

Investment is creating new homes and jobs

Jane Hamilton, chief operating officer of Milton Keynes Partnership, reflects on the year gone and looks ahead to 2008.



◆ Jane Hamilton

MILTON Keynes has seen a flurry of activity this year with new developments under way, huge cranes back on the skyline and millions invested in various projects throughout the city.

More than 10,000 new homes have been granted outline planning consent by Milton Keynes Partnership Committee this year including 3,330 affordable homes. We have overseen 2,373 physical housing starts and have invested a total of £62.5 million in more than 80 projects. As the city grows, we continue to work with local partners and residents to ensure that in Milton Keynes people have everything they need to live and work in the new city.

In tandem, we work alongside Milton Keynes Council to deliver key growth projects and enable the council to provide important services to new areas.

To this end we have provided the council with £3 million funding via English Partnerships to help deal with the impact of growth on services. Over the next three years, this will ensure new posts are created to work alongside the Milton Keynes Partnership teams. All our key achievements for 2007 are detailed in the Milton Keynes Partnership Committee annual review, which is available to download from www.miltonkeynespartnership.info

In 2008, we expect to see more exciting commercial and retail projects opening and we will welcome new high-profile companies to the city. Progress on the Western and Eastern Expansion Areas continues, where we are the statutory Local Delivery Vehicle with planning powers to deal with major planning applications. The Highways Authority within the council continues to lead on highways and public transport initiatives. We have the safety of Milton Keynes residents and businesses foremost in mind as plans for new roads and changes to existing routes are implemented.

The first phase of Gazeley Properties' Magna Park at Fen Farm, a development of up to 3.4 million square foot of logistics/distribution and manufacturing floor-space, will be finished in mid-2008 and will house the new distribution centre for the John Lewis Partnership. The new logistics park scheme overall will create around 4,500 jobs. Further work is being undertaken by Gazeley's to secure the development of future phases.

Anyone travelling into the city via Junction 14 on the M1 will be pleased to know that work on the junction and three supporting roundabouts is due to be completed in March. This major scheme, led

by Milton Keynes Council, will provide capacity for traffic increases to 2016 and is part of a programme of improvements to keep Milton Keynes moving as the city grows. The project also includes redesigning and rebuilding Milton Keynes Coachway so that first impressions of the city as passengers arrive is of a very modern and welcoming facility.

The £120 million scheme at Milton Keynes Central railway station to increase rail capacity and therefore allow greater frequency of rail traffic is also due for completion in mid-2008. The scheme is being led by Network Rail with Milton Keynes Council providing project control and supported by MKP funding. With more frequent trains to and from London, we hope to encourage more businesses to move to the city, improving the work-life balance of hundreds of employees.

The site of the largest Sainsbury's supermarket in Europe, between Avebury Boulevard and Childs Way in the business district, is developing at a tremendous pace and will be completed in summer 2008. The new Sainsbury's store will be more than 100,000 sq ft and has car parking below. Above this 402 apartments and townhouses are being built, 30 per cent of which will be affordable housing and will

also have underground car parking. There will be further retail and leisure space and community areas, including a 550 sqm nursery.

the hub:mk will be fully completed early next year. Businesses relocating there from elsewhere in the city include international property agent Davis Langdon, Milton Keynes & North Bucks Chamber of Commerce and The Institute of Chartered Accountants which is moving its UK head office here.

The flagship World Trade Centre will also be housed at the hub:mk. It will provide a one stop 'information and resource' shop for businesses and government agencies involved in foreign trade and give Milton Keynes businesses an easier, faster international link.

MKP is continuing to work with business representatives to build and strengthen its relationship with the business community. Throughout 2008, we will continue to inform and consult businesses on growth and how it affects business in the city. MKP will also engage with business representatives when preparing its 2008/2009 Business Plan for submission to MKPC in March 2008.

Finally, enjoy the festive season and here's to a prosperous New Year.

Unelected, unaccountable, unwanted

A YEAR has passed since I conceived and launched Urban Eden (www.urbaneden.org), the organisation to promote the original masterplan for Milton Keynes against significant threats to destroy it. That masterplan is highly valued by residents and businesses alike simply because it works.

People generally like what works. It makes this city uniquely user-friendly. One reason it works so well is because it was thought about long and hard before a sod was turned, before a brick was laid, unlike the piecemeal mess that Milton Keynes Partnership would now wish upon us.

