

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING IN MILTON KEYNES - CITY GATEWAYS, CITY CENTRE ROUNDABOUTS AND DISTRICT CENTRE LAMP POST SIGNS

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To seek the Committee's views of proposals in principle for outdoor advertising at certain limited city gateway grid-road verges, city centre roundabouts and for lamp-post advertising within identified district centres.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Council successfully pursued a programme of roundabout sponsorship and bus shelter advertisements but since 1998 this programme has been extended with advertising and sponsorship opportunities in Central Milton Keynes and new sponsored boundary signs. The proposal is to extend this programme further to include suitably designed signs at city gateway grid-road locations adjoining commercial areas, city centre roundabouts and to lamp-post mounted adverts in district centres. Well designed and sensitively located outdoor advertising can enliven and improve the environment and will continue to make a growing contribution to the Council's income stream, for which an increased target has been identified for 1999/2000.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Committee approves in principle the proposal for a limited expansion of outdoor advertising at city gateway sites, on major roundabouts and lamp-post adverts in district centres.
- 3.2 That the Head of Planning be given delegated powers in relation to advertisement consent applications for each sign within these categories.

4. **Background**

Planning Policies

- 4.1 As a local authority Milton Keynes Council has considerable experience and expertise in the area of highway advertising, firstly as 'promoter' of roundabout and bus-shelter signs, and secondly through planning controls taking into account the proper consideration of amenity and highway safety requirements.
- 4.2 The policies for the control of advertisements in Milton Keynes are set out in the adopted Borough Local Plan 1995 (policies DC 30, 31) and the Outdoor Advertising Policy 1994.
- 4.3 DC 30 details the considerations for advertisement proposals:
- (a) size, colour, design, materials and illumination;
 - (b) number of signs in any one area;
 - (c) location in relation to listed buildings, conservation areas, linear parks or Areas of Attractive Landscape;
 - (d) highway and safety considerations; and
 - (e) enforcement against large advert hoardings unrelated to and out of scale with their surroundings.
- 4.4 DC 31 describes the Areas of Special Control where additional levels of control apply, in the older village centres in the city, Stony Stratford, and most of the rural parts of the Borough.
- 4.5 The Outdoor Advertising Policy (approved by Committee as supplementary planning guidance) develops the points in DC 30 stating that:
- (a) there are areas where well designed ads could be encouraged and contribute to the area's amenity:
 - (i) Central Milton Keynes
 - (ii) District Centres
 - (iii) Commercial Leisure Areas
 - (iv) Retail Warehouse Parks
 - (v) Transport Interchanges
 - (b) provided the ads do not present a cluttered appearance and do not proliferate, and for this reason the use of free-standing composite advertising structures will be encouraged;

- (c) advertising would be likely to constitute a hazard where visible to drivers using a classified road or motorway; and
- (d) free-standing advertisements in the landscaped transport corridors are described as detrimental to the amenity of the city as a whole, similarly signs visible from on the grid roads but located within the adjoining grid squares are to be resisted.

5. Issues and Choices

Lamp-Post Advertising

5.1 The proposal for lamp-post advertising using illuminated display panels 120 cm x 80cm is considered to fit within the policies described in section 4, but the novel nature of the scheme warrants inclusion in this report. Officers have reviewed a proposal for 95 units spread around various centres of the city (within the adopted policy list) with an initial view that these could be accommodated safely subject to a number of restrictions. The possible locations are:

- (a) Watling Street, Fenny Stratford (10 units)
- (b) Elder Gate, Central Milton Keynes (15 units)
(adjacent to Leisure Plaza, Station and Retail Park)
- (c) Kingston/Westcroft (15 units each)
- (d) Central Milton Keynes (20 units)
(North Eight to North Thirteenth Street)
- (e) Bletchley:
 - (i) Queensway (10 units)
 - (ii) Station (5 units)
 - (iii) Bus Station (5 units)

City Gateways

5.2 Despite the restriction within the current policies regarding signs on grid road locations there are already exceptions in the form of the roundabout sponsorship and bus shelter advertisements. These signs (approx. 50 roundabout signs and 80 bus shelter signs) have been in existence since 1995 without detriment to either amenity or highway safety.

5.3 It is considered that there is further potential for high quality, well-designed and limited signage of a size appropriate to each site and its setting at the city gateways and on major city centre roundabouts.

