



Bring on the best in business

The awards season is under way and, says Chamber chief executive Paul Griffiths, the recognition can be priceless for the winners.



AS A CHAMPION for business and an avid supporter of the local economy, Milton Keynes Chamber is firmly committed to assisting companies and entrepreneurs. And we are always thrilled to be involved in celebrating the success of businesses in the borough.

Awards ceremonies are vital in helping to bring recognition regionally and nationally to companies that make a significant contribution to the local economy and their industry.

It is also a chance for firms to raise their profile, which we have had the privilege of experiencing ourselves after winning Excellence in Membership Services and Chamber of the Year in the national 2015 Chamber Business Awards.

You too could have that experience. Entries are now open for businesses in Milton Keynes to compete in the 13th annual Chamber Business Awards.

The prestigious honours - hosted by the accredited Chamber networks national organisation the British Chambers of Commerce - promotes the best of British business through a series of regional heats, culminating in a gala awards dinner, which this year will take place at the Brewery, London in November.

Companies can enter a total of seven categories, covering exports, small business, people development, technology, and customer service. Closing date for entries is June 24.

I am also delighted to announce that the Chamber is the headline sponsor for the inaugural Made In MK Awards, organised by OneMK.

The awards celebrate the borough's brilliant independent businesses, individuals and organisations which all play a vital part in our local community. There are 12 categories including the Business Start-Up Award, Best Independent Trader and Outstanding Contribution to Milton Keynes.

Milton Keynes is an innovative and dynamic place to do business and this is a brilliant opportunity for local firms to shout about their achievements. I am regularly inspired and amazed by the Milton Keynes companies that are making a huge difference to their industries and to the wider economy.

The Made In MK Awards evening will be held on September 15 at Mercure Parkside Hotel.

Enter an award today and get the recognition that your company deserves. I wish all entrants every success.

Theo Chalmers

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'We are now over-consulted on everything but not necessarily listened to'

Robert de Grey Co-founder, Milton Keynes Forum



Champions of a quality environment

WHILE at a very well-attended meeting featuring politicians on each side of the Brexit debate, organised by civic society Milton Keynes Forum, it occurred to me that some may not be aware of the sterling work the forum does here.

It was founded in the late 1980s, an initiative by three well-connected citizens Robert de Grey, Alan Francis and Robert Phillips. They were concerned about what would happen to the city in the wake of the government announcement of the then proposed winding-up of Milton Keynes Development Corporation in 1992.

At first its focus groups concentrated on health and wellbeing; housing; the physical environment; structures and the local economy. It gained wide support from residents, diverse organisations, companies and Milton Keynes Council - the latter having the right to elect three members to its committee. Public meetings were held on topics ranging from education to local governance, care in the community, housing and public art.

Over the years the focus groups closed, leaving Milton Keynes Forum to focus on the physical environment, an area it felt was its natural heartland. It concentrated on the way in which the city is developed going forward. Members include planners, architects, engineers, surveyors, environmentalists, business people and those with an interest in the built environment.

In the 1990s the forum took the initiative in proposing the listing of the centre:mk and one of its members Margaret Antalopoulos - who sadly died last month - persuaded many architects to support the eventual grade II listing in 2010. The forum regularly makes representations on planning applications - not only the major ones such as the intu Milton Keynes extension and Primark but also on more modest buildings where it feels that changes might destroy the character of the buildings. It is not opposed to



changes or demolition but is concerned that replacements should be of a high quality.

At the forum's initiative, the council inserts a special planning condition to ensure that, where key buildings are to be changed, there is a formal record of the building in its original state, something which chimes with my own call on house building numbers that we cannot know where we are going unless we know where we are now.

Milton Keynes Forum makes many aware of the city's unique architectural heritage established by the development corporation. It anticipates playing a key role in the council's exercise to identify suitable buildings for the Local Heritage List of the New Town era (this is the step below formal listing). It held a highly successful and entertaining meeting *10 Buildings:10 People:10 Minutes* at MK Gallery last year in which ten local people with an interest in buildings in Milton Keynes were asked to identify ten buildings that they admired. I was honoured to be one of those speakers.

Milton Keynes Forum believes that design is important at all levels and deplores the way in which the well considered grid road signage designed by Milton Keynes Development Corporation is being replaced with an unco-ordinated set



of signs of little design merit. It was responsible for getting the sculpture *Octo above* listed, having appealed against Historic England's initial decision to refuse listing. Perhaps more controversially, the forum has caused a stink by proposing listing of the Cotton Valley Sewage Works.

Its current campaign *Outrage MK* takes its cue from a 1955 *Architectural Review* in which journalist Ian Nairn raged about the fact that all places were starting to look the same or, in the words of another critic Paul Finch "How can we make this city more like itself rather

than more like somewhere else?"

Milton Keynes Forum takes a keen interest in city expansion and inputs consultations held by the council, most recently into *Plan:MK: Site Allocations Plan* and the *Central Milton Keynes Transport and Parking Strategy*. In 2011 it published its own vision for the city centre *CMK Revisited* which formed the basis of the eventual *Business Neighbourhood Plan*.

The forum's current chair is Tim Skelton who has been on the committee since the 1990s. However, I give the last word to the forum's co-founder Robert de Grey, who has also been a borough councillor, school governor and the inaugural chair of MK Gallery. "Milton Keynes Forum was set up to help give people the tools to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy among decision-makers in Milton Keynes," he says. "In some quarters, we were not very popular, but with supporters such as Lord Campbell and Sir Ralph Verney we got the feeling we were listened to from time to time.

"We are now over-consulted on everything but not necessarily listened to. So the forum has changed its role. Its focus is much more that of a conventional civic society, persuading the authorities to build an environment of quality while conserving that of the last 50 years. However, I do regret the early days of the Forum, when we had a lot of fun tweaking a few tails."

Cheerio.



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