacon Retail park back at the junction. This would be a backward step, only lengthening the traffic queues.


Force

The pedestrian controlled crossing on Watling Street currently acts as the flow filter for traffic turning left down Watling Street after approaching from the existing set of roundabouts, thus creating a bottleneck. This is the main bottleneck on the junction and must be addressed. The planned traffic light controlled junction retains the pedestrian crossing 'as is' and again the volume flow would still be restricted. Once again, no improvement.

In a final blaze of outright stupidity, the council had planned to prevent traffic coming from B&Q in Denbigh Road from going straight on or right at the mini-roundabouts. This would force drivers to go left, around the Denbigh roundabout and join the queues the council would already have made worse with their other changes.

The council talks about traffic lights as though they're the answer to traffic build-up. However, while Milton Keynes installs them willy nilly, Leighton Buzzard has ripped its out and is benefiting massively. Lights need maintenance: however, lights reported as faulty in October 2008 by Urban Edenite Ian Michie have only recently been repaired.

Light control and restricting turning options will not improve traffic flow at the B&Q junction. Instead it's another disaster waiting to happen. Cheerio.



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