

Decision is now a matter of national importance

ON MAY 7 89,801 people voted in favour of the Central Milton Keynes Business Neighbourhood Plan referendum, with just 17,133 against. This plan was unique because electors in every MK postcode were allowed to vote because of the significance of the central area as were, also uniquely, all businesses. Of these, 356 voted in favour with just 47 against.

Central government instigated through the Localism Act 2011, heavily promoted and financially supported such Neighbourhood Plans. The one for Central Milton Keynes was given £20,000 - and the cost of the referendum was a public cost too. If the vote had not saddle-backed the local elections, it would have cost an astonishing £350,000. The one for Central Milton Keynes was one of eight government 'front runners' and is the first to go to referendum and has done so with spectacular success. So government is fully committed to Neighbourhood Plans, it seems.

The Central Milton Keynes Business Neighbourhood Plan was required to comply with overriding government requirements on several matters such as the number of new homes to be delivered and the provision of retail and other facilities. But it had the freedom to state where, what and how these targets should be met.

Indeed, the government claims: "Neighbourhood planning is designed to provide a powerful set of tools to ensure you get the right types of development in the right place for your community. Local residents and businesses are now in a position to make planning policies that reflect your priorities, deliver tangible local benefits and have real weight in the planning system."

According to local chartered town planner David Lock CBE MRTPI, a former chief planning adviser to the government: "[Central Milton Keynes 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 CMKBusNP is the first consideration." So that's all good then. Power to the people.

But it seems that the votes and all that effort and cost were completely in vain. The redevelopment plans submitted by intu:MK and passed by Milton Keynes Council's Development Control Committee last month are, apparently, in direct conflict with the Business Neighbourhood Plan. Here are some non-exhaustive reasons why:

- Policy G1 protects the 'classic CMK infrastructure'.
- Policy G3 states that "a reduction in the quantity, quality, use and public accessibility of all or part of ...Midsummer Place...to make way for new development shall not be acceptable other than for exceptional developments as defined under...G11".

Policy G11 does not provide the applicants with the excuse to fill in most of the roofed area of Midsummer Place with shops, restaurants, a cinema. intu apparently did not claim that status, as it would be ridiculous, and it is therefore clear that the G11 test is not passed.

Interestingly, intu staff were participants in the Midsummer Boulevard East workshops which I and other Urban Eden members also attended. Almost all stakeholders

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achieved consensus on the broad direction for the future of Midsummer Boulevard East including constructive ideas for its development while safeguarding its public space.

Since the planning application has been approved many including the Central Milton Keynes Town Council, Urban Eden, David Lock and many other concerned local citizens and

organisations have written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Greg Clark, to 'call in' Milton Keynes Council's perverse decision. It is he who, when Localism Minister, introduced the Amendment to the Localism Bill to enable Business Neighbourhood Plans.

What is the point of creating and voting for a Neighbourhood Plan if it is

overturned at its first test? It would be very bad nationally if local government felt free to breach the trust of those who put in thousands of unpaid hours on Neighbourhood Plans that are properly made and tested, and popularly supported.

I believe this is a matter of national importance because it completely undermines and renders meaningless

the government's policy on, and significant funding of, Neighbourhood Plans.

Rather than providing clear direction, the council's decision unless called in will set a very dangerous precedent. It will put power in the hands of developers and will leave the public and, eventually, councillors powerless to oppose them because the very principal of Neighbourhood Plans will have been rendered valueless.

They will not provide what was clearly intended by government; that local councils throughout England and Wales should have a powerful new and defensible reason to accept, refuse or modify permissions.

Watch this space. Cheerio.

Partnerships put your business in the spotlight

OVER the past 10 years, MK Dons FC has become a leading light in the commercial sector of Milton Keynes. With partnerships across a breadth of industries, the club has been determined to prioritise those companies that have a local impact.

The magnificent setting of stadiummk, coupled with the stunning four-star DoubleTree by Hilton facilities, provides an extensive range of hospitality options for a wide range of budgets, to form the ideal environment to

entertain guests and reward staff members.

MK Dons Corporate Partnerships manager Daniel Cole said: "The football club has an established and ever-increasing fan base and corporate support within the city and we have seen those partnerships grow in number and diversity, particularly in the last 12 months.

"We want to offer a breadth of opportunities to those companies who want to explore partnering with MK Dons."



The most recent announcement from the corporate partnerships team has outlined even greater flexibility for companies of all sizes to

engage with the benefits on offer from the Championship club. With packages ranging from £50 per month (clubRed), corporate clients

can enjoy great seats, complimentary refreshments and access to the Man of the Match presentation. clubGold, clubPlatinum and clubBlack packages include executive boxes, high-quality food and complimentary parking.

Daniel said: "The partnerships we have seen established over the past few years have been of mutual benefit to both the club and to the corporate partner. We have seen businesses benefit from great exposure and a real sense of community being built."

Hospitality packages, advertising opportunities and corporate events for the 2015/16 season are still available. To find out more, contact the Corporate Partnerships team on 01908 622884 or e-mail commercial@mkdons.com.



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