

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

A new year... let's relight the visionary fire

WELCOME to another new year. Congratulations to you all... you made it... and so, just, did Milton Keynes. I know that I go on about the place rather a lot but I, like the hundreds of Urban Eden members, rather like it.

I remember the first time I came here. It was to pitch for the public relations contract of the James Hunt Racing Centre. This of course, is now Daytona, itself a client for many years. Anyway, to get back to the story; when we arrived at the site on a bright sunny day, a steam roller was smoothing off the still hot tarmac on the circuit and whips of steam were twirling slowly into the bright, clear air. Somehow that view, with the ravishing smell of hot tarmac, has stayed with me; somehow signifying a special moment.

We walked around the part of the circuit that had set firm and I remember thinking how extraordinary that such a facility could be right in the centre of this place, a brave new city that has such circuits in it.

The then owner had no finished buildings on site so he kindly took us to The Point for a coffee and a chat about his plans. We did not win the contract for the launch of JHRC, and sadly that business failed. I am too modest to ascribe one to the other but I feel that I got something far more valuable that day; an introduction to this most extraordinary place.

I found a city where you could be in the very heart of town and see only

trees. A place where pedestrians and most cyclists were safely separated from motor traffic on redways; where houses were set far back from road edges and where traffic moved fast, freely and can be parked easily.

It was so unlike anywhere I had ever been in the UK and even a step change away from those other new towns; most of them being a bit like the Curate's egg... good in parts.

In contrast, Milton Keynes had somehow magically got it just right.

As a consequence of that impactful first impression, 15 years ago, in September 1998 I bought an office building and moved the company here. I myself moved here to live a few years later. However it was then that I began to notice that the city was changing and not for the better, so just over seven years ago, in November 2006, I founded Urban Eden.

I have often wondered what confluence of judgement, luck, planning, government intent, bloody mindedness and sheer bravado conspired to get Milton Keynes so right. How did those originally in charge obtain such vision and

pursue it through thick and thin? Take thecentre:mk as an example. When it was originally planned as that mad idea, a large shopping centre in the middle of a field in the middle of rural Buckinghamshire, we did not have the well established precedents we have now to justify it. There were no large regional shopping centres and only town centres to compare it with.

Yes, the USA had its strip malls but not everything that works there, works here. Look at American football. Or Twinkies. Or twerking.

Even Healey and Baker, the original retail agents responsible for it, were understandably cautious. Apparently they recommended that it be built in staggered stages. That we start with 200,000 square feet and if successful slowly expand to 500,000sq ft, perhaps years down the line.

"Sod that," those brave men at the Milton Keynes Development Corporation might have said. "Let's double the size and build it all. Right now." And astonishingly they did. And they were right. Suddenly 1,000,000 square feet of retail reared out of the mud and as

we know was an astonishing success from the day Margaret Thatcher declared it open.

The building itself was no throw-away idea either as its recent grade II listing demonstrates. It was inspired by both architect Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall in Chicago and the visionary plan form of a secondary school at Hunstanton in Norfolk designed by Alison and Peter Smithson. And, with its tinted glass, natural lighting, painted steel columns, travertine marble floors, wide aisles and exotic planting, who doesn't love it?

So what am I trying to say here? I suppose, put simply, it's this. When we had those people at the helm prepared not only to carefully plan, develop and complete their vision against all opposition and obstacles, this place worked - and works - astonishingly well.

Since then, sadly, we have had no one to 'own' or fight for that vision and Milton Keynes has suffered. Sometimes, as in the case of 'city streets', permanently blocked off 'nub ends' of grid roads, or the Hub, it has suffered egregiously.

But I am convinced it is not too late to relight the visionary fire. All we need is someone in a position of power and influence to put their head above the parapet and rekindle the old battlecry that 'only the best will do'.

Who, I wonder, will rise to that challenge in 2014?

Happy new year and cheerio.

DON'T MISS IT!

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Unisex	£9	£108

*Prices based on 12 monthly payments.

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.

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- 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.

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club Platinum offers:

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- 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.

club Black



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Your box includes:

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- 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.

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