



**BUSINESS LEADERS  
PARTNERSHIP**

Milton Keynes Business Leaders  
Partnership Winter 2018/19 update

# Business Voice

[mkblp.co.uk](http://mkblp.co.uk)

## MEMBERS SURVEY SUPPORTS BLP DIRECTION

We recently received results from the members survey and are pleased that overall our efforts meet with your approval. Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. There are a number of issues raised which will be taken forward by the board and incorporated into our future plans.

I am pleased to announce that the AGM approved the appointment of Freddie Guilmar to the board following the retirement of Martin Banham Hall, and the board have appointed Nick Mann as Vice Chair. Good luck to both.

Progress on MKBAA 2019 continues apace with the announcement of stage two entries as we close in on the final shortlisted names for 14th March. Over 130 organisations entered stage one and set the judges numerous headaches in their decision making to whittle down numbers. We also now have all fourteen categories with a sponsor, no mean achievement as the event gathers its own momentum.

We have circulated to members on the availability of complimentary seats for MKBAA 2019 and have received an excellent response - only three seats remain! Let Gina know if you are interested in taking a seat, or book your own table via the website in the enlarged arena space!

We are developing an interesting and varied programme of events for 2019 (see elsewhere for the first quarter) but trying to get politicians at the moment appears impossible as they grapple with another issue!!

Finally, MKBLP were recently invited by the General Manager of the Holiday Inn to join Marco Pierre White at the opening of his Marcos Restaurant at the hotel - a good night was had by all and the food comes highly recommended!



Wishing us all a prosperous and Happy New Year!



## New Board Member Appointment

At the October AGM, MKBLP members elected Freddie Guilmar to the Business Leaders board. Freddie is the Managing Director of the Red Thread Partnership Ltd, a Leadership and Change consultancy based out of Olney. Freddie, who has been an MKBLP member for six years, commented on his appointment to the board:

*"I am looking forward to supporting my colleagues in working towards our aim of identifying and developing the interests and needs of businesses in Milton Keynes, and be recognised as the pre-eminent body for business contact at a strategic level."*

  
**The Red Thread**  
PARTNERSHIP

Using our skills and knowledge  
for the benefit of the Milton Keynes  
business community

# MKBLP Q&A with new member Meena Chander, (MSC) Founder and CEO of Events Together Ltd



## Why being a member is important?

Milton Keynes is a growing city and fundamental to this growth is SMEs and new businesses. As a business which falls into both of these categories, I believe that being a member of MKBLP is a vital element to the continued growth of my business as it enables me to meet fellow business leaders in the same position as myself. While this will aid my business development, it will also provide me with a pillar of support through its wide and

varied network of business leaders.

## What do I bring to MK Business Leaders?

Having worked in the events industry for 20 years, I now produce business events in Milton Keynes which I can organise for local businesses, or they can attend. Although we tend not to give it much thought, as the world evolves, we all rely on new events to educate us, inform us and inspire us. As an event organiser, I see first-hand how events create a sense of community, successfully bringing people, organisations and businesses together.

However, successful events do not randomly materialise or run themselves. The considerations, logistics and planning need to be organised in minute detail and with military precision. They require huge support and infrastructure; organising professional and corporate events is no easy task – and this is where I can fill that gap.

## What challenges face the Milton Keynes business community?

In the bigger and more cosmopolitan cities, there's a lot more happening on a wider scale in terms of business events and general support from local organisations, they seem to work more collaboratively. As SMEs in a smaller city, such as Milton Keynes, there doesn't seem to be this level of support, unless the business is a charity. Also, the same people from the same organisations generally appear to have a greater level of control. As a result, there needs to be more opportunities for SMEs and new businesses to break down these barriers.

## What makes Milton Keynes special for you?

The fact that it's a growing and upcoming city which will hopefully be a place for me to grow my businesses. I've decided to base myself in Milton Keynes as I can see the potential for fresh ideas, which I hope I will be able to contribute to.

## Your tip for success in business and/or life?

Be fair, open and approachable. Also, don't forget those who helped you at the start when you grow and become more successful. Be meaningful.

## New MKBLP Members

During the last few months we have also welcomed three further new MKBLP members. Jerry Taylor, Managing Director at WSA - The Communications Agency, Louise Owen, Sales & Marketing Director at Bobcat Digital, and, most recently, Simon Green, CEO of YMCA, Milton Keynes.

## NEWS FROM MILTON KEYNES BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2019

As we go to press, the judging process for phase one of the 2019 Milton Keynes Business Achievement Awards (MKBAA) has been completed.

