

UNDERPASSES

Connecting people, connecting places

An exhibition tracing the development of Milton Keynes



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Introduction

The 'Underpasses, connecting people, connecting places' project celebrates Milton Keynes' unique urban design heritage. Centred on community engagement, the project will deliver heritage inspired public artworks located in two city underpasses. The work is informed by the ideas and inspiration of local communities in Fishermead, Oldbrook, Conniburrow and Downs Barn. A programme of events is currently taking place where local residents are working with artists, heritage advisers, archaeologists and historians to explore the distinctive heritage of these areas.

The *Underpasses* project will lead into, and form part of, Milton Keynes' 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2017, designed to connect people to their shared Milton Keynes heritage.

Milton Keynes a different New Town

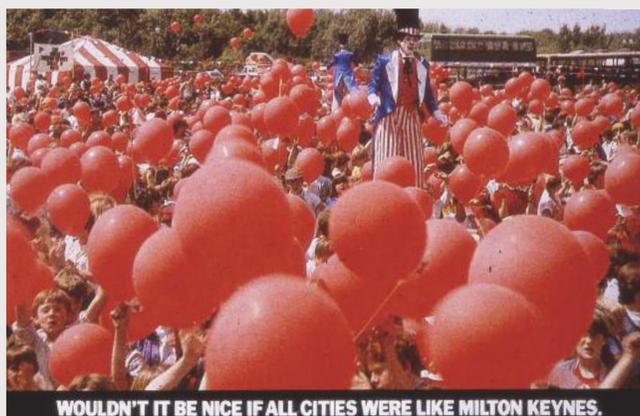
Milton Keynes was the last and the largest of the 'New Towns' to be created in the third wave of New Town developments that had started in 1946.

When planning started in 1967 there were around 40,000 people already living in the 4 towns (Bletchley, Stony Stratford, New Bradwell and Wolverton) and in the 13 villages within the 9,000 hectares (22,000 acres) designated by the Minister of Housing and Local Government. By 1992 45,000 new homes had been built, 150 miles of cycle paths – or Redways - had been created. In addition to construction, 23 million trees, shrubs and bulbs were planted across 5,000 acres of parkland. It is predicted that by 2031, Milton Keynes will be the nation's tenth largest urban area and home to approximately 350,000 people.

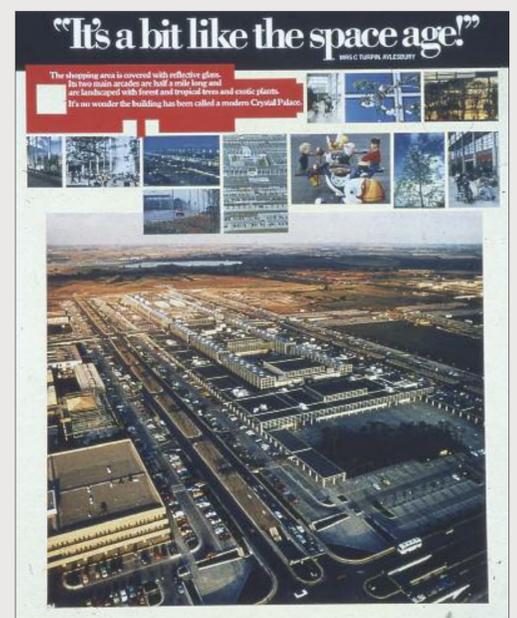
This exhibition traces the history and development of Milton Keynes, touching on its earliest settlers of the Stone and Bronze Age periods through to its modern day inhabitants of the town's central areas.



The Shopping Centre, Central Milton Keynes
Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Red balloon poster by Cogent Elliot with the strap line "Wouldn't it be nice if all cities were like Milton Keynes."
Designed by Cogent Elliott. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Poster promoting MK with picture of shopping centre.
Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



General view of housing under construction at Fishermead.
Photograph by John Donat. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

The Underpasses project is supported by: The Heritage Lottery Fund, Milton Keynes Community Foundation, Milton Keynes Council and The Parks Trust MK.



