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List the noble causes, consign others to history

MK FORUM - the equivalent in Milton Keynes of a civic society - invited me to speak at a recent event entitled *10 Buildings, 10 People, 10 Minutes*. The idea was for ten people, mostly architects, planners and the like, to suggest in ten minutes ten buildings in Milton Keynes worth protecting under the council's plans to draw up a 'Local List' of important buildings from the new town era. This would be an alternative to official listing of those of special architectural or historic interest by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, such as thecentre.mk.

Of course, talking about ten buildings suitable for local listing was not what I was going to do. Instead, my presentation was in two halves. First I listed five 'buildings' that need protecting, preserving and extending. Then I proposed an alternative to 'local listing' which I called 'local condemnation'.

First the preserving:

- In a polycentric city where not everybody drives to the centre every morning and out every night, our city is technically infinitely expandable. But only if they stop messing with the care-

fully designed nub ends of the grid roads that were always planned to be extended.

Already permanently lost are both ends of H7 Chaffron Way, the northern end of V1 Snelshall Street, V7 Saxon Street and V10 Brickhill Street and, although some lacklustre compromises have been made in the Western Expansion Area, we will also effectively lose the western ends of H2 Millers Way, H3 Monks Way and the northern end of V3 Fulmer Street.

The grid roads, their potential to be extended and in some cases dualled; all their roundabouts, which allow fast movement of traffic, and their national speed limits must be listed.

- Underpasses. Underpasses were filled in at the junction of Witan Gate and Avebury Boulevard near Sainsbury's to build The Hub (about which more later). More recently the V10 crossing at Walton Park should have an underpass, following changes of use to housing but somehow they forgot the underpass.

We will see new underpasses on the V4 near the Western Expansion Area and a new one was completed at Oakgrove on the V10, all existing underpasses and

pedestrian bridges should be listed and new ones built as a matter of course.

- Parker Morris room standards. These 1961 minimum room size standards became mandatory for all housing built in new towns in 1967, were extended to all council housing in 1969 and were used on many of our older estates. While some of those houses are showing signs of age, the generosity of their living spaces and abundant storage puts a vast majority of the new homes to shame.

Parker Morris room standards need to be urgently listed and reinstated in Milton Keynes as a bare minimum.

- Protect the green environment and prevent infill building. List all green spaces. The council plans to appoint a sole supplier to rebuild some of our old estates and spend half a billion pounds on the process. Clearly they will not do this for love and will be looking to make a huge profit by over-developing and destroying much open space land.

All our green spaces must be protected and, while we're at it, we need to tell the Parks Trust to live up to its name.

- Redways must be protected. They must also be properly maintained and

extended to new areas.

Now here is my 'Condemn' list, all of which simply should not exist in our city.

- Dwellings that are 'instant slums'. Monkston Park, Broughton Gate Broughton, Oakgrove, Grange Farm, for example. 'Insult Developments', where the planners and builders conspire to build instant slums that "are good enough for the likes of them". Where garbage trucks cannot get down the traffic-choked streets, instead little vans pick up sacks and disgorge them into the truck parked outside; where apocryphally people have fist fights over parking; where not even hawkish estate agents like the restrictions on parking.

- The Hub. I doubt there are many who think it is a good thing. It is like the bastard love child of 1950s Cold War post-modernism crossed with planned obsolescence under the thrall of a nuclear winter. Condemn it now and not make the mistake of building more like it on the B4.4 site across Witan Gate.

- City Streets, another failed exercise in stupidity, futility and wrong thinking inspired by ad hoc planning in a vision-

ary vacuum. They should never have been built and should be expunged from planning options forever.

- Removal of free parking. Milton Keynes' high street happens to be a regional shopping centre. Every regional shopping centre has free parking. Except ours. Its removal cost us £900,000 - nearly £200 a space - all to bring in the princely sum of £2 million.

Of course, the charges to park have just gone up but how long before your average shopper's back-of-an-envelope cost-benefit analysis shows them it is cheaper to drive a little further to have stress-free parking?

What happens to Central Milton Keynes when that happens? Parking income is ring-fenced for use on, unbelievably, "parking scheme implementation". How's that for circular thinking?

- Bus gates. Ludicrous, hugely expensive and never used by a bus. Whoever thought of them must have shares in traffic light companies. Bulldoze them all.

I enjoyed my ten minutes speaking at MK Forum and it seemed very well-received. Will the council take note? Of course not. Cheerio.



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