This year, over 130 entries were received for the awards, and below is a list of the award categories, along with the sponsors:

- Best Training Scheme – sponsored by: Mazars
- Culture & Arts – sponsored by: MK Business Improvement District
- Leisure & Entertainment – sponsored by: Jurys Inn
- Technology Business – sponsored by: Hillier Hopkins
- Design & Creativity – sponsored by: Niftylift
- Professional Services – sponsored by: dbfb
- Small Business – sponsored by: Transport Systems Catapult
- New Business – sponsored by: BSI
- Charity of the Year – sponsored by: Bletchley Park
- Business Impact in the Community – sponsored by: Cranfield University
- Customer Service – sponsored by: ATL Ltd
- Entrepreneur of the Year – sponsored by: Keens Shay Keens
- Lifetime Achievement Award – sponsored by: Barclays
- Business of the Year – sponsored by: The Open University



The 2019 MKBAA awards will carry the theme of Skills and Education, celebrating the fantastic skills, education opportunities and facilities in the City, while marking the 50th anniversary of The Open University, who are our headline sponsor, along with KPMG and MK Council. Cranfield University and The University of Buckingham are also sponsors.

The event will be held on Thursday 14th March at the new venue of the Arena MK. Hosted by broadcaster Faye Carruthers, Baroness Martha Lane-Fox, Chancellor of The Open University, will be our guest speaker on the evening.

MKBAA 2019 will once again donate the proceeds raised from the awards evening to the trust fund established by MKBLP with the MK Community Foundation, which assists start-up businesses in deprived areas of the city.

If you would like to book a table at the awards ceremony visit [www.mkbaa.co.uk](http://www.mkbaa.co.uk), alternatively, we have reserved complimentary seats at two tables for MKBLP members which are on a first come, first served basis.

# The evolution of technology and the impact on business

**While a massive advocate for technology, Gary Turner, Xero Accounting's MD, and self-professed robot vigilante, believes that the recipe for success in business today should be a good mix of technology - and positive human attitude.**

On the subject of 'Disruptive Technology' at September's quarterly MK Business Leaders Partnership Dinner, Gary addressed the rapid pace of technology and the affect this has had on businesses over the last three decades.

At the helm of a global company which planted its UK roots in Milton Keynes just six years ago, Gary was particularly keen to put the technology subject into context for small businesses, who make up a large proportion of Xero's customer base. While Xero fundamentally sells a 'rather ordinary, category of software' accounting, the impact it has on its 5 million UK customers underpins the company's over-riding objective which is to help small businesses succeed.

As the 3rd most influential person in UK finance, Gary has witnessed first hand the growth of technology and the effect it has had on businesses, from transforming the efficiency of an individual, by giving them computing tools, to the era of CRM software, which provides businesses with a platform to improve productivity, and the internet itself, which has re-shaped entire industries. But, as Gary points out: "we all have a responsibility to harness technology within our businesses, as the implications of it are enormous, and we have all seen businesses come and go as a result."

The advent of the internet means that there is no hiding place for businesses today. One negative online review can significantly damage a business, so much so that customer service has moved on from three decades ago and we, as a society, have much higher expectations as a result.

During his speech Gary cited three key technology points which irrevocably disrupted the way we do business today. For instance, the onset of telecommunications brought the death of distance and, for someone who started the UK arm of a firm which began on the other side of the world, Gary is more experienced than most on this subject. "Where you are is no longer an impediment in business and we no longer rely on physicality. For instance, the best search engine for finding out about Milton Keynes just happens to be in California."

Likening technology to science, Gary also referenced Metcalfe's Law, which states that a network's impact is the square of the number of those within that network. "That principle is being applied to software, and the ability to do this digitally, the more the product is used, the more productive the value."



Whether a business is in retail or service, they are increasingly becoming more systemised and technology is being used as a science, decisions are being made through real data and success is being measured through pay per clips. "Science is incredibly prevalent in our business. There are a group of scientists entering the working world today, they are younger, they talk a new language and, through them, there is a new world of business emerging." No longer are we solely relying on human instinct in business today, but, Gary points out, mixing this with the technical tools we have available today is a winning recipe for success.

The final part of his speech focused on the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) who, according to sensationalising media are on the cusp of wiping out our jobs. "I believe we are a long way off from the generalisation of AI." Gary commented, as he regaled the audience with his own experience of rescuing a tipped over, self-driving delivery robot in the Centre of Milton Keynes, which was captured on social media and immediately went viral. "This only goes to reinforce the fact that, without the human element, we are not ready for this level of disruption."

