

Opportunity knocks... but the door does not open

WHEN I THINK about a topic for my column each month, I always hope I can come up with a positive, up-beat story about Milton Keynes. This month is no exception. But I have failed again. Sorry.

My subject is Milton Keynes Development Partnership, the body tasked with development of land sold by the Homes & Communities Agency to Milton Keynes Council for £32 million in January 2013. I wrote then; "Milton Keynes citizens are not idiots and it will soon become evident whether this new revived 'Milton Keynes Partnership' is being set up to perpetuate the much-hated and undemocratic body that powered the hugely unwelcome disposition of building land here; flouting the wishes of its electorate by ignoring the majority's desire to see the original design of the city continued."

So what has MKDP achieved in the years since? Here's one example. It failed to sell the Bowl to Pete Winkelman for his new MK Dons training academy despite the cash being on the table, forcing him outside the city. Then it failed to deliver it to The

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National Badminton Centre - an embarrassing disaster. In April, a local newspaper interviewed Conservative Andrew Geary, leader of the council when MKDP was formed. He said: "We set up MKDP at arm's length from the council so it could manage the asset portfolio. It was designed to bring a revenue stream to the council budget. Thus far it has failed to deliver that."

Oh dear. So despite its chief executive being on a cosy six-figure salary, has he been sitting on his hands?

But then a great new opportunity arrived, to develop a large marina and homes connected to the Grand Union Canal and the link off it to the planned new Bedford Waterway. The large site (around six

hectares) was on two adjoining sites; just outside Campbell Park west of the canal, and east of it, in Newlands. In June last year MKDP invited six architects to produce draft Masterplans. The Development Brief, written by the council, called for "a high quality urban waterside neighbourhood" delivering "an exceptional, exemplar and bespoke residential development" providing a "key gate-

way to Milton Keynes city centre".

Blimey, perhaps they have read and taken on board the principles of the original Masterplan for the city? No, of course not.

The resultant studies

by the six architects were added to the Development Brief put out to the market in October with the declared intention to "judge on the basis of the quality of the... design proposals and layout". Could those in charge of Milton Keynes be trying to recapture the spirit of MKDC, Jock Campbell, Derek Walker et al? Of course not.

This process eventually led to three developers being asked to submit further information prior to a preferred development partner being chosen to take a scheme forward. Throughout this process, developers' design teams were encouraged to produce an "exemplar scheme", "a destination for Milton Keynes", "a development that would set the standard for subsequent Campbell Park schemes" and reassured that "the quali-

ty is more important than the price". Did this happen? Of course not.

Now the winner, Crest Nicholson, has been announced and although its plans for an £88 million development *pictured left* will feature a 100-berth marina and more than 300 new homes, they almost totally ignore the best of those six architects' schemes.

Do all dwellings imaginatively overlook the boat moorings in the marina? No. Do any? No. Not a single one.

Frankly the scheme is a joke. Most of the dwellings are hidden behind trees one side of the canal. All moorings are in a square hole in a field overlooked by nothing on the other. Only a few dwellings overlook water, making the majority just another boring estate.

This is a total disaster. None of the laudable aspirations have been realised and the opportunity to make a significant event out of the connection between the old Grand Union Canal and the new Bedford-Milton Keynes Waterway is totally ignored.

How can the MKDP Design Review Assessment Panel justify this abrogation of its responsibility and declared intent? How can it justify something that wastes one of the last opportunities to create an exciting new gateway to our city?

The current scheme will do nothing for this site; for Central Milton Keynes; for Milton Keynes. A five-year-old with a sheet of paper, a blue wax crayon, a few Lego bricks and some toy boats could do better. Sometimes I just feel like crying.

Cheerio.



“*This is a total disaster. It wastes one of the last opportunities to create an exciting gateway to our city.*”



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Annual dinner brings top speaker to the table

AFTER A RAFT of well wishes and celebrations to mark our second anniversary, we are now looking forward to our next occasion: Milton Keynes Chamber's inaugural Annual Dinner.

We are delighted to be hosting the event on September 16 at the Mercure Parkside Hotel for our valued members and look forward to a night of celebration and review of our activities to date.

It is important that we are transparent to our members and keep them regularly updated of all that their Chamber is doing in the local business environment, and the benefits of being part of the wider British Chambers of Commerce accredited network.

The Annual Dinner gives us this opportunity, as well as the chance to publicly thank our supporters and join together to acknowledge our accomplishments.

We are delighted to be hosting a very special guest on the night. Dr Adam Marshall, the executive

director - policy and external affairs at the British Chambers of Commerce, will be our guest speaker. Dr Marshall is well connected and well respected at the highest end of government, having represented the interests of accredited Chambers of Commerce and their business members in Whitehall, Westminster and Brussels for the past six years. He is an eloquent speaker and will be an incredible asset to the night. We look forward to welcoming him to Milton Keynes and to our Chamber.

It is particularly apt for Dr Marshall to be our guest speaker, as Milton Keynes Chamber has recently employed a policy executive, Simon Dishman, who is already engaging with our members to learn more about the business environment here.

Formerly policy advisor at Doncaster Chamber, Simon was quick to identify Milton Keynes' vibrant and prosperous retail and distribution sector that is pivotal to the growth of the region and a major

source of employment for the area.

Importantly, Simon is also actively encouraging businesses to respond to consultations and survey requests, especially our Quarterly Economic Survey - the UK's leading private sector business survey. The more information we have about your business the better placed we are to represent your interests throughout the corridors of power.

The Chamber is here to help support and develop your business. This means making sure the conditions are right. It is our goal to represent your views to the people that matter, so whether you are burdened by excessive red tape or you have strong views about the economy, for example, we know who to speak to and how to deal with it for you.

This is one of the many great benefits of Chamber membership.

- For more information on the Annual Dinner and Review, call our events team on 01908 547820 or e-mail events@chambermk.co.uk.



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