



OK, I AM feeling a little woozy, a little confused. It must be time for my annual 'say something nice' column. So here it is. Milton Keynes has been awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society and the accolade of Best Large City in this year's Thames and Chiltern regional round of the Britain in Bloom competition.

In addition to the gold medal for the city as a whole, Campbell Park was awarded 'Best Park' for the same region. The entry to the competition was made by Milton Keynes Council, The Open University and Milton Keynes Parks Trust acting in concert and received special praise for horticulture, environmental responsibility and for the partnership with the Open University.

One can but hope that this inspires those in a position to influence these things to preserve more of our green environment and oppose any further wanton destruction (sorry, I slipped for a moment. I know this is the 'nice' column).

Never one to hold back on praise where it is due, I'd like to congratulate Parks Trust chief executive David Foster and his staff and thank him for his commitment to Milton Keynes' green environment, as well as Milton Keynes Council for the

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work they do to maintain the areas in their control.

David says: "This award demonstrates to the rest of the UK how fantastic the parks and green spaces of Milton Keynes are. We take great pride in our work caring for the parks

and we want to encourage others to do so too."

The gold medal was awarded to Milton Keynes, scored on the quality of floral displays, community involvement, cleanliness, recycling and sustainability. Campbell Park and the Hanson Study Centre earned special mention from the judges.

Peter Goff, parks and open spaces manager at Milton Keynes Council, says: "This is really an award for the people of Milton Keynes to celebrate. We can all be rightly proud of the hard work of all staff in making Milton Keynes a brighter and better place to live."

The annual Britain in Bloom campaign is the largest horticultural event in Europe and attracted around 2,000 entries from across Britain, which are judged on all-round horticultural achievement, including conservation and natural areas.

I feel much better now. Cheerio. **STOP PRESS** I've just learned that the award-winning Milton Keynes Council has, in the absence of its judges, cut down all the cherry trees on the east side of Station Square. Clearly, normal service has been resumed and thus my column will also revert to its normal style next month.

## Letters to the Editor

# Time to spread a little kindness

### Airport is reaping what it has sown

*I AM horrified to read that easyJet are cutting back flights by 20 per cent from London Luton Airport. However, those who run the airport have done all they can to make travelling from Luton an increasingly miserable experience and deserve the harvest they have sown.*

*Whether it's paying to collect and deliver people by car, the appalling traffic flow, paying for trolleys, paying for plastic toiletry bags, going up and down stairs to and from the aircraft with no lift or escalator options, being threatened by policemen with machine guns when phoning from a crowded immigration hall with confusing signage, is it surprising that I took Eurostar to Brussels last week?*

**PAUL WAKELING**

President & Secretary General,

The Manufacturers' Agents' Association of GB & Ireland,

Via e-mail

HAVE you noticed it too? Or, as Sir Terry Wogan might say, "Is it me?" But I think the recession is making business people more nasty.

Two recent instances have awoken me to the sad fact that there seems to be less concern for manners and fair play in business nowadays. Maybe it's the recession, or maybe it's the continuous march of aggressive, selfish behaviour that seems to be considered to be both funny and cool.

The first was with a customer. We tried to help them by offering some friendly (unpaid) advice. Unfortunately the people concerned immediately felt threatened and started a vendetta against us, seemingly driven by a desire to humiliate us in an effort to 'get even'.

For what? I wonder. What was our great sin? Has our blessed government passed a law against helping people now? Or has it just fallen out of fashion.

A designer friend of mine, who is also a supplier, asked me to substitute for him at a recent breakfast meeting in Milton Keynes. I was happy to oblige and was relishing the opportunity of telling the assembly about my talented friend - something he would have been far too modest to do himself.

I was blocked by another member who felt I would be

in competition with her. How ridiculous! Who cares if I was? Besides, all she had to do was telephone me and I would have made sure I didn't compromise her position.

Doesn't anyone talk any more? The only result is that I have missed the opportunity to help a friend and my opinion of the lady in question has taken a nosedive.

The problem seems to be wider than these two trivial examples. It seems that everyone is using the recession to squeeze staff into working cheaply and screw suppliers to price levels that remove any real desire or ability to do a good job.

What's going on? We always pay our bills on time and sometimes pay suppliers more than they ask if we feel

they are short-changing themselves. That's not because we are rich: it's because we want people to enjoy working with us. That way you get a better result.

Are we alone? Is everyone else out there just bent on wringing the last ounce of good nature and tolerance out of everyone they meet? Sometimes it seems that way.

This letter is, in part, my way of releasing a little brewing tension (it's good for the blood pressure, I'm told). But it's also a plea for a little kindness in business.

Would it really destroy the commerce of the city if people took a rather more charitable attitude? I think not.

**STEVE JORDAN**

The Words Workshop,

via e-mail

## Discounting breeds discontent

I HAVE just read with some interest the piece in Business MK's October edition by Tim Dolder, of Tenon Recovery, about invoice discounting. As a user of the product for the past two years who has recently had a representative of Lloyds TSB Commercial Finance visit me at home and spend two hours discussing a recent problem, I would take issue with some of the points he makes.

One: it is not remotely discreet. One of the first conditions of becoming a customer was that I had to stick a dirty big flag on each invoice telling the world about it.

Two: they actually contact my customers and hassle them, without making any reference to me.

Three: the service charge is not what I would call small. It is a minimum of £200 a

month, plus interest and other charges. And at that level of charge, I have recently been told bluntly, I cannot expect to receive any attention over and above turning my invoices into cash.

I think that it is a useful product but the execution is poor and mired in the days when it was seen as lending of last resort. By definition, last-resort borrowers must be desperate, they seem to assume, so we are treated accordingly. Do not expect your e-mails or memos to be answered, unless it suits the invoice discounter.

You only need look at some of the blogs on the subject to see that discontent is growing.

**BRIAN BOLLEN**

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via e-mail



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