

Five years old and we continue to support the economic landscape

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SINCE we began trading on July 8 2013, our business support organisation has supported more than 800 businesses through membership and currently represents around 15 per cent of the Milton Keynes workforce.

Over the past five years, Milton Keynes Chamber has actively engaged with around 5,000 borough businesses through membership, events, training, magazine subscription and seminars. Members have been to 169 Chamber hosted events and 71 seminars.

We have provided 287 training courses for 696 delegates and 376 members have saved around £20,000 in training course discounts.

The Chamber has been praised nationally, winning awards annually for the past four years. Our team were double winners at the national Chamber Awards in 2015 scooping the Excellence In Membership Services Award and Chamber of the Year 2015. We retained the Excellence in Membership Services in 2016 and last year won Excellence in International Trade Services.

Accredited

In the past five years, the Chamber's international trade service delivered by our sister chamber Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, has helped 200 member companies in Milton Keynes with documentation to export worldwide, aiding the shipping of goods with a total value of more than £378 million.

We boast the borough's only quarterly private business survey which feeds into the British Chamber of Commerce's Quarterly Economic Survey - used by The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee as one of its key benchmarks when setting interest rates.

Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce became an accredited Chamber within just 18 months because of the relationship with our sister Chamber, the award-winning Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce. That relationship also helped Milton Keynes Chamber to achieve Investors in People Silver status and to give members valuable benefits of liaising with the British Chambers of Commerce.

Milton Keynes Chamber has supported five deserving local charities and last year with Northamptonshire Chamber launched the brand new Next Generation Chamber, a young professionals forum providing a platform for future business leaders to make contacts and improve their skills.

We are delighted with all that our Chamber has achieved over the past five years and would like to thank all of our members, staff, board of directors and stakeholders for their instrumental role in our success.

With their support, and that of the wider business community, we will continue to support the Milton Keynes economic landscape in every which way we can.

I truly believe this is just the start of a very bright future for Milton Keynes Chamber of Commerce.

Theo Chalmers

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There are too many fingers in the planning pie

I HAVE written recently about the current fragmented ad hoc agenda of multiple planning authorities, multiple infrastructure and government agencies and speculative land banking which are likely to make the planned expansion of Milton Keynes an unmitigated disaster. This is all especially depressing as MK is actually well-positioned both geographically and in terms of its 'can-do' attitude to be an enormous success at the 'Heart of the Arc'.

However, as though by magic, two new mushroom spores of potential ineptitude have been secretly developing fruiting bodies from their respective dark, dank, places. They join the existing tsunami of authorities with competing agenda I mentioned previously, namely:

- The National Infrastructure Commission;
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government;
- Milton Keynes Council with its infill-every-green-space-plans and its Plan:MK, arguably a bulldozer to destroy MK as we know it. It is currently out for public examination;
- Aylesbury Vale District Council, with its own plans to dump houses on our western border;
- Northamptonshire County Council;
- Central Bedfordshire Council, Buckinghamshire County Council and several other local or Oxford - Milton Keynes - Cambridge Arc councils.

But who are these new organisations that have sprung up

overnight? Firstly we have the England's Economic Heartland group. It claims to be "a voluntary partnership of councils and local enterprise partnerships. England's Economic Heartland represents the key growth corridor from Oxfordshire through Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire."

So now we even have people who were responsible for the appalling mistakes of the so-called Milton Keynes Partnership - the planning permissions for the Western Expansion Area, for example - getting their sticky fingers back in the planning pie. A disaster in waiting, perhaps?

Secondly, out of the blue, Dominic Raab, the Housing Minister who took over from Sajid Javid when he became Home Secretary, has announced that councils will have powers to set up new New Town Development Corporations to deliver expansion locally. Is this a good thing? Will it cut through the confusion? Maybe. Maybe not. Particularly not if it too involves the people responsible for the planning aberrations of the so-called Milton Keynes Partnership which I strongly fear it might.

ON ANOTHER matter entirely, Hammersons which owns The Point and which is no longer pursuing its takeover of intu which could have provided real synergy in the redevelopment of The Point, held a Design Code Workshop at the offices of Milton Keynes Council offices recently.

Hammersons was in attendance, as were some new architectural advisers from Benoy, its Newark-based retained agency. They also had a Savills representative there. They appear remarkably open to input and their keenness to interact was regarded by many attendees as an opportunity to say what they really felt.

'Iconic'

Many suggested a taller, more 'iconic' (yes, a hugely over-used word) building would be more acceptable than their teeny, doomed-to-fail shopping centre while retailers are falling like flies (the very next morning House of Fraser quit Milton Keynes).

I pointed out that unless they could secure Harrods, Harvey Nicks or Selfridges it would fail. They quickly countered that there would be a leisure offer too,

maybe including a cinema.

So replace a failed cinema with a cinema in a city with two multiplexes already, one with an i-Max screen, and potential screens at intu and MK Gallery? Great idea. Not.

I mentioned, again - as I had at least two years ago - that it was, with its own multi-storey car park, an ideal site for a luxury hotel with conference and events facilities to rival DoubleTree by Hilton at Stadium MK, and it could service Casino MK at Xscape better than the new, Premier Inn hotel on 12th Street.

It could also incorporate flats. Importantly, it might recreate the famous neon-lit pyramid on the roof creating a new beacon for Milton Keynes seen from miles away as once The Point did before it was overshadowed by Xscape and intu and its lights died.

I also came up with the idea that they might use it as a single venue where all major online fashion retailers could maintain racks of every item they sell online-only, in every colour and every size for people simply to touch, assess and try on.

Customers could then, if they liked the item, buy online as they do now but without the current huge likelihood of having to return it.

It was suggested that this would get media attention not just locally but worldwide too and that they start talking with Asos, Net a Porter, BooHoo, Missguided, In the Style, Pretty Little Thing etc, immediately. We will see.

There will be a second workshop eventually. In the meantime, enjoy the summer. Cheerio.

Spanish technology giant completes test laboratory acquisition

A LABORATORY specialising in the testing of electronic automotive components has been bought by Spanish tech giant Applus+.

It has completed the acquisition of 3C Test, which will strengthen its position in the European electromagnetic compati-

bility testing market and increase its presence specifically in the UK market.

3C Test, founded in 1988, has grown to be the largest test facility of its kind in the UKs. The firm is based at Silverstone Technology Park and will join the Ap-

plus+ Laboratories Division, which provides testing and certification services to the automotive sector, especially for electrical and electromagnetic compatibility services. The division has EMC laboratories in Spain and Italy and is a specialist

provider of component validation plans.

Applus+, listed on the Spanish Stock Exchange, was advised by the deals team at PwC's Midlands regional office, led by Matthew Tombs and Simon McKay.



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