

## Minister backs plans for homes

A SCHEME to build more than 2,700 new homes as part of the Bedford Western Bypass project has won praise from a government minister.

Barbara Follet, regional minister for the East of England, was speaking on a visit to the Biddenham Vale housing development.

She said: "These are high-quality, affordable and sustainable homes which are much needed by the people of Bedfordshire, as is the welcome reduction in traffic congestion the new bypass will bring."

The scheme, being delivered by David Wilson South Midlands, has benefited from a kick-start through £24 million of funding from the Homes and Communities Agency, which will pay the costs of the Western Bypass development.

Mrs Follett toured the site, on which a total 2,760 homes will be built. She spoke to representatives from the HCA and David Wilson about the project's progress and heard how partners have worked together to set the project in motion.

The minister said: "One of the key measures announced in the Budget was a £500 million fund to unlock stalled housing sites and provide a kick start to the industry. I have been told that David Wilson Homes will be putting in a bid for some of this money and I urge other developers in the East of England to follow suit.

Almost one-third of the scheme will be affordable housing. Biddenham Vale will also include three schools, community, health and business centres. It will be connected to the centre of Bedford via a park and ride scheme.

HCA projects director Simon Bishop said: "The forward funding of the bypass is an innovative approach which has opened up land for much needed development. By taking this new approach we have been able to work with our partners to deliver a scheme which might otherwise have suffered as a result of the current difficult economic climate."

Richard Brooke, regional managing director for David Wilson East, said: "This is a landmark project for us and we are extremely proud of the results to date. We are also pleased that the project will help bring about the long-awaited Western Bypass and are confident that the scheme will become a thriving and well used new community."



# Our 'paradise' has lost its vision

AS WE HEAD into the hot, languorous, dog-days of summer, it is time to take a deep breath, pause for a while under the once-cool, inviting, branches of the dead oak tree in Midsummer Place and ask ourselves where Milton Keynes is going.

We now have plenty of evidence where Milton Keynes Partnership and Milton Keynes Council are taking our city and we need to ask ourselves whether it is in the right direction. Or whether they even have a clue what they are doing.

Of course we cannot judge MKP or the council on what they say. We must judge them by their deeds; the evidence on the ground. After all, despite what both organisations may claim, it is clearly not the people of Milton Keynes who call the tune.

MKP is guided by the Exchequer in its greed to sell land and drive up densities and the council is simply misguided. The whole expansion project has become a rudderless joke, with committees happy to follow the path of least resistance with convoluted, muddled thinking on transport, roads, trees and land.

This despite the people of Milton Keynes making plain what they think of our city in not one but two ICM polls.

So what of the recent changes? Have they enhanced our city? Have they made our lives easier, more convenient, more secure, better in every way? Do you smile and get a nice warm feeling every time you see the new developments? Have they enhanced or diminished our Urban Eden?

A survey by uSwitch.com has shown that Milton Keynes is the city the fourth hardest hit by the recession. House prices have plummeted 17 per cent, unemployment has more than doubled and council tax has gone up 3.7pc. But let's take a closer look before you decide.

Let's start with the Hub(ris). Here's one of their keynote 'achievements', whose opening was trumpeted with a Royal visit, no less. Its design takes no account of dropping off and picking up of goods, waste or people - not those in wheelchairs nor even an octogenarian monarch and her prince.

One can only imagine with what joy Her Majesty contemplated opening this bleak, largely treeless, wind-swept, inward-facing, ugly glass-and-concrete canyon in Central Milton Keynes, especially since the last place she opened here, Queen's Court in thecentre:MK, is being demolished.

What about parking and public transport? How many businesses are now contemplating deserting the city centre because they cannot function without adequate parking or public transport?

As parking fees climb and spaces diminish, public transport goes not from your house to work, as it should, but instead from bad to worse. Soon, we hear, they will tax private parking in the centre - killing it and any further hope of inward commercial investment. Go home, director of inward investment Grant Seeley, there's nothing for you here.

What about elsewhere in Milton Keynes: Vizion perhaps? Yes, that's the stack of crates with the trees on its roof.

Or how about the Eastern Expansion Area where they've built houses right on the A5130, a major 'A' road. Here, children can run out of their front doors straight on to a combined pavement/redway where, if they are lucky enough to avoid being mown down by a legally speeding cyclist, they can be eviscerated by a fully-loaded artic en route to or from the M1, on the inches-away roadway.

Not content with these excrescences, Milton Keynes Partnership and Milton Keynes Council are planning to build more high-rise family homes in our city centre, exactly the same as those thrown up in the sixties and demolished in the 1980s as abject social failures.

Now the council appears to have washed its hands of its half-hearted promise to renegotiate with the Western Expansion Area developers, it looks almost certain as I write that it will be built without proper connection to and extension of the grid; flying full in the face of the clearly expressed wishes of the electorate.

So you decide. Is this paradise?

But it wouldn't be fair for the council to get not a word in, would it? So here is their vision for the city centre: <http://cmis.milton-keynes.gov.uk/CmisWeb/Public/Binary.ashx?Document=25747>

Sadly it is simply a wish list and visionary it is not. Bruce Stewart, senior planning officer, joint working environmental services directorate even proudly claims in correspondence that: "The Vision for the City Core will enable the Council to be in control, to drive and manage the development process in the City Core, working with

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partners and stakeholders to promote development in the City Core.

"I can advise that in the preparation of the Vision for the City Core, no reference was made to any other outside organisation or individual".

Breathtaking, isn't it? And although the word consultation eventually appears, it's an afterthought at best.

I cannot end without mentioning Broughton, where huge houses in multi-occupancy are built on tiny plots hard against narrow roads with nowhere to park - public or private - sparking 'kerb rage' among residents fooled by artists' impressions into investing in our least user-friendly community yet completed.

Welcome to Broughton, tomorrow's slum. Well done, Milton Keynes Council and Milton Keynes Partnership, for all this is your legacy. Look upon it and be deeply shamed.

Cheerio.

## Team in the pink (and purple) at awards

THE MARKETING department at thecentre:mk is celebrating after winning two national awards.

The British Council of Shopping Centres has awarded two merits to the shopping centre for two of its promotional campaigns: a public and media relations initiative for The Centre for Serious Superheroes and the digital marketing scheme The Facebooking of Santa Claus.

Centre director Robert Goodman said: "This is wonderful news for the team at thecentre:mk. They all worked

exceptionally hard on delivering the innovative Superheroes and the Santa's Facebook campaigns. These awards are recognition of the dedication and team spirit displayed throughout the year and supports our position as the premier shopping destination between Oxford and Cambridge, Birmingham and London."

The Purple Apple Awards is in its sixth year and recognise and reward effective shopping and town centre marketing with the UK retail sector.

thecentre:mk is already working on



ideas on how to engage with the local young people in a new category for next year's awards.

● thecentre:mk operations director Dan Murphy (second from left) and

public relations and press officer Mike Graham receive their awards from BCSC president Jeremy Collins (right) and television presenter Claudia Winkelman.



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