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Parking and the signs of our times

I'D LIKE to wish you a happy new year. Now that's over with, I'd like to depress you. Sorry. But you need to know. While our local councillors argue, point fingers and blame each other for the endless cuts in public spending, and the difficulties local people have with parking, our city has become a confusing and poorly-signed shambles.

Car park signage in Central Milton Keynes is misleading, out of date, contradictory and even plain wrong. What follows should embarrass the owners of car parks and Milton Keynes Council, which is responsible for signage.

In Saxon Gate East, the parking advice sign for visitors is not operating as I write. The similar large illuminated sign on the Secklow Gate route from the eastern approach off H6 Childs Way is mostly missing. The uprights that used to support it are there but there is no sign.

The illuminated sign for visitors on the Avebury Boulevard next to Home Retail Group HQ is also not working. There are no signs on the highways to the multi-storey car parks at The Point; the Food Centre; INTU MK and Sainsbury's - which is jointly a council car park (I bet you didn't know that).

Our city is now a jungle of different coloured road lines fronting parking bays, different coloured parking machines and confusing *Electric Vehicles* but not *Electric Vehicles Only* signage. We have four different blue-painted parking meters, all with differ-

ent tariffs: at Xscape; near the station; near the old bus station and adjacent to the ice rink in the former Leisure Plaza. We also have two types of red-painted parking meters with different tariffs.

We have three differing black-painted meters, owned by the council, Network Rail/London Midland and by thecentre:mk. They have different tariffs. We have orange meters operated by Milton Keynes Development Partnership... at different daily tariffs.

Let's look at the visitor experience and start with a motorist looking for car parking as they arrive at Grafton Gate. He travels east and the first car park he might use is to the right - a MKDP car park. It is not signposted so our visitor sails by.

Fail #1.

The next public car park is off Witan Gate, below Sainsbury's. It is not identified as public in any external sign on the building.

Fail #2.

Once over the traffic lights at the junction with Witan Gate, our visitor sees, on the left, a small public car park and standard rate surface car parking to the right. Beyond the private car park on the left he notices areas of surface level parking on both sides of Avebury Boulevard, with both premium and normal rates applying. Or he might not. The large sign on the left near Home Retail Group is of no use to visitors as it has not been working for a long time.

Fail #3.

Over the Saxon Gate junction with

Avebury Boulevard and he might, if very observant, spot a small sign identifying *P-1250 spaces* to the left. Further along Avebury Boulevard, through the trees on the left, he may catch sight of The Point multi-storey car park. Sadly, however, it is unsigned on Avebury Boulevard.

Fail #4.

Although there is no multi-storey car park sign, there is a sign nearby which says *Area D3 - Premium rate applies - £1.40 per hour*. The car park actually has a rate less than half, at 60p per hour.

Fail #5.

Our hapless visitor drives between surface car parking to the left and right at standard tariff rates. There are no signs pointing to the MKDP surface car park next to The Point, effectively only accessible from Secklow Gate travelling north. Nor are signs to this car park Midsummer Boulevard nor on Secklow Gate itself.

Fails #6, #7 and #8.

Our visitor crosses the junction of Avebury Boulevard and Secklow Gate towards surface car parking outside the vacant former Sainsbury's unit and on the right outside Xscape. However if he enters the area around Xscape he is very likely to be confused and ticketed, as are so many. The large council Area Sign says that standard rates apply but the twice-the-standard-rate Xscape car park rates apply just beyond the sign.

Fail #9.

When our despairing visitor reaches Lower Twelfth Street, the Area Sign

informs that premium rates apply. There is also a small sign on the left on Lower Twelfth Street saying the car park is for *Patrons of the Food Centre only*. This is confirmed on the signage inside the Food Centre and in thecentre:mk. But it's not true. thecentre:mk website says that the car park, which it owns, is available for use by all.

Fail #10.

Externally they fail to adequately sign this multi-storey too, perhaps because it is free.

Fail #11.

Still travelling east along Avebury Boulevard, our visitor reaches an access way to the left with yet more misleading signage into a surface car park to the south east of the Theatre District. The large council Area Sign says premium rates apply yet just behind the sign the Theatre District surface car park is charged at less than one fifth or 25p per hour.

Fail #12.

Finally at the very end of Avebury Boulevard, there is a sign identifying the 330-space Theatre District multi-storey car park via Marlborough Gate - the only one of five directly signposted as a MSCP off Avebury Boulevard.

Success #1.

Our despondent visitor goes home, likely telling his family and friends that parking in Milton Keynes - a city dubbed by many as 'city of the car' - is a joke. Great job, Milton Keynes Council and car park owners. Cheerio.

TESTIMONIAL

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PAUL DAVIS

Senior Partner, Keens Shay Keens
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Chief Executive,

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