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Grid roads: listen to the people

Theo Chalmers



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LAST month I wrote that Milton Keynes Council was about to acquire the remaining undeveloped building land from the Homes & Communities Agency and that we may finally rid ourselves of the unelected Milton Keynes Partnership Partnership Planning Sub-Committee.

Virtually the final act of housing and local government minister Grant Shapps - before he became Tory party co-chairman in the September cabinet reshuffle - was to sign the agreement ceding the land for £32 million. It comes under the council's control from December 1 but there remain a few delays and some very serious issues. These include the fact that the MKPPS-C is due to have met again (October 24) by the time you read this, on November 27 and possibly in December too.

By way of demonstration just how dangerous MKPPS-C is, it last met on August 29 to discuss the reserved matters application for Tattenhoe Park's first parcel (parts of the Kingsmead South site and Tattenhoe Park site which will eventually comprise more than 1,700 homes). Of real interest to Urban Eden is that this includes the creation of Hayton Way, a road which is the continuation of vital H7 grid road Chaffron Way.

The reason why it was renamed at its eastern end as Countess Way and at its western end as Hayton Way is to disguise the fact that it will no longer be a grid road. Instead it will join the ranks of the much-hated and failed city street concepts foisted upon us by Milton Keynes Partnership. And because it will eventually join up with the A421, a major route into our city, it will be an instant bottleneck.

The proposed development comprises a continuous built frontage, pedestrian crossings and 30mph speed limits. Drivers will

face two sudden changes of road character as they switch from 60mph to a stop-start densely-built residential street with no underpasses and raised platforms at junctions and then back up to grid road speeds. Residents will endure a busier, louder, more dangerous environment, particularly for pupils attending Tattenhoe Park Primary School nearby.

Ask those who live in Countess Way or the remnants of the A5130 that should have been the V12. Every time the M1 is closed, their lives become a fume-filled, noisy hell. At other times a stream of articulated lorries rumble past their front doors.

Because of our grid roads and redways, which separate pedestrians from traffic, Milton Keynes has pedestrian casualties significantly below the UK average. Speed limits of 60 and 70 mph allow buses, trucks and cars to cross the city quickly and, because of our polycentrism, we are not all going in the same direction at the same time. The air is cleaner, as travelling at 60mph is more efficient than stop-start. And so long as MKP is not able to destroy yet more grid road stubs, Milton Keynes is infinitely expandable.

The plan put forward for Hayton Way directly contradicts the Core Strategy, published in February 2010, which defines grid roads as: "urban clearways with lay-bys for bus stops, with no direct building frontages

and no at-grade pedestrian crossings. Some are dualled and the remainder normally have land reserved for future dualling or other transport purpose (e.g. mass passenger transit system). They have substantial landscaping for biodiversity, sound screening and CO2/emissions absorption, usually incorporating a redway. Collectively, they form a resilient, interconnected network with roundabouts at most gridway intersections, serving both public and private transport."

The legal officer at the MKPPS-C meeting confirmed that the Core Strategy is a "material consideration". Hmm, we'll see.

Thankfully, the Core Strategy is now supported by all three parties on the council and the vast majority of Milton Keynes residents. At the meeting Lib Dem Cllr Chris Williams, speaking as Furzton ward and parish councillor, beautifully demonstrated that non-partisan support. The Core Strategy states that grid roads should be provided and Cllr Williams objected to a city street which repeated the issues that were experienced at Broughton. It was contrary to Policy T9 of the Local Plan which promoted a road hierarchy. Milton Keynes Partnership should recognise that people in Milton Keynes want grid roads, he added.

His fellow councillors Jenni Ferrans and John Hawthorn also spoke against. Council leader Andrew Geary made it clear his council could not support a development that subsumed a grid road. Labour group leader Cllr Norman Miles agreed and also voted for deferral. Members of the public spoke against while representatives from the developers were in favour of the plans.

The MKPPS-C meeting minutes are available at cmis.milton-keynes.gov.uk/CmisWebPublic/Binary.aspx?Document=36946.

The decision was deferred at the meeting with the chair, sadly, abstaining. The developers have subsequently refused to significantly revise their plans for Hayton Way and their application is quite likely to be passed at the next meeting. If it is, it will demonstrate MKP's unacceptable contempt for the wishes of both elected representatives and people of Milton Keynes.

I make this direct appeal to the MKPPS-C. Please stop going out on a limb and start acting for the interests of the people of Milton Keynes. If you do not, at least we will all know one name which will forever live in ignominy.

Hey ho and cheerio.

Leader welcomes land transfer deal

THE TRANSFER of the land, assets and powers held by the Homes & Communities Agency in Milton Keynes marks the dawn of a new era for the city, according to council leader Andrew Geary.

He said that, for the first time, Milton Keynes is in control of its destiny after the Department for Communities and Local Government approved the transfer.

The council will receive land assets from the HCA which include sites for new homes, offices and commercial premises in Central Milton Keynes, around 20 main sites including the National Bowl, Coachway, and hundreds of smaller parcels of land. Parliament is expected to formally

transfer planning powers by the end of this year, at which point the council will become the sole planning authority in the borough.

Cllr Geary (pictured) said: "Having control of additional land assets gives the council greater flexibility to manage the whole package efficiently and effectively. We can deliver the right conditions for growth, attracting investors and creating more jobs.

"This is an important new chapter for Milton Keynes. For the first time, local democratically elected people are in a position to control the destiny of Milton Keynes. In turn, residents will have a much fuller say on the development of their city."



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