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Securing a safe future at the heart of the Arc

THIS month's column incorporates thoughts from one of Milton Keynes' founding fathers, Brian Salter, who was forestry and conservation officer for Milton Keynes Development Corporation from 1971 to 1978, recreation unit manager from 1978 to 1992 and thereafter the founding chief executive of The Parks Trust until 2003. Much of the non-commercial arts and sports as well as the green infrastructure we witness today has his fingerprints somewhere on it.

He, more than most, knows that Milton Keynes accepts innovation and has an exemplary history of embracing it. Indeed, its creators were well ahead of the curve in so many ways and might reasonably be lauded as true visionaries. As we face the challenges and opportunities of this, its second 50 years, one set of challenges looms greater perhaps than others; the almost inevitable expansion of the city as the epicentre of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and our place within it.

Surely we cannot let 50 years of experience remain voiceless in the planning maelstrom that is now buffeting its very identity and the principles that made it a success story, copied worldwide?

So what were the main drivers that

fuelled Milton Keynes' remarkable success as the zenith of the new towns movement? They included:

- A coherent and flexible plan based on clear goals. In other words, a vision;
- Bold public investment in infrastructure, which embraced roads, redways, underpasses and open space (including heritage) and both foul and surface water drainage including our numerous balancing lakes;
- A delivery vehicle (which initially from 1967 to 1992 was the Milton Keynes Development Corporation) with land assembly and planning powers;
- Facilitation of the private sector to respond creatively as well as profitably to digestible opportunities in short- to medium-term time frames where speculation was minimised and investment risk was not excessive or extensive.

Consequently Milton Keynes enjoyed much privately funded development always subject to design-brief principles laid out in, and sensitively developed from, The Plan for Milton Keynes;

- Sustainable alternatives to the public sector for its ongoing management which were designed to be able to defeat later interference and

political ad hoc opportunism.

These 'safeguarding organisations' included the Parks Trust and Community Foundation. Sadly the ability to defeat later interference has not proven wholly unbreachable. In general, though, we have not yet been excessively disappointed.

Some problems now becoming increasingly obvious are:

- Insufficient tax base within the subsequent unitary authority to maintain infrastructure and other facilities which serve a greater region.
- Milton Keynes is having to embrace a regional role which was previously played by Bucks County Council with its much larger tax base. This was a fact that was never given due weight at the time of the unitary authority initiative.
- Poor infrastructure management in Central Milton Keynes.

The high-quality finishes in granite and street furniture require quality care. The prosperity of the centre and its potential tax base was hijacked by new rules which sequestered the business rates of the centre direct to central government. Rate support grant did not reflect the contribution made by Central Milton Keynes and its special demands. Recently, in an initiative by the

Amazing CMK Business Improvement District, central businesses have agreed to chip in to a fund to solve some cleanliness and maintenance issues in the city centre. This, of course, is very welcome but why must businesses pay twice for the same thing?

- Inflexible public transport for the city grid.

Innovation and deregulation using smart technology are overdue. Bedevilled by short-term thinking with short-term time horizons based on experience gleaned from existing monocentric cities which simply do not and cannot suit polycentric cities such as ours, the misguided 'bus priority/get the people out of their cars' mentality prevails despite some new eco-friendly cars, radical self-driving pods, and even robot pizza delivery initiatives in Central Milton Keynes.

Greater numbers within the authority boundary - although we are already squeezed up against the boundary in most directions - assist the tax base but are unlikely to solve the problem without destroying the very environmental credentials that make Milton Keynes attractive, "a place with the amenities of a city but with the qualities of the countryside", as it was

touted. Must we pay for our future by destroying the green spaces that define our past?

The Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Arc presents opportunities but without taking the experience of the last 50 years to heart, it is doomed to prolong the problems. The drivers that fuelled Milton Keynes' remarkable success with new, modern enhancements to reflect the opportunities and hopefully to learn from the past, are keys to effective delivery of an acceptably expanded Milton Keynes as the 'Heart of the Arc'.

Milton Keynes can, will and must play its part in a regional role without being compromised by other hubs of development elsewhere in the Arc. Focused political and planning leadership and authority at a regional level to be defined is vital to embrace the opportunities.

The current fragmented ad hoc agenda of multiple planning authorities, multiple infrastructure and government agencies and speculative land banking must be firmly and emphatically resisted. Then, and only then, can Milton Keynes be safe and prosper as the 'Heart of the Arc'.

Cheerio.

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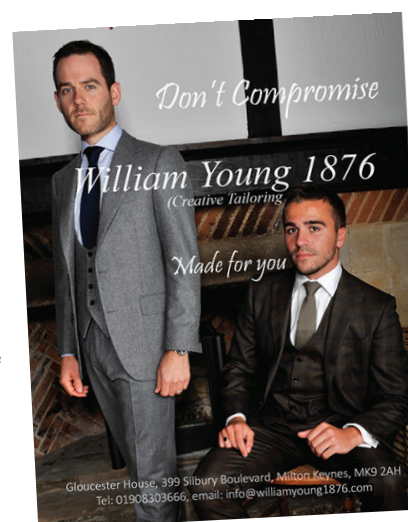
William Young 1876 is a made to measure and modern bespoke tailoring brand synonymous with high quality service and an impressive history.

The brand is named after celebrated soldier William Young, who in 1916 was awarded the Victoria Cross for fortitude, determination, courage and devotion. Nigel Salisbury is Young's great grandson and in his great-grandfather's honour created a company and ideology that he would be proud of.

Nigel, together with Willie Renner, developed the business bringing more than 30 years of industry and consumer experience coupled with a passion for creativity. William Young 1876 creates high-quality luxury garments for gentlemen and ladies.

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He and Willie use the latest technology alongside traditional tailoring methods including hand finishing and traditional construction methods to create a modern suit with a traditional feel.

William Young 1876 offers consultations by appointment at its showroom in Milton Keynes, including evening appointments, as well as a visiting service. More than two hours is devoted to each consultation, which allows the time required to cover measurement and posture detail, cloth selection and styling.

To celebrate the launch of William Young 1876 in Milton Keynes, we are giving away a bespoke shirt.

To be in with a chance of winning, email the answer to the following question, along with your name and daytime contact details to news@businessmk.co.uk by May 31, with 'William Young 1876 competition' in the subject line.

What is the name of the London street that is known around the world for bespoke tailoring?

- Southampton Row
- Savile Row
- Tailors Row

Our usual competition rules apply and the editor's decision is final.

William Young 1876

Gloucester House
399 Silbury Boulevard
Milton Keynes MK9 2AH

Open Tuesday-Saturday
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