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Battle lines drawn in fight to save town's heritage

IN APRIL I wrote a column headlined 'Victory is a triumph for people power' where I detailed how public action had helped to stop plans to redevelop Cofferridge Close as a large supermarket shoehorned into lovely Stony Stratford. Following successful efforts to persuade the Secretary of State to confirm Grade II listing of 7-23 Silver Street - the town houses fronting the western boundary of the site and contiguous in design - Milton Keynes Council's development control committee eventually unanimously rejected the plans.

However, I somewhat portentously predicted that those plans might return and, indeed, on the very last day available for

appeal - in what the owners must have hoped would be a knockout blow to the solar plexus of the Save Cofferridge Close campaigners - an appeal was filed with the Secretary of State. Readers interested to read the original column can visit www.urbaneden.org and find the headline quoted above in our Press Coverage section.

The reasons given by the council for rejecting the application - and which were presumably the ones they felt could best be defended in any appeal - were:

- The size, scale, form and design of the development.
- The harm to Cofferridge Close as a heritage asset due to demolition of a large section;

- The loss of an important community facility - a NHS dental practice - contrary to policy C2 of the Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011.

The campaigners would, I am assured, also have liked to have seen traffic (the appalling prospect of several humongous juggernauts squeezing down medieval Silver Street every single day), parking (involving destruction of ancient apple trees in the existing parking areas) and economic sustainability (including the inevitable commercial destruction of other businesses in Stony Stratford) given as causes for rejection, too. However they were not and the council is now precluded from bringing up any new reasons, no matter how significant, at the appeals stage.

We do not yet know what grounds the owners will use for their appeal. However, it is evident that they are prepared to spend eye-watering sums of money on it. It is already scheduled to last longer than a week and is likely to cost our own council tens if not hundreds of thousands of pounds too. So we are where we are. Or we were.

The latest news is that both the Save Cofferridge Close campaign and Stony Stratford Town Council, also original objectors to the scheme, have been made parties to the appeal. So now they both have equal status to the appellant and Milton Keynes Council as the local planning authority.

On the downside, this is a somewhat onerous burden. Both new parties will have to conduct their case by the rules, which include presenting full Statements of Case and Proofs of Evidence as well as providing full-time attendance at the inquiry and being subject to cross-examination by the owner's no doubt Rottweiler-like barristers.

The upside, however, is very good news. Both new parties to the appeal have been granted Rule 6 status. This means they can, if they can convince the inspector of relevance, introduce new evidence different from the main parties: evidence that Milton Keynes Council is precluded from submission.

Please, take it from me: this is not only very significant, it will transform the hearing into a real battle of David versus Goliath with no holds barred.

Meanwhile, as the 'cold war' heats up, there are already signs that the owners are looking to justify their appeal with new research. Word reaches these ears that a telephone survey is being conducted in the area, by a known firm, which refuses to divulge who it is acting for.

It is asking participants where they do their main grocery shop; how they get there; why they go there; how much they spend and whether they go home afterwards or shop elsewhere locally.

They also were keen to know whether interviewees do a top-up grocery shop; what else they do in Stony Stratford; where they buy furniture, white goods, computers,

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 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

- Flashback: Theo's view in his column earlier this year.

'When the appeal starts, we will see a battle royal... of David versus Goliath with no holds barred.'

clothing and DIY; why they choose to shop there.

I have no doubt that, when the appeal starts some time after March next year, we will see a battle royal. Frankly, my money is still on the good people of Stony Stratford and the good sense of the council.

If we all give in to the bullies of Cofferridge Close, I doubt that Stony Stratford will continue as one of the last surviving examples of a flourishing village high street. Indeed, if retail guru Mary Portas really wants to see how it should be done, she needs to tap her heels together three times, hail a cab and say "There is no place like Stony Stratford".

Cheerio.

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 globe-trotting 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."



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.

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