*"We still need people to do jobs, and you can not digitalise the human capacity for ingenuity. People today are working for a sense of purpose, a meaningful way of life, and not just a job. The companies who succeed over the next couple of decades will be those who harness digitalisation, minimise the disruption and embrace humanisation. People are going to want to work with a company who does good, helps businesses and makes their staff happy - and that isn't going to be run off the road by digital disruption."*



# MKBLP raises a range of issues with Milton Keynes Development Partnership

The issue of car parking in Central Milton Keynes was raised several times during the September MKBLP breakfast briefing, as MKDP's CEO Charles Macdonald outlined development plans which will see Milton Keynes become a city centre powerhouse.

Now in its sixth year, The Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) was created to develop 265 acres of the city's most prime land, with the aid of a £32 million loan from MK Council. While an independent entity, MKDP is subjected to council red tape in the form of an accountability framework, in alignment with MK50, to deliver long term commercial and social benefits.

Through strong pipeline developments to recover capital, MKDP are, according to Mr Macdonald, making great strides in repaying the original debt. "We will tick this box by early to mid 2019 and, with the creation of additional revenue schemes, including direct development and property investment, it is our intention to create, over the next 5 years, a portfolio worth up to £50 million."

As part of the Council's framework, MKDP have been tasked with assisting in the delivery of Renaissance:CMK, a strand which came out of the MK50's future report, which will, in principle, mean intensifying the commercial usage of Central Milton Keynes, while ensuring that some of the founding principles of Milton Keynes are retained.

As one of those founding principles, back in 1967, originally stated that no building was allowed to be taller than the tallest tree, some might argue that the decision to build the 14 storey Hotel La Tour contradicts this. Indeed, as pointed out by MKBLP, many of the planned developments disclosed by Mr Macdonald during his hour long address were taller than what has historically been the norm within Milton Keynes, but he reasoned: "With its alignment to a grid system, our city centre is unique, and we need to increase density to make it more viable and on par with what people expect of a city centre today with a population of 500,000."

Touching on the JV with Sterling Property Ventures and the development of a large commercial site, Mr Macdonald explained that this is set to stimulate a step change in the quality, height and viability of office provision in Central Milton Keynes, in a direct bid to become a powerhouse for large corporates. "We need to push the boundaries of what we are looking to achieve, which will see us into the future." He also acknowledged the momentous £150 million technology hub development by Santander. "For such a major corporate entity to make their stand in MK, will provide a huge amount of leverage moving forward."

With many commercial properties planned for development over current parking sites, including the controversial development of a 180 bedroom business hotel without a car park, MKBLP's Chairman, Dr Philip Smith, raised the question of parking in Central Milton Keynes, which Mr Macdonald admitted was a sensitive issue: "It is set to be a fascinating debate, but we need to maximise the use of the existing parking infrastructure and explore alternative routes, such as the use of shuttle buses, while improving pedestrian access."

He explained that, over the next 20 to 30 years, it is expected that people's parking expectations will decrease as the infrastructure and routes into the city improves. Autonomous vehicles are coming, and the recent relocation of BP Chargemaster from Luton will further fuel the electric vehicle sector and bring better charge point provisions to Milton Keynes.

The need to improve the train connections, particularly from Bletchley into Centre MK, was raised, with a suggestion that talks were already in progress to develop one primary mass transit interchange, on par with Birmingham's New St. This development could potentially be Grafton Gate, with a tram system linking the interchange to the Shopping Centre, however, as Mr Macdonald pointed out; "these are just ideas."

Alongside adding commercial value to the Milton Keynes economy, part of MKDP's remit is to assist in the delivery of more affordable housing. This includes the current development on Campbell Wharf and the creation of Private Rental Sector apartments on the old Wyevale garden centre site. The latter, Mr Macdonald disclosed, is an: "exciting scheme, which will provide substantial residential input into the centre of MK, supporting the Renaissance:CMK ambition which is to increase residential population to stimulate the retail and leisure economy."

Dr Philip Smith MBE and Chair of MKBLP, questioned the regeneration of old commercial properties. Mr Macdonald insisted that MKDP were encouraging the development of residential dwellings within 1980's office blocks. "These buildings are no longer compliant with the image we now have of what offices should look like. However, while no longer commercially viable, they do have a purpose."

"For the first time in the history of Milton Keynes we are seeing the rejuvenation of the original buildings."



# Should Private Firms be Trusted to Provide a Public Service

Deliberating the complex subject of whether private firms should be trusted to provide a public service, Rupert Soames, OBE, delivered his view to Milton Keynes business leaders with a self assurance which confirmed his inheritance of the public service gene from his eminent grandfather, Sir Winston Churchill.

