

'Lights out' move casts long shadow on safety

AS YOU all must know by now, the decision to turn off our grid road lights 'to save money' has become more and more evident as the nights draw in. As I write, we only receive eight hours of daylight to every 16 of dark. And although December 21 as the shortest day marks the lowest, darkest, bleakest point, it will take a long time before we really notice any improvement.

In the meantime surely Milton Keynes suffers from the most dangerous high-speed roads in the country. One reason they are so dangerous is that they were designed and built to be fully lit, not abandoned to the blackness of hell, between little islands of light on the roundabouts. As a consequence you will never see a cats-eye or a highly reflective white line on our roads; and without them, you might reasonably argue our roads are truly unsafe.

Our city roads are missing the following safety features:

- Nearside and offside ribbed white lines;
- Nearside and off side cats eyes that change colour at junctions;
- Central cats eyes;
- Lit direction and warning signs.

I already hear those at Milton Keynes Council who are tasked with reducing costs h-rumping and tutting as they read this but does what they have done even make sense? Is there a better way?

For instance, they have spent tens of

thousands producing and erecting road signs saying 'Street Lighting Not In Use' - although as these are unlit I am not sure how one is supposed to read them at night... And they have spent thousands more turning off all the timers in the streetlights between roundabouts. Sadly they cannot simply flick a master switch as that would turn off the lights over the roundabouts and some of those desperately weak lights on redways and pavements too.

Talking of signage and dark nights, 29 faulty illuminated signs were counted on a recent journey from Far Bletchley to Central Milton Keynes. Sign types included 'top illuminated'; 'rear illuminated' and 'internally illuminated' bollards, such as the 'keep left' types. There are numerous dirty non-illuminated signs which fail to show up on these dark evenings, too.

I have watched in disbelief over the past 13 years as the one marked 'Mount Farm' on the V8 Marlborough Street just before the A5 flyover heading south not only grew dirtier and mouldier but now has a fur coat of moss and is now effectively unreadable.

That's right: 13 years. Next year I plan to plant potatoes on it.

However it is not just a case of using a pressure washer to clean them as some have special coatings which need hand cleaning. Could this be done by those doing community service?

'Our roads were designed and built to be fully lit'

Theo Chalmers



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Something equally worrying on these dark nights is the major theft of drain covers. The lack of grid road lighting, combined with these thefts is making roads not only hazardous, but potentially life threatening; particularly for our youngsters on their L-plated mopeds as they are forced to creep along in the gutters at reduced speeds like social outcasts on their underpowered steeds.

A fellow Urban Edenite tells me he very nearly hit a hole where a drain cover was missing in V1 Snelshall Street last week. He then saw yet another missing cover and was forced to veer sharply outwards to avoid yet a third unmarked hole.

Three drain covers missing and one temporary replacement in less than half a mile serves to indicate the sheer size of the problem with metal theft and lack of street lighting in Milton Keynes.

But let's return to the question I asked earlier; Is there a better way? What about cheaper bulbs?

Typically street lights are sodium lamps, orange are high-pressure, yellow low-pressure. The sodium discharge is managed by control gear so the control gear would need to be modified or replaced to accept a different 'cheaper to run' lamp and a new lamp holder would probably be specified.

Sodium is usually more energy-efficient than a compact fluorescent anyway so LED is the main commercially

viable replacement to reduce energy and long term operating costs but at a high capital 'replacement' cost.

A recent very good report from the Institution of Lighting Professionals called *Save Money and Keep the Lights ON* casts a very long shadow over the council's decision for very many reasons. On the subject of safety, it reports how a local coroner investigating a fatality directly linked the lack of lighting with the accident. He said: "...the driver had no chance to see the lady crossing the road without any street lights operating".

Switching lights off could actually raise the energy tariffs paid by local authorities by reducing the low-rate tariff paid at night and increasing the percentage of high tariff use. Furthermore the costs incurred for a single accident caused by unlit streets in a built-up area are, typically:

Fatal	£1,613,970
Serious	£184,850
Slight	£18,560

These are all far more expensive than the puny amounts saved by switching lights off, as the report proves.

So until the council sees the light; be safe out there. Cheerio.

- If you would like a copy of the ILP report *Save Money and Keep the Lights ON*, send an e-mail marked 'Lighting Report' to news@businessmk.co.uk

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