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Call-in backs spirit of neighbourhood plan

SOMETIMES call-ins of planning decisions by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government take months. Sometimes, minutes.

At Aylesbury Vale District Council, recently, it happened just as the planning committee was meeting to discuss proposals for 130 new homes. The office of current Secretary of State Greg Clark called, saying that Mr Clark was considering making the decision himself, that more time was needed and that if councillors pass the plans, he would call them in.

I make this point to show how closely his department monitors the mood in local politics. However, in the case of intu's plans to develop its shopping centre over Midsummer Boulevard in Milton Keynes, the minister has found himself between a rock and a hard place.

Strange then, that just as a representative of Central Milton Keynes Town Council (the former parish council) was getting on a train to London with Milton Keynes Mayor Cllr Keith McLean to accept awards in two categories at the national Planning Awards for the CMK Business Neighbourhood Plan - for neighbourhood planning and for stakeholder engagement in planning - after a record-breaking 11 long weeks of deliberation, Mr Clark suddenly calls in the plan.

It was he who, when Localism Minister, introduced the amendment to the Localism Bill to enable Business Neighbourhood Plans, of which Milton Keynes' was a frontrunner. In May this year 89,801 people voted in favour of it, with 17,133 against.

Uniquely, electors in every MK postcode

in the borough had the opportunity to vote because of the significance of the central area, as did - also uniquely - all businesses. Of these, 356 voted in favour, 47 against.

When Milton Keynes Council's planners recommended approval, arguably wrongly, of the intu proposals and the planning committee largely accepted their advice, the whole point of the CMK Business Neighbourhood Plan was called into question. It seemed to many, including I, that the local planners had misunderstood the primacy of a properly voter-adopted Business Neighbourhood Plan, misinterpreted it and failed to give it the primacy required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2008, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

According to local chartered town planner and former chief planning adviser to the government David Lock CBE: "CMK Business Neighbourhood Plan is by definition, in law, in conformity with the Core Strategy 2013 and the Saved Local Plan policies that apply. Under the Localism Act 2011, the CMK Business Neighbourhood Plan is the first consideration. The NPPF cannot override the council's Business Neighbourhood Plan."

Many including Central Milton Keynes Town Council, Urban Eden and David Lock requested the call-in. Now the next stage is a public inquiry. This may take up to 18 months and effectively scupper, at least in the short term, intu's contentious plans.

It will also involve them in considerable extra cost. Planning barristers are not cheap. Nevertheless, it is not entirely bleak for them. Given the rapidly changing face of retail it may, at some future date, be seen by them as a considerable blessing that they have been forced to reconsider their plans.

Retail is changing fast. With online; bricks versus clicks; click and collect; workplace delivery; mobile scanning and shoppers buying elsewhere while standing in a shop 'auditioning' the goods, one might ask whether shops will even exist in years to come for all except perishables.

So intu, please go away, lick your wounds, keep your heads down and when you have had time to consider your options, we cannot wait to see revised plans that comply with our publicly voted-for CMK Business Neighbourhood Plan. And please stop going on about your 'public consultation'. Really, no one was fooled.

Cheerio.

Beauties bare (nearly) all for charity

MEET Miss March, the inspiration for a fundraising calendar by a group that has already raised more than £25,000 for the charity Brain Tumour Research.

Miss March is Nicole Phillips, who founded the Head 1st group after discovering in 2008 that she had a brain tumour. Scans revealed it to be benign but the experience inspired her to set up the initiative. The calendar, in which she and a group of friends pose (nearly) naked, is the latest in a series of events in aid of Brain Tumour Research - Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce's charity of the year. They hope the calendar will add to the charity's fundraising to support research.



Brain Tumour Research's head of community fundraising Carol Robertson said: "The calendar is a fabulous way of supporting vital research and will make a lovely Christmas present while also representing a gift of hope for the thousands of people diagnosed with a brain tumour each year and their families."

Find out more at [facebook.com/BTRLadiescalendar](https://www.facebook.com/BTRLadiescalendar).

● Brain Tumour Research has moved from Padbury near Buckingham to new offices in Shenley Pavilions. Chief executive Sue Farrington Smith said: "We look forward to getting to know the people who are putting the city on the map."

Xpress Relocation prepares to celebrate 20 years in business

Xpress Relocation is about to mark its 20th year in the removal industry with a move of its own - to a new larger headquarters at Denbigh, in Bletchley.

The company was established in Milton Keynes in March 1996 and has been operating for the last 20 years in Bletchley. It has always had one simple, clear vision: to provide an outstanding service to clients every time.

This mission statement has meant that Xpress Relocation still works with blue chip clients that it began working with from the outset. Some of these clients have formal service contracts in place and others simply trust the service for which Xpress Relocation is renowned. They come back with their removal requirement time and time again and refer new clients.

Xpress Relocation has grown from strength to strength over the years and now operates on a



● Then...



●...and now

national level throughout the UK and Europe. The company is a member of the British Association of Removers and the Commercial Moving Group and has been a finalist in the prestigious national Commercial Mover of The Year awards on two occasions. The firm also holds many trade accreditations including British Quality Standard BS 8522:2009, and is a member of the Building Futures Group.

Xpress Relocation takes health and safety very seriously and

holds the legislation accreditation SafeContractor, which is being requested more and more as the approved safety standard in the facilities industry.

The management at Xpress Relocation have all worked in the removal industry for over 20 years and fully appreciate that it is the quality of their staff that is the primary reason for the company's success. It is their dedication, skills and passion for their work that has created a company with an impeccable reputation for excellence.

Xpress Relocation is now looking forward to the next 20 years in its new premises and aims to continue strengthening partnerships with existing clients as well as developing new ones.

To request more information or to find out how Xpress Relocation can help with your removal needs, contact us via email or visit our website, Facebook or Twitter pages.

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