As guest speaker at MKBLP's November quarterly dinner, Rupert Soames, in his position as CEO of Serco Group Plc, was aptly equipped to weigh into the often controversial debate - should private companies be trusted to provide Public Services?

Rupert was introduced by Chair of MKBLP, Dr Philip Smith MBE. Drawing on the comparison of the demise of Carillion and the success of Serco, Philip questioned the ethical complexities of contracts and the issues surrounding outsourcing.

Ever since the Thatcher era, which ushered in a de-nationalisation policy, the view that private was good and public was bad has taken root. "We have taken this dispensation for granted, but what we don't see when private companies start providing Government services is how difficult being in Government actually is." During this opening response, Rupert stressed the overriding importance of Government, and the huge impact the delivery of public service has on the lives of Britons, from regulation on monopolies and banking, to hospitals and pensions.

Providing an argument for both sides of the private versus public debate, Rupert draws the line at private companies operating within the judicial process or the army, "these are employees of the state." However, he humorously painted the analogy of a privatised individual running alongside the army offering a cup of coffee!

"The profit motive of private companies is incompatible with public sector ethos. But, what matters is the outcome. We need to understand that profit is a fee, a fee which allows us to re-invest."

Squashing the view that private companies are unaccountable in the same way as civil servants, Rupert, who admits he is regularly called upon by the home affairs committee, opposed the monopolies in the country, both public and private, which, in his view "are always bad, as they are non-contestable."

Serco runs five prisons within the UK, including the immigration removal centre Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire, and Rupert questioned how malevolent society actually wants prisons to be? With 33,000 recorded prison assaults, including 325 deaths, in a 12 month period, he dispelled the myth that prisoners have in fact a 'cushy' time in prison.

Rupert argued the point that yes, prison does need to be unpleasant, a deterrent, but as a huge proportion of prisoners currently incarcerated are illiterate, and with just 70 lifers in UK prison today, the focus should be on reform to make them better people on release. Quoting an extract which graces the front page of The Prison Officers Training Manual, a legacy of his Grandfather's Home Office administration; "When prisoners are in their cells the punishment is lack of freedom and not to be scared to death."

Contesting the annual £30,000 spend per prisoner, he reasoned that Government spending of scarce public resources should be constrained. How much do we want to spend on someone who has broken the law? "It's how we strike the balance on spending on the lawless as opposed to those who abide by the law."

According to Rupert, responding to a question on the role of the 3rd sector, when the public, private and the 3rd sector work well alongside each other it is: "fantastically powerful. The private sector insulates the 3rd sector from the nightmare of Government and can provide the infrastructure needed."

His response to a question on Brexit was to encourage people to focus less on the decision, and more on the fact that it has to be implemented, "we have to suck it up and get on with it."

A sentiment which appears to underpin the very ethos of Rupert Soames, and his belief in the public, private and third sector wheels, which make the UK turn.



# Directors of Milton Keynes Business Leaders Partnership

**Dr Philip Smith MBE** Chair  
**Nicholas Mann** Vice Chair, Interdirect  
**Dr Julie Mills** Milton Keynes College  
**Jan Flawn CBE** PJ Care  
**Jean Gowin** CityFibre  
**Ruby Parmar** PwC  
**Simon DeMaid** Howes Percival  
**Freddie Guilmar** The Red Thread Partnership

Milton Keynes Business Leaders Partnership is an independent organisation, funded through member subscriptions. MKBLP works to identify and develop interests, specific to the business community in the City.

Registered office: Bell House, First Floor, Seebeck Place, Knowlhill, Central Milton Keynes, Milton Keynes MK5 8FR.

## Your contact details

Please remember to keep us up to date with any changes to your contact details, especially email address alterations.

Please email [gina.harper@mkblp.co.uk](mailto:gina.harper@mkblp.co.uk)



Thursday 14th March 2019  
The Arena, Stadium MK  
Reception 6:00pm

## 2019 - Dates For your diary



### Breakfast Briefing

The Mansion, Bletchley Park  
7:30am January 15th  
Speaker: Ron Overton,  
CEO Transitions UK



### Breakfast Briefing

MK Brasserie  
7:30am February 12th  
Speaker: Simon Lloyd, Chairman of  
the Milton Keynes University Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust



### Quarterly Dinner

Holiday Inn  
6:30pm March 28th  
Speaker: Judge Francis Sheridan  
on the judiciary



### Breakfast Briefing

MK Brasserie  
7:30am April 11th  
Speaker: Lal Tawney, Consultant, on  
Fintel Eco



### Quarterly Dinner

Holiday Inn  
7:30am May 23rd  
Speaker: Jane Galvin, Dep Dir General  
CBI (sponsored by HSBC)