

# Theo Chalmers

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## City needs, and deserves, a new icon

I RECENTLY spoke at Milton Keynes Council's Development Control Committee on behalf of Urban Eden to oppose the outline planning permission for The Point in Midsummer Boulevard. The building's owners, Hammersons, wished to demolish it and redevelop the site for me-too retail and some unspecified leisure use.

I was not opposing its demolition per se - after all Hammersons has already done a very effective job in managing its

obsolescence. For years, its famous red lights have been extinguished, its steel pyramid and glass ziggurat have been rusting and rotting. To attempt to save it now would have been the equivalent of Charles Saatchi desperately attempting to preserve his £50,000 investment in Damien Hirst's dead shark by removing the rotting corpse and stretching its skin over a fibreglass frame. But, as ever, I digress.

So why, I was asking, are the

planners recommending approval of what is essentially nothing? And, despite early indications of support from councillors to my noting that the outline application was contrary to the following policies NPPF paragraphs 60, 61, 64, 69 and 135; Core Strategy policies CS7, CS11 and CS19 and Local Plan policies D2, CC8, CC9 and HE5, I noted that following a short break that support had wavered.

Hammersons then won the day by seven votes to three. I suspect

this is because, despite my valid points, councillors may have learned that without outline planning permission, the owners could have started demolition the following day leaving an ugly hole in the heart of Milton Keynes and with it, they could not.

Yet all is not lost. The outline planning permission comes hedged around with much that we should be grateful to the planners for. For instance, Hammersons - or whoever they now sell the more valuable site to - must come up with a detailed Design Code which must come before the development control committee again. And demolition cannot commence until a contractor to rebuild whatever is eventually approved has been appointed (Clause 5.8).

Interestingly, the planners state this reason for requiring the Design Code: "To ensure that the development... suitably addresses its location at a prominent location within Central Milton Keynes, the setting of the grade II listed shopping building and to ensure that the development is of sufficient quality and standing to offset the loss of The Point, which is a landmark building for MK."

Which is all well and good, but this is where I get a little animated.

It seems that everybody hates the indicative building which is a very poor pastiche of the original. Is this really the best that the company that created Selfridges in the Bull Ring, Birmingham can do? Or is Milton Keynes not worth the effort, Hammersons? I confess that in my presentation to the DCC I may have, with apologies, used the term 'pile of steaming poo' to illustrate exactly how I feel about their sorry offering.

It seems to me that the site of The Point is not just important; it is actually at the very centre of our city. When the centre is completely developed, it will literally be at its very heart; its nub point.

The existing building, although less than 30 years old, was truly iconic. It was Britain's first multiplex and the first multi-leisure complex of its type in Europe. Lit up at night, it



● Vision: Owner Hammersons' plans for The Point site.

could be seen as a beacon from miles away, including everyone travelling on the M1, calling people to that new 'dream in a field'... Milton Keynes.

If anything is to replace it, surely it must be iconic too? Now I've read naysayers claiming that you can't set out to build an icon. What tosh. Tell that to Frank Gehry architect of the Guggenheim, Bilbao or Renzo Piano, architect of the Shard, London. An icon is what we need and an icon is what Milton Keynes deserves. If it needs to be tall so that it can once again be seen from the M1, over the more recently completed Xscape building and theatre district, then so be it. It has its own

multi-storey carpark, which is not being demolished, so it's in an ideal position to 'go tall'.

The outline plans talk vaguely about shopping and leisure but let's look at what Milton Keynes really needs. We have huge mid-week demand for hotel rooms and there is no five star hotel and conference centre in our city. Or perhaps we could have some wholly new concept of a wild-ride indoor theme park (well, this is wet and cold Britain, not Florida).

But whatever we get please, please, please let's have some creative minds coming up with some exciting ideas.

Here's me crossing all my fingers. Cheerio.

From student to teacher in just three years...

### College welcomes back ex-Student of the Year



WHEN College student Melanie Bourke finished her A-Levels in 2010 and went on to study at university, little did she know she would be returning three years later to a teaching position with on-the-job training.

Melanie studied A-Levels at the College's sixth form (then named MK6) before going on to study Law at Keele University. She earned an impressive 2:1 grade but then decided to change direction.

She felt inspired to become a teacher. Instead of studying the popular PGCE qualification (a one-year, bolt-on teacher training course), Mel is benefiting from funding provided by Milton Keynes College, receiving on-the-job training and earning a competitive salary all at the same time. "My once teachers are now my colleagues and even after three years, occasionally I do have to remind myself I am not their pupil."

Mel teaches a full timetable of lessons including GCSE English, A-Level Law and English and Access - the qualification for adult learners who want to progress to university. She has a busy programme of work which includes planning for and delivering classes alongside the Head of the Department, Duncan Lovell.

"It's great to teach the students with Duncan as it means I can watch how he works and I can pick up the techniques I need to master," she says. "It also means I'm being observed so I feel confident I'm putting into practice all I'm being taught with the security of Duncan's expertise."

Duncan and the academic department are

delighted to welcome Mel to the team. As a previous winner of the College's prestigious Student of the Year award in 2010 and as a student ambassador and mentor at university, Mel promises to bring valuable characteristics and skills to the department.

"Mel is a real asset to the College," says Duncan. "Her case is particularly special as we have seen her move full circle from studying her A-Levels to starting her career with us."

It is really important for people to realise there are many different routes into the teaching profession. "I would encourage anyone who is interested in becoming a teacher regardless of their qualifications to apply for a position with us," Duncan adds. "We do not solely recruit people who have gone through the conventional teaching route as we can offer funding to train on-the-job while working. We look for passionate people who are dedicated to becoming the best teachers they can be."

On the subject of how the students feel about her being an ex-student at the College, she laughs. "I think it's earned me a lot of respect. The students can see that with hard work, success can be achieved. Apart from that, they're all dying to know how old I am... it might ruin the illusion!"

If like Mel, you aspire to become a teacher, contact the People Services department at Milton Keynes College to talk you through career options. Call 01908 684444 or e-mail [info@mkcollege.ac.uk](mailto:info@mkcollege.ac.uk)

Access to the Alumni Association is available to previous students of Milton Keynes College or the Further Education Colleges at Wolverton and Bletchley. e-mail [alumni@mkcollegealumni.co.uk](mailto:alumni@mkcollegealumni.co.uk) or sign up at <https://alumni.mkcollege.ac.uk>

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