Since its foundation, Urban Eden has gone from strength to strength and we've had a few significant victories with, hopefully, more to come. It's not for me to name those victories but we know that we've caused certain destructive actions to be moderated, delayed and even abandoned. We've also, sadly, lost some battles but we have made them think about us and I've been thinking about them.

That's why I feel it's appropriate to take issue with the policies, the methods and the very existence of Milton Keynes Partnership. MKP chief operating officer Jane Hamilton regularly blathers on about "innovation", "exacting standards... for design and quality" and - get this - "new parking and new green spaces." Can she be serious?

English Partnerships, in the guise of Milton Keynes Partnership, is cutting down thousands of trees; narrowing the

boulevards; closing major roads such as Secklow Gate and Midsummer Boulevard East; turning the A5130 which should have been the V12 into a city street; not extending our beloved grid nor the redways into the expansion areas; presiding over new, high density 'shiny slums' such as thehub:mk, MK-One and the West End CMK development with 180 homes per hectare; filling in underpasses, thus forcing pedestrians to cross busy roads; adding miles of empty bus lanes; removing roundabouts that work and putting up traffic lights that don't; moving public highway to the private realm; removing car parking spaces all over the city.

At a business breakfast recently, Ms Hamilton poured scorn on anyone who would suggest that the expansion plans for our city were anything to do with EP. She was adamant that they were the responsibility of Milton Keynes Partnership and tried to paint it as an independent organisation with proper representation from all sectors. When I challenged this, she completely failed to answer my question.

I tried again at MKP's recent AGM at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, when I was allowed to ask the board how they justified their existence, given that they were unelected, unaccountable and undemocratic. Chairman Sir Bob Reid told me that "his conscience was clear" as he represented the elected government of the UK. But surely that's wrong, as these decisions that affect all our lives

Theo Chalmers



Theo Chalmers is managing director of Verve Public Relations and chair of Urban Eden.
www.vervepr.co.uk
 e-mail: t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk
 Tel: 01908 275271
www.urbaneden.org

are not made by the government based on its manifesto but instead are taken by his undemocratic committee bowing to whatever whim, pressures or requirements they might face.

Yet Ms Hamilton still insists that MKP is nothing to do with EP, that it represents the people of Milton Keynes and

that it has on its board people from all walks of Milton Keynes life. So let's look at who exactly it represents.

EP itself says this about MKP. "In June 2004 Milton Keynes Partnership Committee was created by the Government as a *sub-committee of English Partnerships* [my italics]. The role of MKPC is to co-ordinate and implement the delivery of growth and ensure that homes, infrastructure, jobs and community facilities are provided as part of a joined-up approach."

Here's more, from a Milton Keynes Partnership Committee document; "...the MKPC is in legal form *English Partnerships*. It has full delegation from the English Partnerships Board and the members of the committee were appointed through EP procedures overseen by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It, therefore, undertakes all its actions under the brand name Milton Keynes Partnership *but its legal form is EP.*"

Clear enough, isn't it?

Just so you know who the voting members are, here's the official list of the voting board:

Unelected

Sir Bob Reid (Chair) (EP);
 John Walker - just resigned but not yet replaced (EP);
 Dr Pauleen Lane (EP);
 Malcolm Brighton (Local Strategic Partnership);
 Wendy Lehmann (Local Strategic Partnership);
 Dr Ann Limb (independent);

Andrew Peck (Local Strategic Partnership).

Elected

Cllr Roger Bristow (Milton Keynes Council, Labour, represents only Denbigh);
 Cllr David Hopkins (Milton Keynes Council, Conservative, represents only Danesborough);
 Cllr Isobel McCall (leader of Milton Keynes Council, Liberal, represents only Campbell Park).

So there we have it. I've established beyond doubt that legally Milton Keynes Partnership is English Partnerships. And if only ten members have voting rights and if only three of those voting members are elected councillors - and let's not forget they only represent tiny portions of Milton Keynes - and the rest are either EP staffers or selected by EP, how can Ms Hamilton claim that the expansion plans are nothing to do with EP?

MKP is therefore demonstrably unelected, unaccountable, unrepresentative and, I sincerely believe, unwanted. Personally I feel that, in a democracy, actions that deeply affect all our lives ought to be decided democratically. If you agree, write to Jane Hamilton at JaneHamilton@englishpartnerships.co.uk and tell her, or join Urban Eden - it's totally free, visit www.urbaneden.org - and together perhaps we can win back our rights and save the city that we love.

Love Milton Keynes, Love Urban Eden. Cheerio.