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Grid roads: we must make a stand

THERE'S a saying; "You never miss your water until your well runs dry". Given my recent experiences with almost daily traffic jams in Milton Keynes – yes, traffic jams... in MK! - I would like to suggest an alternate version: "You never miss your grid roads until the idiots stop building them."

OK, so maybe these are temporary jams caused by infrastructure works for the Western Expansion Area, the redevelopment of the Kingston roundabout and resurfacing works triggered by renewed Milton Keynes Council investment and the enthusiasm of the new contractor. Maybe.

However, the congestion may well be a portent of the future. The 40 years of free flowing travel were initiated in 1970 when the Milton Keynes Master Plan was published, which included the design of the grid system. This meant fast roads, roundabouts, segregation of cars from people and cycles on the redways, landscaping and buffers between roads and housing. Perfection.

The city developed and these principles survived the test of time and were enshrined again, within the Milton Keynes Planning Manual, published by Milton Keynes Development Corporation in 1992. It also restated the requirement for grid corridor reservations to be planned into all development areas to fulfil the following functions:

- To protect adjoining development from the effects of modern road traffic;

- To add to the attractiveness of the environment for residents and road users through the provision of landscaped corridors;

- To secure the land for primary transport routes and other main services, now and in the future.

You'd think therefore that these principles were so well-established and so admired worldwide that we'd be safe. But no. Sadly, there are always 'idiots' who think they know better.

Our grid roads were not only admired and copied worldwide, our citizens clearly loved them too. In 2008, the Citizens' Advice Group on Transport was established by the council to review the transport needs of the city into the future. The group commissioned a survey of 1,000 people to obtain a wider view. ICM carried out the survey and reported: "The grid is beloved of this parish. There is likely to be strong opposition if the format is radically changed."

Specifically, the respondents provided the following views:

- 88 per cent said it gives Milton Keynes a unique identity not seen in other towns;
- 87pc said the grid road system is fast and efficient;
- 84pc said the grid road system should not be tampered with.

But I suspect that the 'idiots' were

standing with their fingers in their ears, going: "I'm not listening, la, la, la!"

Now I happily accept that the MK Master Plan is not without its critics among the planning fraternity and that the model is not perfect. However, in 2014, the independent research analyst Centre for Cities had Milton Keynes at the top in virtually every key measure of urban success. It works, it is highly successful and the people love it. What could possibly go wrong?

Then those 'idiots', our so-called public servants, in partnership with the larger developers, came up with the Eastern and Western Expansion Areas. I have written about this previously so I won't repeat the detail. Of course, the 'idiots' needed some facile justifications for destroying our grid system. The WEA Development Framework (2005) was one such: "...the long-term transport vision envisages that the infrastructure in the expansion areas should provide public transport routes associated with higher development densities".

And so the hated and failing City Street concept was born.

The 'idiots' hadn't finished their scorched earth policy yet, though. In the east, the EEA Development Framework (2008) further stated "...the standard Milton Keynes model can be regarded as highly structured

suburbia; it is a model which (in its best interpretations) is well loved by residents. The challenge for the EEA is to deliver a "New Milton Keynes" which updates the Milton Keynes tradition..."

Hello? So the 'idiots' were attempting to "update the Milton Keynes tradition" by destroying it?

Good sense appeared to return with the Strategic Land Allocation Development Framework SPD (2013) that covers the expansion in the south east of Milton Keynes. The design criteria for grid roads is as follows: "80-metre corridor, with substantial green reserve. Single carriageway but with space to provide additional carriageway."

However, we can now see as the detailed plans come forward for approval that the grid road corridors specification is being ignored.

So with the 'idiots' having won in the West and the 'idiots' having won in the East, here in the south east of Milton Keynes we, its citizens, are at the last redoubt. Remember that 84pc of us said the grid road system should not be tampered with. Surely all those who care must press the council to live up to its promise to retain one of the key features of the city.

If our elected representatives do not deliver what they have promised, we will all be losers.

And then we shall all sit in traffic jams in our cars, buses and taxis for ever... like idiots.

Cheerio.

'All those who care must press the council to live up to its promise to retain one of the key features of the city.'

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