

Rail link towns set for a house price boom

HAPPY New Year... In this month's column I want to talk about some changes which will have a major impact on Milton Keynes and how property speculators can make a big killing. Or a big loss. But first a cautionary tale best summed up by the line: 'Be Careful What You Wish For'.

For years, residents along the old Marston Vale rail line linking Bedford and Bletchley via, among others, Millbrook, Ridgmont, Aspley Guise, Woburn Sands, Bow Brickhill and Fenny Stratford have called for it to be preserved. They liked the idea of their old Victorian line, brought into being by diktat of a former Duke of Bedford and an Act of Parliament. It is the reason Woburn Sands is so named. Upon hearing that his illustrious guests would alight at Hogsty End, the good Duke demanded its renaming as Woburn Sands. And so it was.

In recent years, the locals have campaigned hard for the line to remain open. Perhaps they fondly imagined it would continue to host what were effectively buses on rails, comprising one or two carriages travelling at the speed of a geriatric snail, mostly just taking their sons and daughters to and from their good schools in Bedford, and as infrequent as a reduction in fuel prices.

Their pleas have been heard. In almost exactly five years, by December 2017, the line will be electrified and be part of a re-

vised Varsity Line linking Oxford to Bedford and at some future date - when problems to do with the old line having been built on at St. Neots are resolved - on to Cambridge. Those same youngsters will be able to travel to the leading university of their choice from their doorstep.

However what perhaps they had not realised is that the line will come back into proper commercial use with a vengeance. Not only will it very regularly host 90mph trains, all of them making the level of noise and vibration associated with 90mph trains, but it will also be used throughout each and every night to haul heavy sea-freight containers from Southampton to the West Midlands on trains up to perhaps a mile long.

Sadly for those who might plan to protest, the bleeding-heart carbon-apostles alone will almost certainly ensure that any objections to this will fall on largely deaf ears. And while property prices in areas next to the line may suffer here, in other parts of Milton Keynes they are likely to soar.

Take Bletchley for instance. The old rail flyover will be brought out of mothballs and east-west trains will once again travel west to Oxford, Bristol and Wales, avoiding London, and east to Bedford and eventually Cambridge. Passengers will also be able to travel north-south to Euston or Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow, making

Bletchley a major interchange once more.

I propose that as part of these major changes Bletchley Station is renamed. Let's face it; Bletchley is possibly the ugliest word in the English language - someone once told me it sounds somewhat like the noise one's pet makes when it eats something that perhaps it shouldn't. So I propose the station is renamed Milton Keynes South (for Bletchley/Station X).

I learned recently that Winston Churchill, when Prime Minister in the Second World War, would regularly travel from London to Bletchley in a special rail car secretly attached to the rear of scheduled services just before departure. He would slip off the train unseen at a siding at Bletchley and disappear down a secret tunnel to his flat at Station X, Bletchley Park. And no one outside a small group sworn to secrecy ever knew he was there.

Wolverton too, where once trains in supplicant echo of the practices of 17th-century stage-coaches would stop so that passengers could avail themselves of the comestibles at the station restaurant, can be renamed Milton Keynes North (for Wolverton).

This would give much-needed homogeneity to our station naming and bring us broadly into line with the styling of station names in cities such as Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool.

However, I suggest that the

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real property killings can be made at Winslow. Here, a new station - the old one is long sold and in private hands - will have some quite remarkable connectivity, possibly boosting house prices by 30 or even 40 per cent, according to one expert I have consulted.

As well as the revived East West route, Winslow will link with every rail route out of north London, including Paddington to South Wales, the West Coast Main Line, London-Sheffield and to Edinburgh, Marylebone to Birmingham via Banbury. Because of a new rail flyover to be constructed at Reading it will link with trains between Southampton and Oxford.

The only unanswered question is whether many of these trains will actually stop at Winslow. However I am certain that some will, making the quiet market town truly connected as never before. So estate agents at Winslow, gird your loins for the rush. Cheerio.

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English as a second language for many professionals can create difficulties for themselves and for those who are listening and trying to 'get the message'. East Europeans, for example, often confuse 'w' and 'v' which, when spoken at speed, plays havoc with fluency.

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● Cheryl Hawkins

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