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## It's been ten years - let's keep the dream alive

URBAN Eden, the lobby group I founded largely as a result of writing about Milton Keynes in these pages, began in February 2007. So it's ten years old this month - phew, how did that happen?

This is a good time to reflect on Milton Keynes as it is now 50. By some miracle of luck, clever planning and circumstance Milton Keynes Development Corporation, established in 1967 and abolished in 1992, created the zenith of the new towns movements in these Buckinghamshire fields.

Lord 'Jock' Campbell led the MKDC. His chief executive Walter Ismay appointed Llewellyn Davies as principal planning consultants, including Richard Llewellyn-Davies, Walter Bor and John de Monchaux. Execution of the plan was led by Fred Roche. The founding architect of Milton Keynes was Derek Walker whose Pineham Sewage Works he regarded as his finest achievement, as well as the shopping building designed by Stuart Mossrop and Christopher Woodward. The design concept aimed for a 'forest city'.

Milton Keynes was designed for 250,000 souls but was created as what I have dubbed the 'Infinitely Expandable City' because of the grid system, grade separation of pedestrians and cyclists, and polycentrism. One of the greatest benefits of Milton Keynes' design is that not everybody travels into the centre in the morning and out at night. One-kilometre square developments with doctors' surgeries, schools, shops, workplaces and commercial premises work well and could usefully have been extended infinitely. Because of these local centres, human movements are much more widely spread than in mono-centric cities elsewhere.

This is very good generally and the people like it.

In 2014, the independent research analyst Centre for Cities had Milton Keynes at the top in virtually every key measure of urban success. Citizens declared in two ICM surveys that they overwhelmingly love Milton Keynes. In one, 84 per cent said the grid road system should not be tampered with.

This is the Milton Keynes way - and it works. Our leaders should have worked hard to preserve it, just as others around the world have recognised its value and copied it on

several continents. Sadly, however, the people of Milton Keynes have been betrayed.

Between them, Milton Keynes Council, English Partnerships (founded in 2004) and its subsidiary Milton Keynes Partnership have done everything possible to destroy its infinite expandability. Sacrificing infrastructure for densification, profiting from land values and pushing for expansion to double the size without the benefits of the Infinitely Expandable City is frankly insane.

Grid roads are the perfect example. They were designed with an 80-metre corridor, with substantial green reserve. They were largely dual carriageway but single carriageways had space to provide dualing. They have huge redundancy and were left with nub ends to be expanded as population increased.

But the council and English Partnerships have already arguably destroyed both ends of H7 Chaffron Way, the northern ends of V1 Snelshall Street, V2 Tattenhoe Street, V3 Fulmer Street, V7 Saxon Street and V10 Brickhill Street; the western ends of H1 Ridgeway, H2 Millers Way and H3 Monks Way; the southern ends of V6 Grafton Street and V8 Marlborough Street and the grid road that should have been the V12, now Newport Road. This stymies much planned expansion for our otherwise Infinitely Expandable City.

### Legacy

English Partnerships and Milton Keynes Partnership are no more. However, their legacy of shame is the planning permissions granted for huge swathes of land such as the Western Expansion Area, a development the size of Buckingham but with no grid roads and with at-grade crossings. The last of the major undeveloped land was sold by the Treasury via the Homes & Communities Agency to Milton Keynes Council for £32 million in January 2013. Milton Keynes Development Partnership is the wholly-owned council body tasked with development of this land. To say that it has been unsuccessful in its task would be an understatement.

But it is not just the sacrifice of open land that betrays us. We should be having a return to Parker Morris room standards. These 1961 mini-

mum-room-size standards became mandatory for all housing built in new towns in 1967, the year Milton Keynes was founded. They were extended to all council housing in 1969 and used on many of our older estates.

The mandatory nature of the standards was ended by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, when the incoming government sought to reduce the cost of housing and public spending. Thus we now have developments such as Monkston Park, Broughton Gate, Broughton, Oakgrove and Grange Farm; 'Insult Developments', I call them. Here the planners and builders conspire to build densely packed, high-occupancy houses with few or no parking spaces on narrow roads. Refuse trucks (nor fire engines) cannot get down these traffic-choked streets so little vans pick up sacks and disgorge them into the refuse truck parked outside.

A further betrayal is the council's appointment of Mears plc to demolish, infill, densify and urbanise our central estates using compulsory purchase orders and forced relocations and spend half a billion pounds on the process. This is unconscionable and will, I strongly suspect, promote social unrest and tensions.

Another issue is the removal of free parking. Milton Keynes' high street, uniquely, is a regional shopping centre. Every regional shopping centre has free parking. Except ours. Its removal cost us £900,000, nearly £200 a space, and was apparently designed to bring in the princely sum of £2 million, although recent figures suggest that the council pocketed £9 million in car parking 'profits' in 2014/15 - only three cities outside London brought in more.

How long before your average shopper's back-of-an-envelope 'cost benefit analysis' shows them it is cheaper to drive a little further and have stress-free parking? What then happens to Central Milton Keynes? Will a new Primark, allegedly planned for the former BHS store with a new added floor, save the centre:mk? We'll see.

But all is not lost. There is still hope and I wish a happy 50th year to Milton Keynes and a happy tenth birthday to all the Urban Eden membership. Let's keep the dream alive. Cheerio.

## Traditional values, 21st-century practices

**Neves**  
SOLICITORS

IN 1867 Queen Victoria was less than halfway through her 63-year reign. Gentlemen wore frock coats and wing collars; ladies sported voluminous skirts supported by hoops, petticoats, crinolines. There were no cars, no aeroplanes, no telephones, no computers.

In Luton, Walter Neve opened a solicitor's office and that firm, now called Neves Solicitors LLP, has traded in Milton Keynes, Luton and Harpenden to the present day and at least one local family, the Cathcarts, have proudly described Neves as their 'family solicitors' for three generations.

The Cathcarts have used Neves for both private and commercial property work. Mrs Theresa Cathcart says: "Their charm, politeness and efficiency

combined with expertise in the latest aspects of law have meant that choosing Neves to conduct our legal business is our first and simplest choice."

Neves partner Ian Simpson has worked at the firm for 41 years. "The extraordinary longevity and success of the firm is because we know how to combine traditional courtesy and values with 21st-century practices and we understand the changing face of legal requirements," he says.

"We have been around a long time but we are still modern in the way we operate."

Neves now has nine full partners, three senior associates, one associate and 16 solicitors. It deals with all aspects of commercial property, family law, wills and probate, employment law, commercial disputes and two partners are notaries public.

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Guests will enjoy a three course dinner, wine and entertainment on Thursday 9th March 2017 at **The DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at Stadium MK**

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