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Central Milton Keynes: A meeting place throughout the ages

The area occupied by Central Milton Keynes and the surrounding grid squares of Conniburrow, Downs Barn, Oldbrook and Fishermead does not appear to have been attractive for settlement until the late Iron Age and early Romano-British period, when a number of small farmsteads are recorded. Prior to this, evidence for human occupation is limited to chance finds of flint tools, with signs of more permanent occupation being focussed around the river valleys of the Great and Little Ouse or Ouzel.

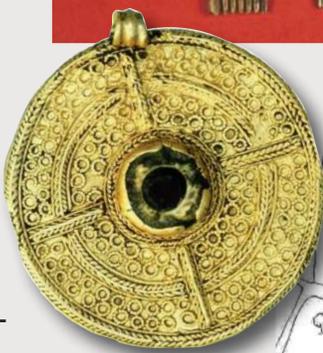
Behind the Central Library lies a Scheduled Ancient Monument (nationally important archaeological site) known as Secklow Mound. Secklow was the name of one of the Hundreds – an Anglo-Saxon administrative area – that included the Milton Keynes region. The low turf-built mound served as a meeting place for the elders of the Secklow Hundred and is close to the point where three parishes meet, a typically isolated spot for a Saxon 'moot' or meeting place.

Prior to the construction of the New Town, knowledge of the site of Secklow Mound had passed from local memory. However, historical research carried out by the newly formed Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit (MKAU) in the 1970s led to the rediscovery of the mound on a plan of 1641 marked as 'Selly Hill'. Fieldwork confirmed the precise location of the mound to the edge of the City Centre. A subsequent excavation by MKAU revealed a low flat turf mound surrounded by a one metre wide ditch and to the recovery of medieval pottery.

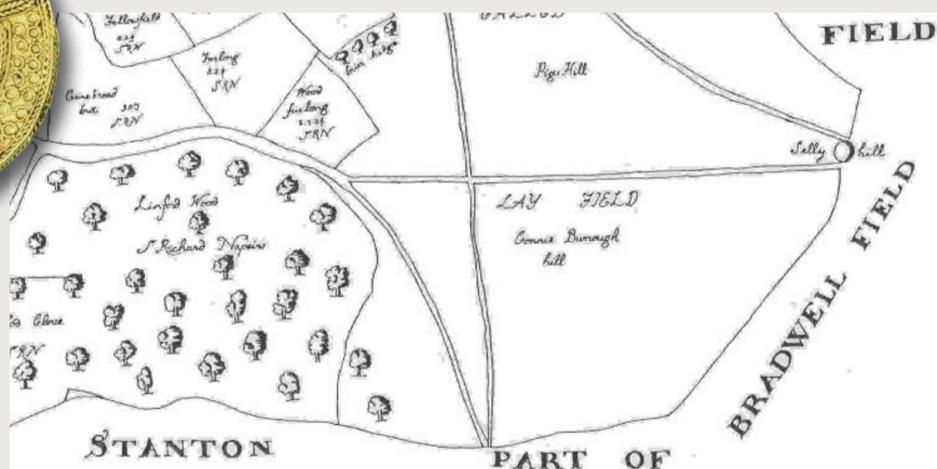
In 1978 the mound was reconstructed and landscaped protecting the significant archaeological remains beneath a 'new' mound. At the same time, it was added to the national Schedule of Ancient Monuments making it the archaeological equivalent of a Grade I listed building.



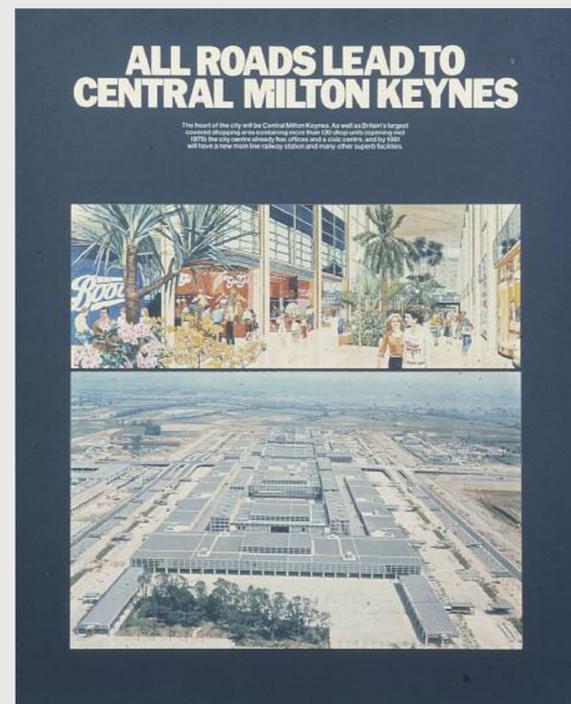
Saxon Combs.
Image courtesy of Milton Keynes Conservation & Archaeology Department.



