

The honeymoon is almost over and a new council seems to be delivering on its promises... but a new threat is looming.

# The Hub: don't let history repeat itself

## Theo Chalmers



Theo Chalmers is managing director of Verve Public Relations and chair of Urban Eden  
[www.urbaneden.org](http://www.urbaneden.org)  
[www.vervepr.co.uk](http://www.vervepr.co.uk)  
 e: [t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk](mailto:t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk)  
 Tel: 01908 275271

AS MANY of you will know, Milton Keynes Council's new cabinet is now coming to the end of its 'honeymoon' period with the electorate. And I have to say - albeit Urban Eden is resolutely apolitical - they have begun to deliver on some of their promises made in meetings with us and have not merely blown smoke in our eyes as did some of their predecessors: all promises to your face, nothing going on behind the scenes.

Having said that, there are two new developments which might seriously undermine any good intentions they may have. Those are the developments planned for the B4.4 site opposite the Hub, Sainsbury's and Vizion and the Lloyds Court site by the Elisabeth Frink black horse bronze in Silbury Boulevard.

Worryingly, it is very possible that we may end up with not one but two new 'Hubs' and as all fans of the Hub (who met recently in a one-man tent in that windswept wasteland) know, The Hub is widely considered an architectural and planning disaster.

Among its many failings, it has forever destroyed the wide, elegant building lines of the Boulevards and Gates that surround it. It caused the infilling of vital underpasses and the installation of the slowest and most annoying traffic lights anywhere in Milton Keynes.

It has no drop-off or pick-up points inside the square for wheelchair access or garbage.

It features architecture reminiscent of the worst excesses of communist East Germany... and bits are already falling off it.



So you would think, wouldn't you, that this simply could not happen again?

Sadly, it can and the council planners and their Framework Plan for Central Milton Keynes - as yet unrescinded - is the only excuse that the Homes & Communities Agency, still clinging leech-like to land in CMK, needs.

### Emotional

The densities pencilled in for B4.4, as in the previous failed plans mooted by developer Places for People and dubbed West End One, aspire to those of Hong Kong and can only create a dormitory development for commuters to London and Birmingham. A place that *'will do until we can buy somewhere civilised'*, for people with no emotional investment in our city.

Is that the kind of development that Milton Keynes needs or desires, in a prime central location? I think not.

'The densities pencilled in aspire to those of Hong Kong and can only create a dormitory development for commuters.'

Can we not simply have somewhere of which we can be proud? Somewhere up to a standard, not down to a price? Somewhere imaginative, not created simply to sweat the land assets for the treasury?

If you think the potential for another Hub opposite the existing one is bad enough, take a look at the Pre-application Development/Parameters Brief, drawn up for a fee by the council's own planners for the pension fund owners of Lloyds Court.

Excuse me, but is this not an inappropriate use of council employees? By all means allow the council to hire out its skills to outsiders for a fee but do not let their work be inevitably seen as the council's imprimatur for inappropriate development.

Instead, do a swap with Bedford or Northampton and get some distance so that no one's hands appear soiled.

As a consequence, the planners have

clearly felt obliged to interpret the framework plan as loosely as possible, to allow the potential footprint of Lloyds Court to expand massively over parking and roadways owned by (you guessed it) the Homes & Communities Agency, which is hanging around our city like a drooling Shylock sending Bill Sykes and his waifs and strays to do their dirty work.

### Remove

To put the potential size of a new Lloyds Court in perspective, the new footprint will extend the building line past the colonnades on Silbury Boulevard at the front (south side) and on the east Secklow Gate side and the north side.

On these two sides it will then go on to swallow the wide pavements, overpower the first row of parallel parking, gobble up the two-lane roadway, subsume the second row of parallel parking, the line of trees and, finally, demolish and forever remove the third row of parallel parking. Unbelievable.

So what are we all going to do about it? Urban Eden is lobbying hard and we are sensing some very welcome agreement from councillors in this. If you feel strongly, why not join us? It is free and you have no obligation to do anything.

Ultimately, I guess this will prove whether the honeymoon has ended with on-going nuptial bliss and the marriage is a success or not. Over to you, councillors.

Cheerio.



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