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**Information evening dates:**  
**April 13th - Police HQ, Kempston**  
**7.30pm-8.30pm**

To book one of these events please log onto our website or contact the Recruitment Team on 01234 842398.



# Theo Chalmers

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## A setback for the grid destroyers

WE NOW KNOW that the council has no 'Vision' for Milton Keynes' future development, as I highlighted in my column last time. There are numerous examples of ad hoc short-sighted developments being approved. However, in south east Milton Keynes, people power has recently managed to prevent this 'anything will do in MK' attitude becoming manifest... for now.

Members of Urban Eden, residents, Walton Community Council and ward councillor Alice Bramall mounted a campaign to raise awareness of serious issues with the 350-home Church Farm planning application. Concerns were raised with Milton Keynes Council planners from 2011, namely: no strategic plan, no infrastructure, failed consultation and an inadequate road solution.

Sadly the first three failings were not considered when it went before the Development Control Committee in February. The detailed plan for the 'strategic' road access was, however.

In the 1990s the road layout between Wavendon Gate and Old Farm Park was designed very carefully. It ensured the easy extension of the H10 Bletcham

Way between the two communities, with the right amount of noise and pollution mitigation.

The land is even built up so that the key crossings could be grade separated. That is what 'Vision' does.

However to save land, cost and because 'anything will do in MK' these days, the developer, in consultation with the planning and highways team, dreamed up a route that runs tightly against the bottom edge of the original grid road corridor crossing two extremely busy footpaths 'at grade' where hundreds of children would meet hundreds of cars every day.

Planners had their fingers in their ears, too, when it came to future proofing this edge of Milton Keynes. The land adjacent to Church Farm will come forward for housing and is already owned by a property company. And there has to be a solution to the level crossing at Woburn Sands by 2021, the extension of the grid road through Church Farm being the most likely answer.

At first, nobody listened to the locals but in February the DCC compromised and deferred the scheme to give time to

improve it. Sadly, the developers submitted an unchanged 'anything will do in MK' application in March.

Almost miraculously, and arguably because of the opponents (for 'opponents', read 'electors') arraigned against it at the ensuing DCC meeting and because they could not defer again, members rejected it.

It is not a final victory and I sincerely hope that the developer will develop a conscience and not appeal or try to force through a tweaked scheme with some no-cost changes. So how might things have been different?

Church Farm should have been part of a long-term, cross-party 'Vision' for Milton Keynes. Such a 'Vision', accompanied by a strategic plan would take us from a population of 250,000 (the original plan's design limit) to 350,000 by 2050. It would lay down, in legally robust terms, 'how we do things round here'.

It would confront sacred (concrete) cows such as the use of greenfield land and the treatment and protection of adjoining villages.

It would spell out how infrastructure and facilities would be ahead of expansion

(i before e). There would be innovative solutions to how infrastructure was funded.

Each developer would know how their land bank fitted into the 'Vision' and so would have a clear path to gaining a return on investment.

Sites would not come forward in isolation and businesses would have confidence that their investments in our city were being protected and continue to expand here.

Planners and developers should listen to the citizens. Despite what they might assume, we are - possibly uniquely in the UK - generally pro-growth.

The locals know the areas, unlike the planners for whom these developments are often desk exercises. When locals tell you something is wrong, they might be right.

Perhaps all parties, residents, businesses and yes, our elected councillors too, can aspire to be like Alexandre Dumas' the Three Musketeers; capable of grasping the concept 'All for one and one for all'.

On this occasion, so far they have. Cheerio.



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