Saxon Pendant.
Image courtesy of Milton Keynes Conservation & Archaeology Department.



Map with Selly Hill.
Image courtesy of Milton Keynes Conservation & Archaeology Department.



Central Milton Keynes and shopping centre marketing poster by Cogent Elliott. Designed by Cogent Elliott. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Secklow Mound early 1980s.
Image courtesy of Milton Keynes Conservation & Archaeology Department.

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Building on the Garden City Movement

The concept of 'New Towns' can be traced back to the late 19th Century. Sir Ebenezer Howard, an early pioneer of town planning and social reform, established the 'Garden City' movement, which proposed planned, self-contained communities, which would combine town and country.

In 1898 Howard wrote a book entitled *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (later republished as *Garden Cities of To-morrow*), which advocated the construction of a new kind of town. It can be summed up by his "Three Magnets" diagram as combining the advantages of cities and the countryside while eliminating their disadvantages. Industry was to be kept separate from residential areas - such zoning was a new idea at the time - and trees and open spaces would proliferate across the entire scheme.

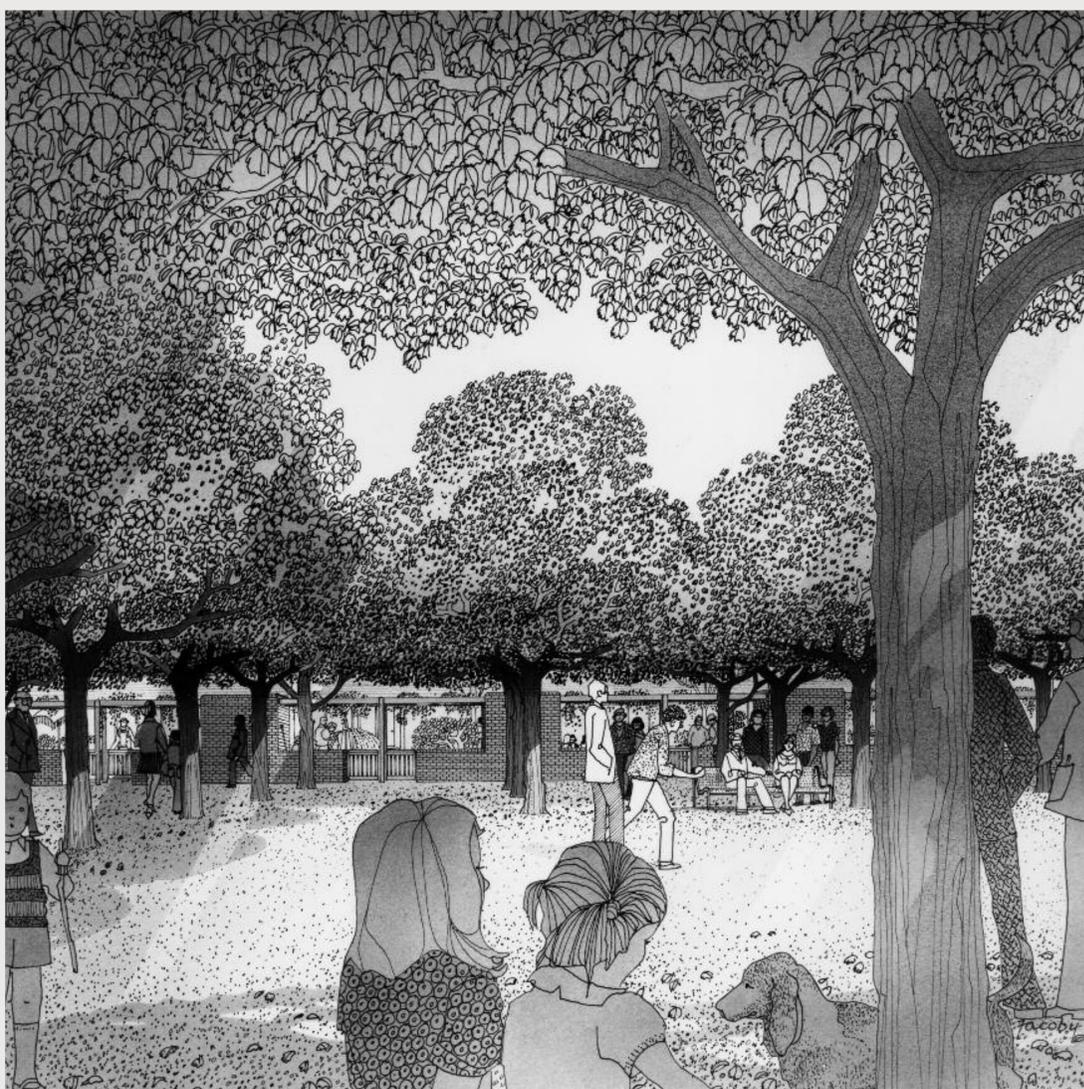
The principles outlined by Howard formed the basis of Letchworth Garden City, founded in 1903. Letchworth had an important influence on future town planning and the New Towns movement. Much like Milton Keynes nearly sixty years later, it was created as a response to the squalor and poverty of much urban life in Britain.

