

# 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 blight on the face of a dear friend

IN MARCH I had a private meeting with co-owners of thecentre:mk Hermes, town planners Turley and architects Leslie Jones. They told me that I was the first to see plans for a new multi-storey car park next to John Lewis. I think I was meant to be flattered and thus melt into acquiescence. And at first I was and I did. However, a question I asked at that meeting, which was not properly answered, came back to haunt me.

Why would they waste £30 million on a new car park when, according to their own experts when they applied to demolish Secklow Gate bridge two years earlier, there is easily enough parking around thecentre:mk? Surface parking is over capacity and under utilised, says *Transport Assessment Secklow Gate, Planning Application 12/0174/2FULEIS thecentre:mk August 2012*, by Waterman Transport & Development Ltd. The loss of 46 spaces was insignificant, they argued, because customers could use some of the 1,166 spaces within 400 metres or a five-minute walk that are unoccupied at peak times.

The two multi-storey car parks - in the Food Centre and next to Milton Keynes Theatre - are not only free of charge but extremely under-utilised. So is there an ulterior, undeclared motive? Surprise, surprise, it appears there is.

It seems the multi-storey car park is a 'stalking horse' for rather more radical and arguably less popular changes. Could two of these changes be demolition of the Food Centre multi-storey car

park and additional development around the listed shopping building? If so, it seems they have not thought it through properly. For instance, the Food Centre car park has 550 spaces compared to 1,412 spaces in the proposed new one. And although the new one is 256 per cent larger, it has less than 25pc of the lift capacity - the Food Centre car park has seven 33-person lifts while only three 17-person lifts are proposed in the new one. A people log-jam beckons.

But don't worry - there will be no cars in the new car park anyway. Because motorists will be unable to get in via a newly three-way traffic-lit junction on the busy single-carriageway, no grid road access, bus-clogged Marlborough Gate.

And what of the other potential changes? The Design and Access Statement reveals much: "PHASE TWO: Restaurant/Leisure & Residential.

"This component could further wrap the car park and activate the southern frontage. As an alternative to Phase One this proposal illustrates an extension to the Midsummer Boulevard "infill flank" to deliver deeper units, meeting current tenant requirements...to deliver a viable critical mass of new space from the outset."

Readers may recall that I dealt with elements of this stealth proposal to narrow Midsummer Boulevard East at the Design Workshop which I attended earlier this year. Suffice to say, I felt like a

potential King's sailor discovering a shilling at the bottom of his pint - i.e. railroaded, to mix my transport-related metaphors.

Note also that in the DAS the Food Centre is shown as part of both phases of the 'Future Development Potential'. Bizarrely, its multi-storey is not mentioned as suitable to accept displaced cars during construction of the proposed new multi-storey car park. The theatre multi-storey and the Hermes-owned Secklow Gate car park are both cited and both within 500 metres yet the car park at the Food Centre (also within 500 metres) is not mentioned.

What, I wonder, could have caused this omission?

The transport assessment by Waterman shows some rather fanciful conclusions. For instance, "the Development would result in a generally negligible effect on traffic flows and junction operation, though Marlborough Gate would experience minor adverse effects".

So the traffic queuing to get into the car park's essentially sole entrance, fatally blocking a single carriageway used by most of the buses in Central Milton Keynes, would cause 'minor' effects? Oh, please...

In any event, it does not comply with the Parking Strategy for Central Milton Keynes adopted in November last year, which speaks against "meeting unfettered, unsustainable demand". Indeed, it became somewhat transparent during my meeting at the thecentre:mk that the

true intent includes establishing signage across Central Milton Keynes directing all shoppers to the new multi-storey, thus dragging them away from retail rival Intu Milton Keynes.

Now while this may be the perfectly normal, self-serving, dystopian behaviour by your average corporation, we must ask whether forcing motorists through the city centre to literally the hardest place to get to - it is not connected to the nearest grid road at V8 Marlborough Street - really serves Milton Keynes. I say not.

A further aim of the Parking Strategy is "to maintain the economic vitality of Central Milton Keynes as a place to shop, work and visit, while recognising parking management as a tool... to promote a shift to more sustainable modes."

For a decade Milton Keynes Council has made an annual policy decision that additional off-street parking is unnecessary or undesirable in Central Milton Keynes. Once again the proposed multi-storey car park fails. I doubt that the £30 million investment could even be recouped given that the new multi-storey would have to charge VAT and compete with ground level parking around the building which does not.

I again ask the question: Why would they waste £30 million when according to their own experts, when applying to demolish Secklow Gate bridge two years before, there is easily enough parking around thecentre:mk?

Cheerio.

HAVE YOUR SAY  
IN BUSINESS MK

e-mail  
news@businessmk.co.uk

the  
stables

The Laine Dankworth Centre  
WAVENDON, MILTON KEYNES



The Stables has a great reputation as one of the area's premier venues for a wide range of corporate and private uses. Our dedicated event team and highly experienced technical crew will ensure your event runs smoothly with the highest levels of service.

- Free parking for up to 250 cars
- On-site catering facilities
- Within easy reach of major roads and rail

For more information - please contact:  
The Development Office  
Tel: 01908 280815  
Email: Development@stables.org  
www.stables.org



Season 2014/15 seats now on sale!

## A SEASON TICKET FOR BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT

**club Red** club Red offers Premiership hospitality at a fraction of the cost of a Premiership season ticket.

Ideal for growing your business... or just watching the game in style!

Secure your seat now by calling 01908 622884 or email [commercial@mkdons.com](mailto:commercial@mkdons.com) or visit [mkdons.com](http://mkdons.com)

