

# All the characteristics of a Clochemerle farce

I'D LIKE to send you all into what our American cousins like to call 'the holiday season' with a smile on your face. Thus this month's column seeks to shed light on the frankly risible activities of those determined to add a new multi-storey car park to thecentre:mk.

I wrote about this in October, describing the owners' thinly veiled attempt to extend their listed shopping building under cover of offering the people of Milton Keynes a car park. Recently, however, they appear to have totally lost the plot. Indeed, their efforts have put one local challenger of planning and transport matters, David Stabler, in mind of Gabriel Chevallier's famous French novel Clochemerle, which was adapted as a TV series by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson in the 1970s. It is an analogy that appeals to me also.

Clochemerle deals with the confrontation of secular and religious forces in a small French village in Beaujolais. The eruptions begin when the socialist mayor decides that he wants to leave behind a monument to his administration's achievements. He takes as his model the ancient Romans, who were famous for two things: hygiene and noble edifices. He decides to unite the two concepts by constructing a public urinal in the centre of town. There is one problem, however. The chosen location is next to the village church, and this outrages the traditionally minded villagers.

Substitute the secular mayor and his urinal with Hermes and partner Australian Super as misguided developers wanting to erect a monumental multi-storey car park to consolidate their commercial triumphs. Their efforts are being opposed by a growing band of those defending the concept of the design of Central Milton Keynes, the grade II listed shopping building and the free movement of traffic on Marlborough Gate. Perhaps we see in this stand-off similarities to the farcical goings on in

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Clochemerle and the disputes about it.

For those who think I am being a little unfair, you may not be aware that Hermes has now submitted five separate application forms and just cannot seem to handle the basics of what is a fairly simple planning application for a big box with empty floors and a few ramps. Because of protests from third parties, they have now finally been forced to notify the adjoining landowners, something they neglected to do, even though they want to use their land for access and external works.

Both the Parks Trust, which looks after the city's green spaces, and Milton Keynes Development Partnership, responsible for promoting the development of the borough's land assets, took active part in recent seminars about the future of Midsummer Boulevard, which I, Hermes and Australian Super also

attended, but neither the Parks Trust nor MKDP were consulted about their car park plans. No wonder that both landholders are at best critical and now seem totally opposed to the plans. MKDP chief executive Charles Macdonald has bluntly offered his opinion about what should happen: "The proposed stand-alone car park on this site should be withdrawn by the applicants, or refused."

Not only did Hermes/AS not consult with key stakeholders but its architects do not seem to know exactly what it is they have designed. Each of the five application forms proposes a different number of parking spaces to be built, ranging from 1,344 to 1,418; a difference of 74 spaces or over five per cent. How can they 'lose' 74 parking spaces?

They have also had to increase the number of disabled spaces from 57 to 85

because their first 'go' offered less than the 6pc required. I wonder how much they are being paid for their lackadaisicality, if that is a word.

And then there are the pigeons. Rather, the potential pigeons and potential pigeon roosts. Thousands of them.

The four elevations of the car park are designed to be clad with nearly 4,500 coloured anodised box panels. The key word here is box. Now while this may sound excitingly different to some, to others it is an affront to the minimalist listed building which it will adjoin.

The outrage does not end there. At a public meeting the designer was asked whether the facade would attract roosting pigeons, for whom the boxes would appear to offer perfect hospitality, and what they might do to obviate this. Each panel could, theoretically, provide a roost for a nuclear pigeon family. 4,500

purpose-made pigeon roosts and the resultant pigeon poop from up to 18,000 pigeons inside a structure full of vulnerable cars, is perhaps a disaster even Hermes/AS might wish to avoid.

The architects have gone away and thought about this. Is their solution alternative cladding? No, it's Optical Bird Gel, developed by a scientist in Korea. The gel gives the impression to bird brains that it is on fire. It would be added to little dishes, as many as 4,500 of them, placed where birds would otherwise nest, roost or hang around cooing (perhaps it's not roosting dishes they need, but roosting dishes... I digress).

According to the manufacturers, if the birds are nesting you need dishes every four to six inches, for roosting birds ten-12 inches between each dish and finally, if the birds are loafing (their words) 18-20 inches between each dish. So how does this gel age and for how long is it effective, I wonder?

So it looks like the car park elevations will be covered in thousands of Optical Bird Gel dishes. Does this sound like Clochemerle? Mais oui... and please avoid the pigeon merde.

Have a happy holiday. Cheerio.



Dine in style this Christmas

REWARD your staff this Christmas with a meal at one of the best restaurants in Milton Keynes. The award-winning Calcutta Brasserie, set within a grade II 17th-century listed chapel in the heart of the historic town of Stony Stratford, is the perfect place to wind down after a busy year.

In the build-up to Christmas, the festive lunch menu is an ideal option, with a three-course meal available for £14.95. The hearty lunch includes a selection of the nation's favourites such as Chicken Jalfrezi, Lamb Rogan Josh, Butter Chicken and more. There are a plethora of desserts and starters also available.

For those who prefer dining in the evening, Calcutta Brasserie's comprehensive festive dinner menu is available from December 1 between 6pm and 11pm. Your group will be served all the dishes from a

selection of two menus so that every guest can enjoy every dish. Three-course meals are £23.95 per person.

A lavish Christmas Day lunch is also available this year for £29.95 per person. The four-course meal includes a lovely tomato and coriander soup with fresh Loch Fyne mussels, an entrée, a main course of your choice and either a traditional Christmas pudding or traditional Indian sweet dish for dessert.

Calcutta Brasserie is also hosting a Bollywood Bash for New Year's Eve which includes a luxury three-course meal.

Whatever the occasion, Calcutta Brasserie are the perfect hosts over the winter holidays. With the stunning décor, attentive staff and excellent cuisine – it is the place this Christmas.

Vegetarian options are also available.



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