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Truly awful but 'Hub 2' plans will be back

OH DEAR, oh dear, oh dear... The legacy of inappropriate development of public land as formerly administered by both a council out of touch with public wants and needs and a defunct English Partnerships and its lap dog Milton Keynes Partnership drags on. Intractable problems remain, spread and grow and come back to haunt us.

Among those problems is the large plot of land opposite the Hub and Vizion in Central Milton Keynes, running down towards the station, known as B4. It is the last major undeveloped block in CMK and provides an effective gateway to the city for visitors coming by car or rail.

It would provide a perfect site for development which says something about the aspirations and ethos of the city we love. It might become the home of exciting, sexy and iconic architecture. Perhaps a new masterpiece by Renzo Piano, Frank Gehry or Zaha Hadid. I get excited thinking about it. But this is Milton Keynes and for a few years in the 1990s and early 2000s we lost the plot. During this lacuna in critical thinking, in 2004 plans were submitted to the council to build what is effectively The Hub

2 on the site. In 2008 outline planning permission was, outrageously, granted.

Barratt Homes has acquired part of this land and recently applied for certain reserved matters to be approved; 400 dwellings and 885 sq metres of A1, A2, A3 and B1 commercial space with roads, landscaping and car parking. These matters were, quite properly, referred to the council's Development Control Committee where elected councillors decided their fate.

Thankfully, our councillors have woken from their two-decade slumber and I hope that Urban Eden and its hundreds of supporters may have played a small part in administering the wake-up call. Gratifyingly, the committee rejected much of these reserved matter plans. However, their hands are effectively tied by the original outline consents which haunt us still, like Banquo's ghost.

For a developer, having outline planning permission is a bit like having permission to punch you in the face. A reserved matters application is a bit like them politely asking which side you would prefer the bruise. Sadly, there is not a 'no bruise' option.

In my view, the plans, with their 11-storey inward looking flats huddled up to Witan Gate and Avebury Boulevard mirror the depressing ugliness over the road. I can scarcely imagine any company planning to build something which will have passers-by eagerly awaiting its demolition for as long as it stands but my doubts that this is even feasible were tragically assuaged when I first saw the Hub.

In the latest application, it is particularly galling that the council's planners saw little wrong with the further narrowing of the boulevards and expansion of the building lines. They appeared to ignore the proposals flying in the face of the council's own CMK Development Framework as well as the inappropriate rejection of the long-established building ideals of CMK.

While we all 'enjoy' this brief flowering of government-assisted mortgages for first time buyers and a resurgence in the buy-to-let market, developers will be keen to throw up buildings as soon and as cheaply as possible.

Expect these plans to be back shortly. Tweaked yes but essentially still truly awful. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Cheerio.

Letters to the Editor

When freedom of expression becomes a criminal matter

TIM NORRIS

Woodfines Solicitors, via e-mail

THE Crown Prosecution Service has published guidelines for prosecutors in relation to the increasing number of complaints of crimes committed through communications via social media.

As the use of social media has risen, so has the number of criminal allegations. Police recorded 556 allegations in 2008 with 46 people charged. In December 2012 alone, officers recorded 4,908 allegations and charged 653 people.

The CPS is to concentrate on certain types of communications sent by social media:

- Credible threats of violence to the person or damage to property;
- Those that specifically target an individual and may constitute harassment or stalking;
- Breaches of a Court Order;
- Those that are grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false.

The CPS intends that the first three categories will be prosecuted robustly and will be perhaps easier to identify. The final category deals with the boundaries of social comment, which, however unpleasant, should not attract prosecution through the courts unless it goes beyond acceptable levels.

An example is the case of Paul Chambers, prosecuted for an angry tweet when he faced delays at Robin Hood Airport in South Yorkshire. The Lord

Chief Justice concluded that the message was not of a menacing character and allowed his appeal after Mr Chambers had been convicted by magistrates and lost a Crown Court appeal.

The tweeter simply vented his feelings without thinking any more of it. However, such an incident may cause problems for an employee whose employer may be less than impressed by their conduct, even if cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.

The test will be whether threats are credible. If they are not, an individual should not be prosecuted unless they form part of a campaign of harassment. Behaviour not considered to be harassment, a threat of violence or a breach of a court order can be regarded as communications which are grossly offensive, indecent, or false under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 or the Communication Act 2003. It is these which draw the greatest debate in relation to freedom of speech.

