

Our 'Eden' is a very different challenge

An open letter to Sir Bob Kerslake, chief executive of the Homes and Communities Agency.

Dear Sir Bob,

ON BEHALF of Urban Eden, the organisation founded to preserve the original masterplan for Milton Keynes, I am writing to welcome you to your new post as the chief executive of the new Homes and Communities Agency.

The agency will bring together the housing and regeneration delivery functions of the Housing Corporation, English Partnerships and the Department for Communities and Local Government. I've always wondered why Milton Keynes would require the attentions of EP, the so-called 'National Regeneration Agency', when it requires no regeneration apart from the council occasionally repairing a few smashed granite borders around roundabouts and replacing light bulbs in the Portes Cocheres.

Sadly, however, EP hasn't regenerated anything here: instead it has proved beyond reasonable doubt and to the satisfaction of many of its citizens that it has done a good deal more harm than good. Harm that I would humbly entreat you to use your new powers to cease. Forthwith.

You are a native of the fabulous and historic city of Bath, which is still largely unspoiled, I hope you would see that some places are so special that they do not require being messed around with by muddled ideologues. Would you slap thehub:mk down on that green space in front of Royal Crescent? I think not.

As the now-departing chief executive of Sheffield City Council, you were credited with some positive, even visionary changes. You will, I trust, realise that the challenges of such cities are not the same as ours in our 'Urban Eden'.

My understanding is that you will take up your post next month, although the Homes and Communities Agency will not become fully operational until next year. In the meantime, no doubt you will review the work of Milton Keynes Partnership which is the wholly-controlled EP agency set on destroying our wide boulevards, thousands of our trees, our exceptional grid system, our underpasses and redways and seems set on building windswept, shiny new city centre developments with nowhere to park

and, outside the centre, houses with nowhere to park and with no grid roads linking them to the rest of the city.

Astonishingly, MKP had also planned and is attempting to undertake closures of existing roads (Secklow Gate, for instance), downgrading roads to ridiculous 'city streets' (the A5130, which should be the V12, is one example), and giving public highway to private users to erect barriers to the rest of us (Witan Gate West).

Interestingly, as it appears increasingly likely that they will miss their new housebuild targets, there has been a flight of those with responsibility from MKP, namely chairman Sir Bob Reid,

Theo Chalmers



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and chief operating officer Jane Hamilton, both of whom have resigned and depart at the end of next month.

Therefore, I would like to humbly propose that you take the following actions pending a full review:

- ◆ Cease all new construction - and destruction - until MKP's plans have been fully reviewed.
- ◆ Insist that no new developments can take place without an extension of the grid, underpasses, redways and tree-lined roadways.
- ◆ Stop filling in underpasses and insist on the continuation of our separa-

tion of motorised traffic from pedestrians and bicycles.

According to the latest statistics from the Audit Commission (for 2003/4), the average pedestrian road accident casualties per 100,000 population in England were 78.4. In Milton Keynes they were 35.7. This means that, by filling in underpasses and forcing pedestrians over busy roads such as on Witan Gate and the V4 Watling Street, a potential additional 42.7 people could be killed, maimed or injured every year.

◆ Cease cutting down trees until the results of the RPS tree survey promised to us by MKP last summer are released.

A recent list of trees already felled comprises 305 plane trees and 1,010 of other species. A further 3,248 are under threat in Central Milton Keynes alone. Please stop this arboreal carnage.

◆ Close underused bus lanes. There aren't enough buses to warrant them and they force motorists to queue where no queue is necessary. Instead consider investing in trams, a public transport system actually likely to be used by the public.

◆ Stop ripping out our beloved roundabouts - which work - in favour of traffic lights, which don't. Look at V6 Grafton Street by the National Hockey Stadium or the chaotic plans for Watling Street, V4. Seven sets of traffic lights; plans to take pedestrians over a main road; no proper allowance for traffic from the Western Expansion Area... it's a sorry disgrace.

◆ Build dwellings that people want to live in, up to a standard we are used to, not down to some ideological 'insult' standard. We don't want John Prescott's failed Millennium communities.

◆ Review the £18,000 roof tariff. It's simply not going to work. Under this system, some 25 per cent must be paid up front. The remaining 75pc is due on completion/occupation of each development. In this financial climate, however, it is a recipe for abandoned sites.

◆ Consult properly. Asking us which colour roof tiles we like instead of whether we want new grid roads, is not a consultation. We've never been properly consulted and as a consequence we're angry. You won't like us when we're angry.

Milton Keynes really is a great place and we're sure that, once you know it well, you'll love it too. Give me a call if you'd like a tour.

Yours faithfully
Theo Chalmers

Awareness on a national scale

Grant Seeley, director of inward investment at Invest MK, reflects on a successful 2007 and looks forward to more of the same in 2008.

2007 was a fantastic year for us at Invest Milton Keynes, part of Milton Keynes Partnership. Working with our partners, including the local property agents, we've had 58 investment successes, created or safeguarded 2,805 jobs and handled 404 premises or land enquiries - a four-year high and a 46 per cent increase on the previous year. We also supported high-profile events such as the City Challenge, the inaugural Milton Keynes Science Festival and Light Fantastic, all of which helped raise national awareness of our city.

2008 is proving to be just as bright and, rather than resting on our laurels, we're already leaping into what promises to be another exciting year.

Already planned for the city are two developments which represent £100 million of investment in office space. The Pinnacle, due to be completed in May 2009, is the largest office development for 25 years in Central Milton Keynes and will provide 200,000 sq ft of office space for businesses in Central Milton Keynes.

Knowledge

Two firms which have already bought into the £60 million development are business advisers Deloitte and law firm Denton Wilde Sapte.

Alongside the Pinnacle development, there is the £40 million Wavendon Business Park acquisition which will be fully occupied by global technology giant Electronic Data Systems. Phase I is already complete, with phase II due for completion in May. The Wavendon Business Park development will comprise four two-storey office buildings totalling 150,000 sq ft over 16.5 acres and accommodating around 850 staff.

Potential relocation enquiries are also doing well and of the 60 projects we have so far this year, 32 are in our target group of high-growth, high value, knowledge based businesses.

These potential relocations and expanding businesses will be able to



◆ Grant Seeley

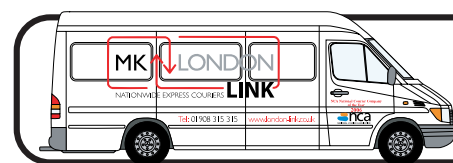
take advantage of some of the excellent networking facilities on offer in Milton Keynes, including the Sparc Technology Network which on February 4 is to host a debate on Achieving Zero Carbon Construction through Innovation.

The keynote speaker is Tim Fenn from Green Carbon, an organisation which specialises in sustainable new build techniques. Tim will be joining a panel of experts including representatives from the construction industry and English Partnerships to debate the critical issue of achieving zero carbon construction in our region.

Considering the amount of housing growth planned, it promises to be an engrossing forum.

On March 16, Milton Keynes is hosting one of only 23 flagship Sainsbury's Sport Relief mile events. We've been working with our partners Milton Keynes Council and Comic Relief to ensure the event is a fantastic success and we have TV coverage on the day. Competitors will be running through Central Milton Keynes on a one-three or six-mile course, raising money for Comic Relief's good causes.

So make sure you get your running shoes on... and look out for some huge red space hoppers!



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