

for all our futures

From facing page

Later, in the 1980s, the welcome mat was out for white collar aspirational owner-occupiers.

Nowhere are the social disparities of this historic pattern more evident than in our school system. Some of our schools are serving areas which rank among the most deprived in the South East while others are located among homes costing £400,000 and above.

In addition, the speed and scale of Milton Keynes' growth has generated persistent opportunities for people to frequently trade up in housing and careers. Among local schools, this has manifested as a constant churn of students and teachers on the move, adding to the difficulties thrown up by the settlement history.

Thus the challenge facing secondary schools in Milton Keynes is different and more complicated than that generally found elsewhere.

Significantly, Milton Keynes is among a handful of English education authorities which have been earmarked by the government for additional help to raise the educational performance of youngsters prior to

transfer to secondary school.

Other approaches being promoted by David Gamble's office to raise local standards include a scheme for pairing teachers from high and low performing schools.

"The object is to draw on our strengths and disseminate good practice throughout Milton Keynes schools" says Mr.Gamble.

Transformational

Another initiative is the new £30 million Academy which is due to open on the site of the Sir Frank Markham school in September 2009. Part of the government's School Reform Agenda, academies are controversial because they enable private interests to invest in state provided education.

But David Gamble is convinced that the new Academy will have a positive effect on such things as GCSE performance

"The new Academy will be transformational in its educational offer," he says. "With its business hub and shared emphasis on vocational as well as academic topics, it will act as a catalyst for Milton Keynes education by driving up skills in that part

of the city as well as exerting a wider positive effect throughout."

Important and innovative as these initiatives are, they must be supplemented by wider community involvement and commitment.

Research into classroom teaching has illustrated the primacy of home and community factors in determining exam success. For example, a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that children from poor homes are nearly a year behind when they start school, and two years behind by 14.

After all, children are only in school for 14pc of their time. The rest of the time they are out and about in the community.

The community has much to gain from improving the performance of children in school in the form of more prosperous neighbourhoods and a sustainable labour supply for future growth.

Our challenge is to ensure that the 86pc of children's experience in the community compliments and enhances the 14pc in the classroom.

For more details on the national schools league tables, visit www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables

Trees on the move after public outcry over their fate

MILTON Keynes Partnership is starting a programme of works that will enable healthy and maturing trees - currently growing on sites earmarked for development - to be relocated to new and more suitable homes around the city.

A total 50 plane trees are to be removed from the city centre site which has outline planning permission for the West End Central development.

Some will be replanted on the Northfield roundabout near the M1 junction 14.

The move follows public concern over the removal of plane trees in Central Milton Keynes.

Safe

MKP projects director Tim Roxburgh said: "We have listened to the public's comments about trees in Milton Keynes and, as a result, the first phase of work will see 50 London Plane trees removed from the currently disused site where outline planning permission has been granted for the new West End Central development.

"Of these, ten trees will be relocated to the Northfield roundabout, whilst the remainder will be kept in a safe haven until sites have been identified for them to be replanted within Milton Keynes or its surrounds."

The remaining shrubs and vegetation, together with a number of diseased horse chestnut trees, will be removed from the site and all of the work will be completed before the start of the bird nesting season.

Precious

Mr Roxburgh said: "Maturing and healthy trees are a precious commodity and we welcome the opportunity to work with both The Parks Trust and Milton Keynes Council to find ways to save them and reuse them elsewhere in the city.

"We are delighted that we will be able to relocate the London Plane trees from the West End Central site so that they can be enjoyed and continue to grow in Milton Keynes."

... we were wrong

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block the car-lined carriageways to carry out their functions.

There is no real pretence at amenity space within the development either, apart from a single deeply shaded and heavily overlooked courtyard between the blocks. There is very little parkland or open space anywhere nearby. In terms of landscaping, a great many 'civic scale' trees of high ecological and biodiversity value are being (or have been) felled.

Within the scheme 35 lesser, smaller trees are proposed among 141 on-street spaces. Further, there seems to be no strategy to 'break up' or 'soften' the soaring multi-storey elevations beyond some low-level, low-key shrub planting and ground cover in slim margins at the edges.

Because of its close proximity to Milton Keynes Central station, it's likely that West End One is secretly intended to be marketed to London-based people who will treat the development as a relatively cheap dormitory estate.

I believe the rationale for the very low car parking provision is not for any reasons of connectivity (there are few bus connections), but because the lives of most of the inhabitants

will be lived elsewhere, probably in London.

So the proudly trumpeted 'West End One' will be essentially a cheap doss house for London commuters. That's something to be proud of, is it? In civic terms, I believe West End One will offer very little to Milton Keynes beyond the opportunity for a really important social study as the place degenerates inexorably into a centrally located slum over the next ten-20 years.

Also in for planning is the three-storey school designed to go on the roof of a car park at the West End One development. May I humbly suggest that, before they build it, they ask parents whether they'd like their child to attend a school on top of a fume-filled public car park and, as it shares its entrance with car park users, potentially with perverts lying in wait in its darkened corners?

Meanwhile, over the road, at 100 Avebury Boulevard, lawyers Shoosmiths are apparently determined to destroy their current caring, sharing, community-conscious image with a monolithic, pressed-right-up-to-the-roadway, let's-cut-down-lots-of-trees, 80,000 sq ft office building. It's designed for 200 existing local staff and 400 incoming.

Hard to believe, I know, given some of the recent architectural failures but it's one of the least attractive new designs possible. It imposes its bulk upon its surroundings with the arrogance of a conquering army. Can it really not be moved back to the existing building line? Does it really have to be so deeply unattractive? Surely there must be architects, developers and clients in Milton Keynes with some vision.

There are several other developments in the pipeline but no space to do them justice this month. However I would just like to leave you with the valedictory farewell message from Jane Hamilton, the retiring COO of Milton Keynes Partnership, speaking about the growth plans for Milton Keynes.

In it, she damns herself with these words: "It involves growth across boundaries and it threw up too many wicked issues for a council to handle; too many vote-losing issues".

So to summarise: the EP-enforced growth agenda is unpopular, unwanted and undemocratic but she was happy to force it through with her unelected unelectable quango despite what we, the voters, think.

Thanks for coming clean at last, Jane. Happy retirement. Cheerio.



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