

2

INSIGHT

- Paradise Papers
- Debt Recovery
- Access to Funding

Page 10

SECURITY MATTERS

The countdown to the new GDPR data privacy rule is under way... and employers need to be ready. Special feature on data security

Pages 11-14

IN THE 1970 TV comedy series *Up Pompeii*, starring Frankie Howard, Cassandra the Soothsayer would regularly exclaim: "Woe, woe and thrice woe!" This month's column is definitely a three woe-er.

Greg Clark, then Localism Minister, introduced legislation in 2011 to enable Business Neighbourhood Plans, of which the one for Central Milton Keynes was a frontrunner. In 2015 89,801 voted in favour of it, with 17,133 against. Uniquely, electors in every MK postcode voted because of the significance of the central area, as did all businesses in MK9, with 356 voting in favour, 47 against.

Many were jubilant including those who gave countless hours preparing the plan. They believed, wrongly as it soon transpired, that Milton Keynes Council would take note of the people's views; that they would henceforth protect our grid roads and green spaces and that the plan made by local people, not the council, had precedence. Neighbourhood plans were quickly under way in almost every parish in the borough, with many formally adopted.

Soon, however, the cracks began to show in local and national government's commitment to localism. Intu's controversial plans to expand its shopping centre was arguably the first such crack. Council planners recommended approval, and the planning committee largely accepted their advice against, it appeared, the precepts of the Central Milton Keynes Business Neighbourhood Plan.

Instantly the whole point of neighbourhood plans was called into question. It seemed to many, including I, that the local planners

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A thrice-woe tragedy for neighbourhood plans

had misunderstood the primacy of a properly voter-adopted 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 which should not have been able to override the council-adopted plan.

Urban Eden was among those who requested the call-in. The next stage was a public enquiry and in July this year the Department for Communities and Local Government published its decision. Despite the best efforts of those who objected - and as I publicly predicted in these pages - intu won the right to build over the Midsummer Boulevard and infill the space where a mighty oak once stood.

The DCLG stated that a public transport link reduced to 14 metres in width would survive but, frankly, the chances of this ever happening now are south of zero.

Meanwhile the council's new housing plan, Plan:MK, marches on. It will replace the Core Strategy adopted in 2013 and saved policies from the 2005 Local Plan.

Admittedly the council is under the cosh from central government which requires a minimum of 26,500 new homes to be built in the borough before 2031. And of course, no one at the council has the courage or vision to stand up to this madness despite it threatening to permanently destroy everything that makes Milton Keynes... well, Milton Keynes.

In further attacks on the plans Gavin Barwell, then Minister of State for Housing & Planning, made a statement in December last year on the five-year housing land supply rendering all neighbourhood plans obsolete after just two years, subject to certain housing criteria. So will unfinished neighbourhood plans survive? In at least one case, probably not.

Take Bow Brickhill Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan as an example. A working group, aided by planning consultants, over three years produced a draft plan which went to public consultation in February last year. Comments received included a proposal for 36 dwellings in open countryside on a site named by developers as

Tilbrook Pastures and large-scale greenfield housing development between the railway, Bow Brickhill and Woburn Sands. Two planning applications were subsequently submitted; at Rectory Farm and at Tilbrook Pastures. These were both approved by Milton Keynes Council in the light of its deficit of the five-year housing land supply.

The working group examined the draft neighbourhood plan and concluded that much of it had to be rewritten. Neither the planning consultants nor the council could advise whether further community consultation would be required. The likelihood of the amended plan being approved at referendum was in any case slim. Furthermore by the time the plan had advanced further, yet more sites would likely be brought forward and would almost certainly be approved.

The working group has concluded "that it is impossible to continue with the BBNP as it would be subject to constant amendment (site by site) to the point where it could never be 'made'." The majority of the members resigned and a public meeting

was held in January this year to consider the BBNP's dilemma.

It was agreed to wait for the government's planning White Paper and for consultation to begin on draft Plan:MK, as its proposals would in any case clearly overrule even an adopted neighbourhood plan.

