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## It is time to say 'Enough is enough'

THE TERRIBLE events at London's Grenfell Tower have, I suggest, provided a lesson that can perhaps be extrapolated to events here, in Milton Keynes. It is already becoming clear, as I write, that warnings by residents, the London Fire Brigade and others as well as lessons learned from other fatal tower-block fires (Lakanal House in London in 2009 and Shirley Towers in Southampton the following year) were ignored, dismissed or 'waved away' by central government, local councils - in particular the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea - and, most particularly, their management agents.

As The Telegraph reported, adding yet more levels of blame; "Until 1986 all buildings in London fell under the London Building Acts which ensured that external walls must have at least one hour of fire resistance to prevent flames from spreading between flats or entering inside."

"But under Margaret Thatcher's government [and this from the 'Blessed Thatcher Memorial' newspaper, The Telegraph] those rules were replaced by the National Buildings Regulations and the crucial time stipulation was scrapped. Instead, materials used on the outside of buildings now only had to meet 'Class O' regulations and show that they did not add to the heat or intensity of a fire. But crucially they did not have to be non-combustible."

Let me repeat that: "...crucially they did not have to be non-combustible".

As the media and public react with incredulity that those responsible could have been so irresponsible, the guilt of those accused by many of 'having blood on their hands' becomes ever more obvious.

So how, I hear you ask, can this possibly apply to Milton Keynes? Well, firstly, I am not referring to Milton Keynes' few tower blocks - although I am hopeful and optimistic that they will be checked for fire safety expeditiously. No, I am referring to the cognitive dissonance of those in power, the inability to see the glaringly obvious and to be alert to the wrongs against the residents of Milton Keynes that they are committing daily.

The original Milton Keynes Development Corporation design concept aimed for a 'forest city' and for it to eventually expand to a population of 250,000. It is, in fact, at about 270,000. Now this figure, or even a greater one, was not a problem as the team - under Lord 'Jock' Campbell with chief executive Walter Ismay, Llewellyn Davies as principal planning consultants and all executed under Fred Roche with founding

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architect Derek Walker - had designed what I call the Infinitely Expandable City. I use this name because of the grid system and polycentrism.

Milton Keynes could have stretched from Wales to Norfolk and its residents would still have enjoyed a highly user-friendly city. For instance, grid roads were designed with a 80-metre corridor, with substantial green reserves.

The grid roads had huge redundancy and were left with space to be dualled where they were single carriageway and with protected nub ends to be expanded as population increased.

But between them Milton Keynes Council, English Partnerships and its then subsidiary Milton Keynes Partnership have done everything possible to destroy this infinite expandability.

### Despair

The council and EP have already permanently destroyed most nub ends, rendering the expansion of Milton Keynes as originally planned no longer feasible. Already we have developments like the Eastern and Western Expansion Areas with no grid roads, no underpasses or proper redways and no way through these huge developments and into future expansion areas. And yet we are now told by our council - acting, it must be admitted, under direction from Westminster - that under the latest plans our population must expand to 350,000 or more.

Plan:MK, the new draft local plan for the vision and development strategy of Milton Keynes, not only includes new developments in every possible direction outside a blocked-off Milton Keynes but massive infill too. I despair at the council's insane appointment of Mears plc to demolish, infill, densify and urbanise our central estates using compulsory purchase orders and forced re-locations and spending half a billion pounds on the process.

Half a billion pounds that will be raised by building on every scrap of green right up to the grid roads and, incidentally, replacing

spacious homes built to Parker Morris standards with hateful shoe-boxes.

This is unconscionable and will, I strongly suspect, promote strong social unrest and tensions. Above all, it flies in the face of the principles of Milton Keynes that we all love so much including the 80-metre green reserves of our 'forest city'.

By way of proof of our extraordinary love of this place, in 2014, the independent research analyst Centre for Cities had Milton Keynes at the top in virtually every key measure of urban success. The citizens of Milton Keynes have declared in two ICM surveys that they overwhelmingly love Milton Keynes as it was built. In one, 84 per cent of us said the grid road system should not be tampered with.

So the question that must, in my opinion, now be asked is this. If the means by which Milton Keynes can be safely expanded while sticking to the original design principles have now been destroyed beyond reinstatement, why must we further expand?

Surely enough damage has been done? Surely the spell of cognitive dissonance under which our leaders are labouring must be broken?

Surely enough is enough?

I say no to further expansion, no to Plan:MK and no to mindless infill. I invite our councillors and two MPs to find their personal courage at last and fight for what we all love. Otherwise they may find their own ivory towers burning around them.

Cheerio.

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