After the Second World War, there was an urgent need to build a significant number of homes in order to relocate families living in poor or bombed-out housing. 'The New Towns Act' of 1946 was brought in to help alleviate the housing shortage across the UK. The Act allowed building control to be removed from the local authority and placed under the supervision of specially established development corporations.

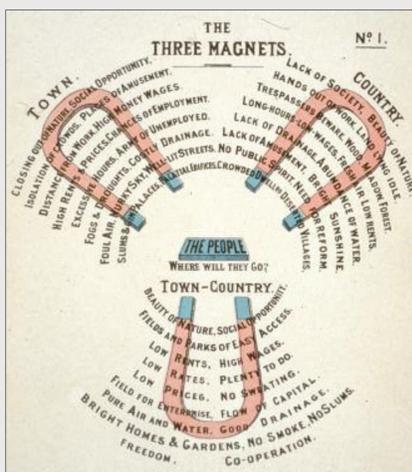
In the years that followed, 23 New Towns were created across England; 34 across the whole of the UK. They were created in three waves of building development from 1946 to 1970. Milton Keynes was created in the last wave, between 1967 and 1970, which saw six areas designated for New Town development.



Plan for Underpass System With Trees, Cars and People. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

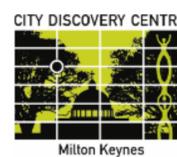


Drawing by Helmut Jacoby of rear of houses and communal area at Fishermead, 1975. Drawing by Helmut Jacoby, photograph by John Donat. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Ebenezer Howard's 'Three Magnets' diagram. Image courtesy of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

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Ambitions of the New Town

Milton Keynes was initially designed for a population of 250,000. An area of land totalling 22,000 acres to the north of Buckinghamshire was set aside for the development. Existing communities spread across four towns, eight villages and five hamlets were incorporated into the Master Plan, providing a sense of history and identity.

In March 1967, the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) was established with Lord 'Jock' Campbell as its first Chairman. Fred Lloyd Roche CBE joined in 1970, initially as the Chief Architect and Planner, later becoming the Corporation's General Manager.

MKDC ran from 1967 to 1992 and at its height in the 1980s employed 1,700 people. Over its 25 year history MKDC generated over 80,000 jobs, oversaw the construction of 44,000 houses and planted 14 million trees and shrubs. It also provided 83 new schools, 10 new health centres, over 100km of new city roads and nearly 230km of cycle Redways¹.

