

Victory is a triumph for people power

ONE of the aspects of Milton Keynes that make it unique is the way that the original planners skilfully blended ancient coaching towns like Stony Stratford into a modern grid-based city. And Stony Stratford really is a gem, with its successful High Street surviving intact in an age of Mary Portas-style rescue attempts elsewhere.

However a plan recently defeated by concerted public effort could have changed all that, destroying forever its mix of shops, service industries and old coaching inns such as the Cock and Bull and dumping a huge supermarket, like a black hole sucking the life out of the town, at its heart.

The attack was mounted on its weakest redoubt, Cofferidge Close, created by Milton Keynes Development Corporation in 1975 as a mixed-use facility of homes, offices and retail around an ancient orchard whose trees remained as silent fruit-bearing witnesses of a bygone age. It was designed to complement

the High Street's retail and employment offer, guaranteeing access to residents and property owners and increasing parking for visitors and tourists. It was to sit sympathetically within the surrounding conservation area.

In 1992 at the wind-up of MKDC, ownership transferred to Milton Keynes Parks Trust, which sold it into private hands. Cofferidge Close was sold again in 2005 after the purchaser's agents enquired of Milton Keynes Council planners regarding redevelopment of the site. The reply was that development for a large supermarket with residential accommodation above would be "difficult to achieve in a manner which would preserve or enhance the Conservation [Area] and maintain this valued public car parking and open space."

Nevertheless the owners persisted. In May 2010 they staged a public exhibition of plans and sowed the seed that Waitrose 'might' be

coming. In February 2011 they submitted their planning application and the fight by residents, businesses, the parish council and members of groups like Urban Eden began.

The scheme was to replace most existing buildings with one large supermarket 240 per cent larger than the existing one, clear all green space and trees, lose 64 parking spaces and privatise the public highway and parking. Over 300 public objections were recorded, most being that it was out of scale for the town, that a fourfold increase to 16 HGV movements a day could not be sustained in narrow medieval Silver Street and that it would destroy many businesses.

The town council formally objected and an ad hoc residents' group began to form, which became Save Cofferidge Close. World-class experts in traffic management, planning, safety, heritage, landscape and economic sustainability became involved. The original design had received national and international attention so an application was made to English Heritage for listing.

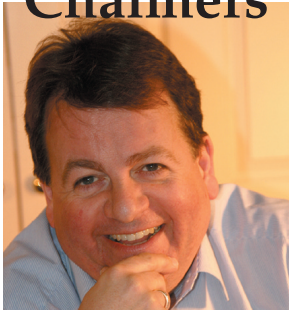
Work began on design alternatives and the big guns of citizen action were deployed. Each report was of such quality that the town council adopted and submitted them to Milton Keynes Council as technical underpinning for a formal objection to the application. Economic sustainability was peer reviewed through the University of Oxford's Said Business School, and the Open University and found to be methodologically sound.

In May last year the Secretary of State confirmed Grade II listing of 7-23 Silver Street, the town houses fronting the site's western boundary. The whole Close would have been listed but for the 'tinkering' it had suffered in the intervening 15 years.

In December the owners submitted a mainly cosmetic, revised application. A town meeting of more than 150 residents authorised the town council to oppose it and last month the council's case officer recommended refusal to the development control committee because of the size, scale and design of the proposal, the harm to Cofferidge Close as a heritage asset and the loss of an important community facility, namely a NHS dental practice.

Shockingly, the officer omitted any mention of traffic and parking and economic sustainability. Speeches were made by the public, ward and town councillors before the committee unanimously rejected the application. If ever an example was required of true people power surely this is it. We can rejoice that Stony Stratford is saved. Until the next time... Cheerio.

Theo Chalmers



Theo Chalmers is managing director of Verve Public Relations and chair of Urban Eden.

www.urbaneden.org www.vervepr.co.uk
e: t.chalmers@vervepr.co.uk
Tel: 01908 275271

Letters to the Editor

Why we back Riverside plan

CHARLES SMITH

Regional chairman, North and East Bedfordshire branch, Federation of Small Businesses

WE at the Federation of Small Businesses support the Riverside North Planning Application, at least in principle.

The vibrancy of a town centre directly affects the local economy. While a small town centre, Bedford offers a myriad of independent retailers, many of whom are struggling to compete in the current economic climate, particularly with nearby towns such as Milton Keynes and the growth in buying goods and services online.