5.4 By re-designating small stretches of the grid road network as 'City Gateway' locations for the purposes of the advertising policies, it would allow a slight variation to the existing approach on advertising (see DC 30 above) without weakening the overall position in the

remainder of the Borough. The proposed 'City Gateway' locations, listed in the **Annex**, would fit the following criteria:

- (a) where major roads enter the city;
- (b) on sites adjoining commercial land where visual impact would be limited, not adjoining residential or open space/leisure;
- (c) restricted to a single high quality, well-designed sign located on the grid-road verge signage of a size appropriate to each site and its setting, contributing to the street scene; and
- (d) distant from existing traffic information signs, warning signs or highway junctions at sites representing minimal implications for driver and road-user safety and sited so as not to create potential hazards.

5.5 City Centre Roundabouts

The roundabouts at the four corners of the city centre where signs meeting similar criteria could be accommodated immediately adjoining the zone identified in the Outdoor Advertising Policy at Central Milton Keynes are Belvedere, Springfield, North Grafton and South Grafton. These represent opportunities for exciting and novel structures which would become landmarks in the area.

Consultations

5.6 The Head of Transport has noted that within the Council's current adopted policies all grid roads and most major routes in or around MK are classified roads. Therefore, strictly speaking, the proposal is contrary to the guidance in the Council's "Outdoor Advertising Policy, 1994". Road Safety or Highways Development Control will need to approve sites, and these locations, as important gateways, are becoming increasingly subject to "sign pollution" e.g. M1 J14 to Northfield Roundabout where many tourist attractions now want signing . As long as the adverts do not detract from the messages given by traffic information and warning signs and do not create potential hazards I have no concerns."

5.7 The Head of Legal and Property Services has raised no objections in principle but has four main comments:

- (a) "that the fees need to take account of the increased rating liability of the structures;
- (b) that any new structures owned by the Council will need to be included on the register of the Council's assets;
- (c) concerns over highway safety and possible insurance claims; and
- (d) the need to comply with the contracts procedure."

- 5.8 Regarding (c) it should be noted that all three types of signs are commonplace at road-side locations in other parts of UK and Europe or in the case of the lamp column adverts which are a new format have been trialled in London.
- 5.9 The location of these proposals on highways land means that they fall within the existing contract with the company which maintains all the Borough's bus shelters in return for the advertising in selected shelters. Any new opportunity within the terms of this contract require a fresh agreement on the associated costs and income.
- 5.10 A draft of the report has also been considered by the Head of Planning and the Development Control Manager. If approved in principle by the Committee each detailed proposal would be the subject of applications for Advertisement Consent.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

Whilst outdoor advertising is common in many other cities the unique appearance and the nature of Milton Keynes requires a very careful approach to this subject. The environmental implications of developing a limited programme of carefully designed signs have been a key consideration. Equally Milton Keynes' reputation for innovation and design is another consideration. Great care needs to be exercised to ensure that signs are well-designed and reflect the quality and amenity of their surroundings. This has been the objective during the development of the project so far and will be managed through the advertisement control application system.

6.2 Equalities

None.

6.3 Financial

The enhanced target for sponsorship income generation within the 1998/99 and 1999/2000 budgets places a considerable onus upon the current system to expand. The proposals contained within this report represent a considered expansion of the advertising scheme which will generate the additional income required. A business plan for sponsorship and advertising 1999/2000 was recently completed and will be amended to reflect the new targets in the light of the Committee's decision.

6.4 Legal

There are few legal implications restraining outdoor advertising generally however the existing contract between Adspace and the Council in relation to bus shelter maintenance which gives the company priority in relation to highway advertising needs to be accommodated.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

A sponsorship team of two posts has been operating within the Environment directorate on a self-financing basis since April 1998. Last year the Team raised £200,000 of income and other benefits.

7. **Conclusions**

- 7.1 This process required a careful balance between the increase in outdoor advertising which can reasonably be anticipated in a city of the size and scale of Milton Keynes, and the safety and amenity implications. The signs proposed resemble many found elsewhere in other cities and in one sense may be considered part of a restrained approach appropriate to the quality and appearance of Milton Keynes.
- 7.2 The Committee is recommended to approve the concept of slightly expanding the advertising regime in Milton Keynes within constraints described and to grant delegated powers to the Head of Planning in relation to each type of sign in the areas listed.

Background Papers: Borough of Milton Keynes Local Plan 1995
Outdoor Advertising Policy 1994