

# Theo Chalmers



## Lobbying makes the right connection

IT IS the season of mellow fruitfulness and so this month my column will be both fruitful and mellow. I hope.

Milton Keynes, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire Councils have been awarded money from Broadband Delivery UK, the government body that is spending almost £0.5 billion of public money on next-generation access to superfast broadband and signed a contract with BT Openreach to make it a reality.

Milton Keynes has, until recently, suffered from the paradox of being one of Europe's newest cities while being saddled with among the most Stone Age broadband internet access in the world. Parts of Milton Keynes had no internet access at all in 2004 and coverage was poor across a swathe from Shenley Lodge and Loughton, through Great Linford, Willen, and Middleton to Old Farm Park.

Where ADSL - asymmetric digital subscriber line, basically broadband through a telephone line - is used, the routing of cables around the grids meant very long runs into the estates and ADSL is distance-limited. This discrepancy and its consequences have inspired much debate and begat lobby groups such as the Milton Keynes Broadband Action Group.

While the layout of Milton Keynes included ducting and cabling for television, it lacked the capacity to be upgraded to digital. Cable provider ntl - which merged to become part of the Virgin Media Group in 2006 - approached MKBAG to trial a new wireless broadband solution that ultimately

would have provided 10Mbps symmetric DSL (with upload speeds equal to download). The trial was a success and the feedback from MKBAG members invaluable but ntl's financial issues effectively scuppered the project.

MKBAG and Milton Keynes Council lobbied BT hard to trial the best form of fibre optic connectivity in the city and three years ago this was accomplished in limited areas connected to the Bradwell Abbey exchange.

The system is called Fibre to the Premises: glass fibre cable runs to the user's premises and delivers a guaranteed download minimum speed of 100Mbps. BT has also developed the cheaper-to-install Fibre to the Cabinet, which most know as BT Infinity. This involves fibreoptic cable to above-ground green boxes, using the existing copper cable for the 'last mile'.

However, when FTTC is the option of choice, it is vital that that last mile really is over copper cables and much of Milton Keynes used aluminium which, although adequate for speech, is useless for data and meant many phone lines could not use Infinity or even ADSL.

Successful lobbying persuaded BT to replace aluminium for copper in affected estates such as Monkston Park. However, despite apparent reluctance, BT was also persuaded to extend its costly fibre trial beyond Bradwell Abbey exchange and to bring forward the fibre enablement of Woburn Sands and other exchanges.

Another anomaly is that national planning laws for new estates did not make any requirement for the builders to talk to BT nor to build the ducting for fibre cables - hence some shocking 'not spots' in new developments in Broughton and Walton Grange. Now a newly awakened council insists on builders making provision for the fastest available broadband and new estates will be enabled from day one.

The actual figures are secret but those who have studied the subject believe that the take-up of fibre once the infrastructure is in place is very high. BT has been encouraged to continue its roll-out here and appears to have prioritised Milton Keynes.

It is likely that in the next six months, Milton Keynes will be in excellent shape with its fibre cable infrastructure and BT will be profiting from the take-up rates. However, there will still be some 'not spots' and we all need to continue lobbying the council to maintain progress.

BT might be justified in claiming we are now at about 95 per cent fibre-enabled. If you are in the 5pc however, that is not good enough. Efforts must be redoubled to ensure that some 5,000 houses are not left with appalling connectivity. In theory, this is where the new BDUK money comes in. We shall see.

All in all, however, it is very good news and Milton Keynes is now well on its way to becoming the best connected city in the UK. Once again, Milton Keynes leads the way for lesser cities to follow.

Cheerio.

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## Housing market: new figures show bright prospects

RISING demand and more agreed sales means the recent momentum in house price growth has been maintained in August, normally a month which sees a downturn.

According to Hometrack's monthly national housing survey, prices rose by 0.4 per cent, following a 0.3pc increase in July. Demand continued to grow, up 1.1pc on the back of improving market sentiment.

Hometrack reported that house prices grew by 1.8pc over the past 12 months - the biggest annual rise for more than three years. Key market indicators such as time on market and the proportion of the asking price achieved show underlying market conditions are at levels not seen for six years. The time to sell at 8.1 weeks is the lowest since November 2007 while the discount to asking price at 5.4pc is the lowest since September 2007.

The prospects remain promising so long as the outlook for the economy and mortgage rates remains unchanged. Low supply will keep an upward pressure on prices.

### 'Lazy UK business owners'

Small business owners in the UK work fewer hours than their counterparts in the USA, Germany, France, Netherlands or Spain, according to research by insurance provider Hiscox. It found that UK entrepreneurs worked an average 37.6 hours a week compared with an average of over 41 hours.

The average annual holiday taken by UK entrepreneurs was 21.4 days, the highest apart from Germany. The Federation of Small Businesses responded that its members were putting in long hours in response to renewed confidence and the report did not reflect this so was not helpful.

### Attitude to Risk

Research by one of the world's foremost behavioural finance experts has found that the UK has the second highest loss aversion ratio in Europe and is the seventh most loss-averse

country in the global mutual fund industry. The study, commissioned by Deutsche Asset and Wealth Management Global Financial Institute, found that emotion, and thereby behavioural science, goes some way to explain fund flows in nearly all countries. It added that investors who are more wary of losses are more likely to increase volatility of fund flows.

The key point is that for most clients, understanding risk and accepting short-term market fluctuations is vital in building a long-term strategy to achieve financial planning goals. It only really comes about through education and experience.

### FTSE to break 7,000

The FTSE 100 could reach 7,300 in 2014 as the UK economic recovery gathers pace, according to investment specialist Old Mutual. It expects the FTSE to trade between 6,500 and 7,300 as better weather, economic data, employment and consumption figures make consumers and corporates feel more positive about spending money. With the UK market trading on 12 times earnings compared to its long-term average of 14 times, valuations of UK companies are attractive, particularly on domestic UK stocks geared into the nascent and strengthening UK economic recovery.

Interesting times lie ahead but it is important to take a balanced view and not become carried away when the markets go up nor panic when we hit a period of volatility. Longer-term objectives and strategy should remain uppermost in our mind.

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# BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE!

**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, so 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, tea and coffee at half-time and can enjoy licensed betting facilities. After the final whistle the Man of the Match presentation takes place with another live televised match shown on Saturdays on our big screen.

**club Red** members can take advantage of the monthly interest free easy payment plan with adult prices starting at just £45 per month over 12 months; Concession at £33 per month for Over 65s; Under 21s at £33 per month; Under 18s £21 per month and £5 per month for Under 7s.

**club Red PRICING GRID**

	Price per month*	Seasonal price
Adult	£45	£540
Over 65	£33	£396
Under 21	£33	£396
Under 18	£21	£252
Under 7	£5	£60
Unisex	£9	£108

\*Prices based on 12 monthly payments.

### 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.

**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.

Prices start from £64 per month (£768 for the season) – reserve now on 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. A seasonal package costs £1598 ex VAT per seat.

**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 – £10,000 ex VAT for the season.

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.