

A new iconic beginning for our city

I HAD lunch recently with Milton Keynes' city centre manager, the charming and lovely Kay Greenhalgh. She said that I was "a really good writer but why did you have to be so mean? Why can't you be more constructive?".

Once I'd recovered my composure, it got me thinking. Is there a way that Urban Eden can genuinely advance the growth agenda by suggesting something that will garner support from English Partnerships, Milton Keynes Partnership and Milton Keynes Council?

Something, that while it's unlikely to 'save' Milton Keynes from the worst of the tree-felling, road-closing, high-density-instant-slum excesses against which we've been campaigning, nevertheless can draw us all together behind a common cause? Something which will give these protagonists the opportunity to prove that, deep down, they *do* love Milton Keynes and that they really *do* want to do something to prove it?

The answer, I think, is something I've been suggesting for years informally but now, I believe, the time is right to put it on the table as an open invitation to English Partnerships, Milton Keynes Partnership and Milton Keynes Council to adopt as official policy. In its way, it

will solve some of their issues too because it will be about high density, it will be an 'extension' of Milton Keynes, it will encourage higher average rents and it will be something Grant Seeley of Invest Milton Keynes can use in his campaign to attract high-profile businesses and residents.

And, of course, if the powers that be ignore it or sideline it, it will demonstrate to many, once again, that they really don't have pride in our city and they really don't acknowledge it as a place that 'thinks differently'.

So, here it is. EP will designate a good-sized plot of land in Central Milton Keynes - Station Square, for example - for a unique, breathtaking, signature building which defines (and I humbly propose is called) The Spirit of Milton Keynes: a building which people will flock to see, to visit, to invest in and to occupy.

In short, a stunning landmark structure which pushes at the very boundaries of architectural thinking, which sets the bar for 21st-century building design and which contains offices, homes, restaurants and shops. A building so stunningly beautiful it will make your jaw drop in wonder and delight.

Just imagine the impact of that.

The justification is simple too. In many ways, iconic buildings in one form or another have shaped our very world and changed the perception of places, even in ancient times. For instance, Rome demonstrated its power and invincibility as much with its Pantheon, Hippodrome and Coliseum as it did with its armies. Greece did the same with its Parthenon and Temple at Delphi. Egypt similarly impressed the world with its Pyramids, temples such as at Karnak and the Lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the seven ancient wonders of the World.

Ancient Britons have a proud iconic-architecture tradition too, dating back to Stonehenge and Avebury and in more recent times demonstrated with works of 'shock and awe' such as St Paul's, Salisbury, Canterbury, Wells and St. David's Cathedrals. China has its Imperial City and Great Wall; India, among other stunning gems, the Taj Mahal.

In the 20th century, the Sydney Opera House helped to shake Australia out of its 'cultural cringe' which had lasted from convict times and which, at a stroke, gave the nation its new, confi-

dent, 'can-do' face. Designed by the Danish architect Jørn Utzon, the Sydney Opera House not only served its designated purpose magnificently but with its UNESCO World Heritage Site status continues to define not only Sydney but Australia itself.

In modern times, Sir Norman Foster's 'gherkin' in London, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim gallery in Bilbao and Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and Daniel Libeskind's project for Ground Zero in New York have all remade the way we see those cities.

Gehry's Guggenheim has totally regenerated that tired northern Spanish fishing port, transformed its economy and made Bilbao a truly global destination. Other architects such as Peter Eisenman, Enric Miralles, Zaha Hadid, Coop Himmelblau, Renzo Piano, Will Alsop and Rem Koolhaas have all created architectural icons that have attracted publicity and controversy equally.

Perfect for Milton Keynes So, instead of spending millions on filling in underpasses why not put some money into this, EP? I heartily recommend this proposal and look forward to your response.

Cheerio.

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
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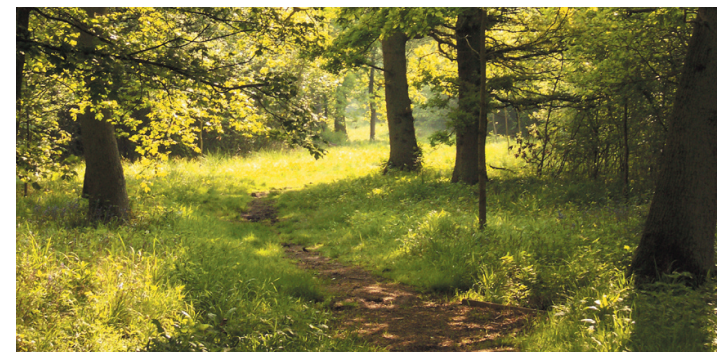
Our green and pleasant land

DESPITE the best efforts of the men with chainsaws, Milton Keynes is officially a forest.

The definition of woodland in the United Kingdom forestry statistics is land under stands of trees with a canopy cover of at least 20 per cent (or having the potential to achieve this), including integral open space, and including felled areas that are awaiting restocking.

Urban Eden's experts have cast their eyes over the stats and declare that, yes, Milton Keynes is - like Sherwood or Epping or New (which will now obviously have to change its name to Old) - officially a forest.

Although the list of tree species in British woodland is closely defined, it includes all the usual Milton Keynes species. Woodland includes native and non-native trees, semi-natural and plantation areas. Woodland habitat types are not currently differentiated in these statistics. There is no minimum height for trees to form woodland at maturity so the definition includes woodland scrub but not areas of gorse or rhododendron, for example, outside woodland.



Virtually all the wooded green spaces managed by the Parks Trust, including Linford Wood (pictured above), are already designated woodland, including the grid road reserves. They used to, and may be still do, enjoy grant aid from the Forestry Commission and they are managed under an approved Plan of Operations which allows the Parks Trust to manage those areas responsibly without having to obtain felling licences from the Forestry Commission every time it has to do some thinning.

In 1997, the Parks Trust Estate was given the National Centre of Excellence Award by the Forestry

Authority England - one of only four such awards granted between 1993 and 1997. This was in recognition of creating the widest possible range of uses, such as improving quality of landscape, creating benefits for wildlife, providing recreation, growing timber in an environmentally sound way: in short, multi-purpose forestry.

Bizarrely - and apparently because Milton Keynes won it - the award was then summarily discontinued, the alleged reason being that this did not sit comfortably with the up and coming government agendas for new build. The more we look, the more we find...

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