Social media generates hundreds of millions of communications every month. The European Convention on Human Rights protects not only speech which is well received and popular but also that which is offensive, shocking or disturbing.

Effectively, banter, jokes and offensive comments in common usage, which are frequently spontaneous, will have to be judged in context when considering whether they should proceed to prosecution.

Two years of uncertainty but now 42 jobs are secured

GARY COHEN

Managing Director, Cougar Accident Repair Centre
Via e-mail

THANKS to support from Luton Borough Council, Cougar Accident Repair Centre has been able to retain its 42-strong workforce in Luton.

The company's future was threatened when the council's new ring road scheme included part of Cougar's location in Crescent Road. There was a serious possibility that 42 jobs would be lost if the business was forced to close or relocate.

In what is a contracting sector for jobs, with many repair centres closing, it would have been very difficult for my staff to find equivalent jobs in the area.

However, with the support of the council, we

were able to identify some unoccupied council-owned premises. A major refurbishment of the site was required in order to bring it up to an acceptable standard from both an operational and environmental point of view.

Now we have moved into our new site behind the Shell petrol station on Eaton Green Road, Luton, less than two miles away from the previous location.

After nearly two years of uncertainty during which period the staff did not know if their jobs were safe, it is a relief to know that we have finally managed to secure them.

Now that we have certainty about the future we hope to be able to grow the business and with a little luck we might be able to take on more staff.



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club Red

club Red PRICING GRID

	Seasonal price
Adult	£540 inc. VAT
Over 65	£396 inc. VAT
Under 21	£396 inc. VAT
Under 18	£252 inc. VAT
Under 7	£60 inc. VAT
Unisex	£108 inc. VAT

club Red is the fastest growing area in the stadium with access to the Ballroom and bars with seats on the half way line directly behind the dug-outs. It offers Premiership hospitality at a fraction of the cost of a Premiership season ticket.

Right from the time you enter **club Red** via the VIP entrance at the hotel reception you will experience a premier matchday out at MK Dons. Doors open early, meaning you can watch the early televised live Sky or ESPN match on our big screens. You can enjoy an optional roast dinner, maybe fish and chips or just a bar snack.

All members receive a teamsheet, complimentary tea and coffee at half-time and can enjoy licensed betting facilities. Then after the final whistle the Man of the Match presentation takes place in the Ballroom with another live televised match shown on Saturdays on our big screen.

club Gold



A private club situated on Level 2 of the West Stand, adjacent to the pitchside bar with the best seats in the house on the Directors' Balcony for just £29.00 ex VAT per game. (Based on a minimum of 23 league matches)

club Gold Members enjoy:

- a light snack pre-match, a complimentary programme, teamsheet at all league games, and half-time tea and coffee.
- admission to Cup games and friendly matches meaning members enjoyed eight free games in 2012-13 as part of their package.

New memberships can be reserved now by calling 01908 622884.

club Platinum



Our premium matchday hospitality offers a fabulous three course pre-match meal in the pitchside restaurant with premier seats on the Directors' Balcony for just £69.00 ex VAT per game. (Based on a minimum of 23 league matches)

club Platinum offers:

- the opportunity to reserve from two to ten seats.
- a splendid three course meal for all 23 home Football League matches.
- seats on the Directors' Balcony for cup matches as well as League games.
- a listing in the programme
- the stylish surroundings of the pitchside bar with one complimentary parking space for every four packages purchased.
- programmes and teamsheets are included along with licensed betting facilities.
- networking events throughout the season.

Reserve now by calling 01908 622884.

club Black



club Black offers the ultimate in private hospitality with executive boxes for ten people situated on both Levels 3 and 4 of the West Stand. Boxes are available for the season for less than £44 per head ex VAT. (Based on 23 League matches for 10 people)

Your box includes:

- ten reserved luxury padded seats in front of each Executive Box and access to all 23 home npower Football League games, home cup and selected home friendly matches.
- three car parking spaces
- advertising board and company logo featured in our matchday programme, on the big screen and on a small board in front of each box.
- hostess drinks service with half-time complimentary tea / coffee / biscuits.
- a 40" large screen TV, complimentary programmes and teamsheets.
- seasonal and match by match food options at extra cost
- hostess service and the best view of the game.

Call 01908 622884 to reserve your box for the 2013-14 season.