It also ran an artist-in-residence programme, commissioning over 50 public artworks. The planning committee set out six key goals in the planning of Milton Keynes, including:

- i. Opportunity and freedom of choice
- ii. Easy movement, access and good communications
- iii. Balance and variety
- iv. Attractiveness
- v. Public awareness and participation
- vi. Efficient and imaginative use of resources²

The Master Plan also set out strategies to address potential needs of the future; the flexibility of the grid structure allowed sites to be reserved for later growth and change. The amount of land identified made Milton Keynes the largest of the schemes to be developed under the 'New Towns Act'. This ambitious scale was often remarked upon by critics at the time.



Part of Milton Keynes Exhibition Design Stand, Haymarket, London. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

'The one prescient feature of the Master Plan is that it did anticipate the levels and use of car ownership that we now have. People at the time thought this is mad, this is never going to happen... and it's happened quicker than the Master Plan guessed it might'

Christopher Woodward, Architect³.



Underpass on Saxon Gate showing the Shopping Centre in background. Photograph by Ivor Leonard. Image copyright Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

¹ The Story of the original Central Milton Keynes CMK – told by the people who shaped the initial ideas of Central Milton Keynes ed. Marion Hill (Living Archive, MK, 2007) p.10.

² The Master Plan for Milton Keynes Vol. 1. p.13.

³ The Story of the original Central Milton Keynes – told by the people who shaped the initial ideas of Central Milton Keynes ed. Marion Hill (Living Archive, MK, 2007) p. 17.

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The Master Plan

'The city should offer its newcomers and its inhabitants the greatest possible range of opportunities in education, work, housing, recreation, health care and all other activities and services'⁴.

In September 1967 the architect and planning company Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks Forestier-Walker & Bor were appointed as master planners for the new city. The plan covered social development, education, health, transport, employment and industry, leisure, recreation, and agriculture. These early architectural designs were brought to life through the visualisations of Helmut Jacoby.

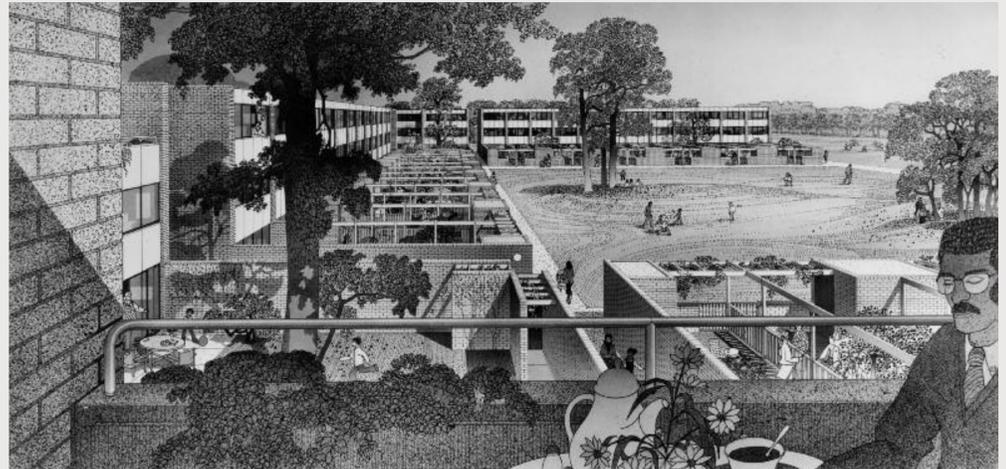
A grid pattern of roads and squares was designed to avoid congestion and to follow the topography of the land. From the outset, Milton Keynes took into account the growth in car ownership and the role it would play in modern life. The grid road network provided quick transit routes across the town.

Alongside the increasing use of cars was a need to provide pedestrian routes. A safe system of pedestrian and cycle paths away from the major roads was established. The Redways were designed to provide a network of walking and cycle paths with underpasses connecting the estates. In total there are 364 underpasses in Milton Keynes.