Consultation on Plan:MK is due to close on December 20. The draft proposes a greenfield employment site it names South Caldecote and the large urban housing extension mentioned above. Both conflict with the contents of the draft Bow Brickhill Neighbourhood Plan.

Depressed yet? They are. You should be.

Bow Brickhill Parish Council agreed that the neighbourhood plan was to be stalled until Milton Keynes Council's five-year housing land supply quota was fulfilled. Shortly thereafter the council indicated that it had been achieved but Bow Brickhill resolved to wait for the outcome of Plan:MK, realising that further work on its neighbourhood plan was pointless given the current housing development issues and the unknown nature of the route of the proposed East-West Expressway.

Is it dead yet? Well, it is not moving. Meanwhile Milton Keynes Council continues its much vilified Site Allocations Plan under its Urban Capacity Study, which lists 117 mainly open or earmarked-for-demolition areas for probable intensive development.

Recreation and play areas, football pitches, tennis courts and the green lungs of our city are not safe.

So it is, most definitely, "Woe, woe and thrice woe".
Cheerio.

READY FOR GROWTH?...

Sometimes size does matter. But then again, big isn't always best. It's the right type of growth that's important. We understand this and that's why we listen to our client's aspirations and frustrations around growth. In doing so, our Business Performance Improvement team will identify areas or opportunities and formulate an effective plan, to help you reach your destination with speed and certainty.

After all, success in business is similar to success in sport. You need a strong team, a sound strategy and the resilience to perform under extreme pressure. That's why we're supporters of local business and partners of local rugby. So, whatever your business challenge, we'd love to hear from you. You won't find a greater supporter locally and it's been proven there's strength in partnership.

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Embrace the cloud and improve your decision-making

IT IS FAIR to say that technology continues to move at an incredible pace and accounting systems are no exception to the rule. All major software companies are committed to cloud accounting offerings and indications are, that very soon, support will cease for desktop systems. Is this good or a bad thing?

Cloud accounting systems should ultimately make business owners' lives much easier. This is certainly a view shared by HM Revenue & Customs and one of the reasons behind their modernising *Making Tax Digital* agenda; something that will mean they are collecting and processing tax-related information from businesses on a quarterly basis instead of annually, as now.

One of many benefits of adopting cloud accounting software is being able to file quarterly tax statements. Others include automated invoice production, live management accounts and - the primary benefit of the cloud - instant secure access. You have the ability 24/7 to view and access your financial data via a laptop, smartphone or other device from anywhere in the world.

However, for some, having live access to financial data is not enough, as often data alone is not going to help them. Either it is not the right kind of data or it is not compiled and analysed properly. Additionally, it may not be communicated in the right manner, meaning you may not necessarily be able to fully appreciate the importance of what it is telling you.

This is just one of the reasons why we are now seeing a trend in more business owners outsourcing their finance functions, something that is also a lot more achievable and affordable with cloud accounting systems.

Typically, outsourcing is often regarded as providing book keeping services, usually to serve a direct purpose; for example, submission of VAT returns or to enable statutory accounts to be prepared.

However, true outsourcing is more proactive than simply book keeping. We become part of our your team, provide the usual book keeping services *but*, importantly, we add to your back office support together with providing regular reporting, non-sense communication and accountability.



Haines Watts partner Stephen Watts pictured says: "The regular reporting and communication we generate enables us to provide business owners with the information they need. This in turn aids them in making more informed business decisions based on clear and concise financial data. With our expertise, we can easily interpret their data for them so it actually means something - whether that is identifying key trends, variances, cash hot spots or future cash pressure points."

With numerous cloud providers vying for the attention of business owners, the costs are increasingly competitive, especially when compared to desktop systems. As 2017 draws to a close, now is an ideal time to consider converting to the cloud and reviewing your current finance operations. We think you could benefit from outsourcing and we would be very happy to support you in doing so.