The Riverside North

development will help bring new life into the town centre by better connecting the river to the town and the town to the river. Increased footfall will be good news for the independent retailers, who should be encouraged to take space in the small units planned for the development.

Small businesses are the engine room of the economy, employing more than half of all private sector workers and contributing 50 per cent of UK GDP. We also trust that local developers, contractors and sub-contractors are given every opportunity to tender for the work.

Tesco contracts boost farmers

PETER SNODGRASS

Partner and agricultural specialist, Shakespeares

IN THE wake of the horsemeat scandal, longer-term supplier contracts are likely to become the norm as major retailers take a fresh look at their supply chain management and make change to working practices.

Tesco chief executive Philip Clarke made a commitment at the NFU conference in February to shorten supply chains and source more food directly from British farmers. Specifically, the retailer - the largest buyer of agricultural produce in the UK - promised that all suppliers would

be offered two-year contracts as a minimum. The farmers' union's food chain adviser Ruth Mason said the arrangement would give food producers the confidence to invest for the future.

The move to two-year contracts should be a very positive step for local farmers and food producers, many of whom have on occasions felt under pressure to accept less than favourable terms from major retailers. However, with the promise of working more directly with retailers in the future, some farmers may be new to such contractual arrangements and they could get caught out.

Globetrotter has fond memories of College days

FORMER students and staff members are joining the Milton Keynes College Alumni Association from all around the world.

The Association has been formed as part of the College's 30th-anniversary celebrations. No one has got in touch from further afield than Simon Keeping, a design student who left in 1995 and whose globetrotting has taken him to live in Australia via the private jet of legendary rock band Kiss.

Simon says: "I studied Design (BTEC Diploma in Design and a GNVQ advanced in design), really enjoyed the courses and found them to be my ideal first steps into my design career. At the time I didn't realise how lucky I was to have facilities like those at Milton Keynes College on my doorstep but looking back now I can really appreciate it and I can see the grounding it gave me to go on and continue learning."

After passing both design courses and a Higher National Diploma in Design, Simon

worked for a number of household named companies including Levi Strauss and Lotus before becoming Art Editor for a leading publisher. He helped to produce a number of large format luxury books for clients including Ferrari, Marco Pierre White, Diego Maradona, Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and Celtic Football Club.

"I was headhunted to work on another large format art book for the rock band Kiss," he says. "That meant going on the road with them around Canada and the United States, speaking regularly to them about the project, which was great fun."

Simon (pictured on the left) says he's delighted with the formation of the Alumni Association. "It's a really positive way of hopefully inspiring people now studying at the college," he says.

"I met my wife through work and I have had a wonderful and exciting career, all because I had the opportunity to study the one thing I wanted, design, at Milton Keynes College."



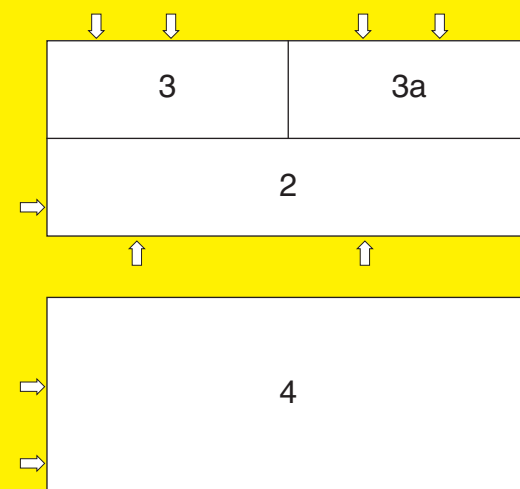
Access to the Alumni Association is available to previous students of Milton Keynes College or the Further Education Colleges at Wolverton and Bletchley.

To find out more, e-mail alumni@mkcollegealumni.co.uk or sign up at <https://alumni.mkcollege.ac.uk>

Twitter: @MKC_Alumni Facebook www.facebook.com/MKCollege

LinkedIn Search: Milton Keynes College Alumni.

Economical Warehouse and Industrial Space 14,100 to 46,740 to 60,840 sq. ft. Bletchley MK1 1JJ



2=14,700, 3=17,340, 3a=14,700, 4=14,100 sq ft
High bay; power and lighting; good access and parking



www.commercial-lynx.co.uk
info@commercial-lynx.co.uk