

Full steam ahead as rail firms consider moves to city

NETWORK Rail's decision to build its national centre on the site of the National Hockey Stadium in Milton Keynes has led to more rail companies assessing whether to relocate to the city.

Rail signalling contractor Clough Smith Rail, based in York, has taken office space in Central Milton Keynes.

Network Rail hopes to have between 300 and 400 staff based in Milton Keynes by the summer and expects that its new purpose-built national centre employing up to 3,000 people will be open by the end of 2011.

The organisation, which owns and operates the UK's rail infrastructure, has 80 corporate offices across the country and is planning to build its national hub in Milton Keynes.

Deliver

Chief executive Iain Coucher said: "Creating this heart for the business is an important step in delivering our long-term plans. That is why we have started planning ahead for a state-of-the-art centre based in Milton Keynes.

"Creating a national centre will make us

better and innovative in the way we work, supporting our routes to deliver a better service for our customers and rail users."

Milton Keynes-based commercial property agents Bidwells say they are not alone having seen an increased level of enquiries from rail companies looking for office space in the city. It handled the Clough Smith Rail deal.

Charles Macdonald (pictured right), head of Bidwells Milton Keynes office said: "The space provides Clough Smith Rail with an excellent base from which to deliver contracts in the area."



Hospital earns £1.5m windfall

EXPANSION plans by Milton Keynes Hospital NHS Foundation Trust have received a windfall of more than £1.5 million from Milton Keynes Partnership.

The Tariff payment will buy new back-up electricity generators for the hospital to provide power in case of temporary failure of the mains supply.

The Milton Keynes Tariff has already contributed nearly £2 million to Milton Keynes Hospital, which has been spent on improving the hospital's road system and helping to clear the way for new facilities such as the multi-storey car park.

Support

The latest tariff payment - money used to fund new infrastructure as Milton Keynes expands and paid by developers to Milton Keynes Partnership - will also help to fund a new endoscopy unit and 22-bed ward. Both are due to open this month.

Hospital director of facilities Bob Heavisides said: "The hospital has expanded rapidly since it first opened in 1984 and this funding will support further growth."

Milton Keynes Partnership chief executive John Lewis said: "It is really important that as the city continues to grow the hospital is able to expand necessary services such as paediatric and maternity care."

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Time for clear democracy

WINSTON Churchill famously said that democracy is a terrible form of government but unfortunately it's the best we have. Consequently it is supposed to be the decider in so many things in our lives and here in Milton Keynes there is one man responsible for upholding it.

He is John Moffoot and he enjoys the splendid title of Head of Democratic Services. As an unelected employee of Milton Keynes Council, his role is to make sure that all decisions made by the council are, indeed, transparently democratic.

On this, the fourth anniversary of this column, it perhaps won't surprise regular readers to learn that I am not convinced that, despite his best intentions, Mr Moffoot fully understands the meaning of the word. This has been demonstrated to me very strongly recently in matters concerning Central Milton Keynes Town Council.

CMKTC is one of the very few parish councils in Milton Keynes actually to have had sufficient candidates for each to be democratically elected. Its current councillors, since election in May last year, have taken their responsibilities very seriously, have stood up to those determined to irreversibly damage Central Milton Keynes and have won much praise under the leadership of Ken Baker. I should mention for good democratic reasons that Ken is a member of Urban Eden, the lobby group dedicated to preserving and extending the original Milton Keynes master plan.

At the Parish Review Working Group overseen by Mr Moffoot on November 17 last year, it was agreed that CMKTC be amalgamated with Campbell Park Parish Council as a separate parish ward. This might not seem significant until you consider that by 'amalgamation' the council actually means 'abolishment' and that the central core of a world-class city is to be represented by just two councillors out of 20 on the largely

residential CPPC. On top of that, the decision was largely made with no one from CMKTC being invited to attend and speak - although it seems CPPC along with six unknown members of the public were, and did.

When the working group minutes were presented to CMKTC, the councillors were unanimously outraged. Firstly, all its councillors were elected last May on the platform of bringing visible democracy back to the residents of Central Milton Keynes. It had been aware that a review of parish boundaries was taking place and that its predecessors had given written input for consideration by the working group.

To this they had added their input in writing. However, they were not aware that the working group meetings were open to public input, even personal representation from CMKTC. They received no invitation to attend.

The CMKTC sought clarification from the Milton Keynes Council website and reread all communications it had received on the subject. They also looked at any available council information to see if they or the public could have known that such a serious and important subject was open for public input. None discovered that it was. Also, despite the three borough councillors responsible for Central Milton Keynes having given input to the working group, CMKTC still have no idea from the minutes what that input was.

They also know that six members of the public spoke but do not know who they were; how they knew the meeting was taking place; what views they held or how accurate their input was; who invited them and on what premise. In short, CMKTC does not understand how this can in any way be described as a democratic process. Frankly, neither do I.

Their second cause for concern was that the resolution as it appears

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in the minutes is contradictory. Item 1(a) records: "The Central Milton Keynes Parish be amalgamated with Campbell Park Parish". This is clear enough until you read 1(b): "That Central Milton Keynes Parish be a separate parish ward of Campbell Park Parish". These two contradictory statements make even less sense when you read Item 2: "That officers be requested to consult Campbell Park Parish Council on revised warding arrangements".

If it is the intention that CMKTC amalgamates with CPPC, the working group's recommendation is presumably that CMKTC becomes a ward of the newly formed larger parish and that officers be requested to consult both Central Milton Keynes and Campbell Park Parishes about revised warding arrangements. Or is it the intention that CPPC takes over CMKTC and that CMKTC (and therefore the residents of Central Milton Keynes) effectively have no more say in the matter?

If the final scheme is agreed by Milton Keynes Council without appeal, it will be subject to public consultation and we all know what that means in Milton Keynes, don't we? Come on Mr Moffoot, it is time to get transparently democratic. Cheerio.

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