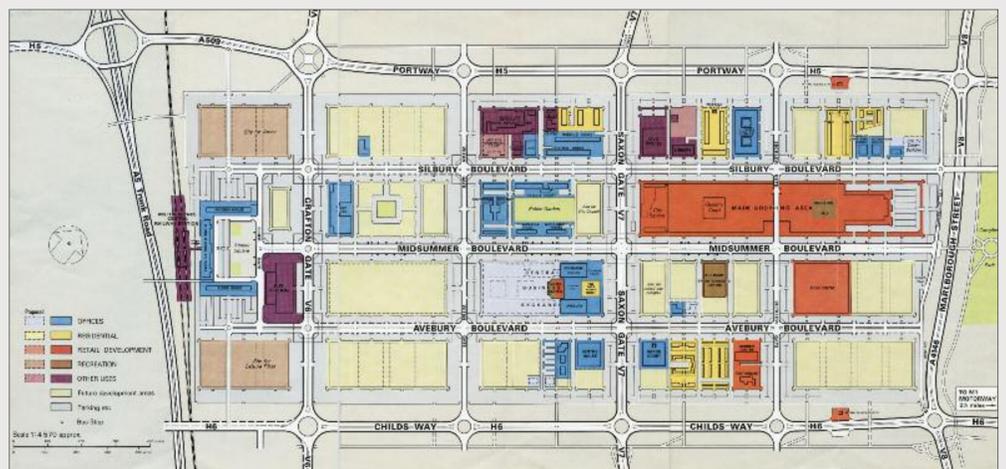
Landscaping was central to the Master Plan. Green spaces make up 25% of the city, (around 5,000 acres), a vision within the Master Plan that has now fully matured.

Other features in the Master Plan included:

- **A distinct city centre** – this was in contrast to the idea of a dispersed city and would contain a shopping centre, cultural and leisure facilities.
- **Linear parks** – based on existing rivers and streams, which played a major structuring element.
- **Overlapping catchments** – So that no area would be exclusive or self-contained. The ambition was not to create a dormitory town but a self-contained city where one could work and live.
- **Activity Centres** – including local shops, pubs, schools and bus stops would be grouped where main pedestrian routes crossed the mid-point of each length of city road so they would be easy to access by foot or road.⁵



Drawing by Helmut Jacoby of rental housing at Fishermead, 1974.
Drawing by Helmut Jacoby, photograph by John Donat. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Plan of Central Milton Keynes.
Courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Outdoor Market with City Shopping Centre.
Image courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

⁴ The Master Plan for Milton Keynes Vol. 1. p.13.

⁵ The Master Plan for Milton Keynes Vol. 1. p.75.

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Architecture and Art

Much of the overall quality of the architecture and master planning of Milton Keynes was due to the vision of Derek Walker, Chief Architect and Planner from 1970 to 1976.⁶ Walker recruited a team to work with him at the MKDC and produced a strategy for the 'New City' that would produce 3,000 houses per year with supporting community, leisure, retail, sporting and cultural facilities.

'The first thing I ever did at Milton Keynes – before anything was built – was to walk high onto Bow Brickhill and look at what a bloody, dull place this 'Designated Area' looked. Flat as a board! Coming from the north of England, I'd never seen anything quite this flat – only 200 feet difference in the whole of the Designated Area. I thought, the only thing that can really make this thing tick is landscape – and plenty of it!'

Derek Walker, Chief Architect & Planning Officer⁷.

Walker had a gift for spotting talent and commissioned architects of national and international repute to design domestic and civic buildings for Milton Keynes. This new wave of architects were given the space and encouragement to develop their creative ideas for the new town and built their own reputations on the opportunities Milton Keynes afforded them.

The growth of Milton Keynes was rapid, with five new houses being built per week. Unlike many cities in Britain, based around a single industry, Milton Keynes looked to attract a diverse range of organisations from manufacturing to science-based industries. This growth in jobs stimulated the growth in population. When the boundary of Milton Keynes was defined, some 40,000 people lived in the "designated area" of 88.51 km² (21,833 acres).⁸ In 2013 the population of Milton Keynes was 255,700⁹. Milton Keynes was not designed to be a satellite of London or Birmingham but to be a self-sustaining city in its own right.

Since its inception in the 1960s, Milton Keynes has been commissioning highly accomplished and celebrated artists such as Elisabeth Frink's 'Black Horse', Bernard Schottlander's 'MS Series No 1' and Wendy Taylor's 'Octo'. The latter two works being Grade II listed in 2016 as a result of a national assessment of post-war sculpture by Historic England. Alongside this, a local organisation - Art in Milton Keynes (AIM), actively promoted Milton Keynes as a place for artists to show their work. AIM, previously known as the Midsummer Arts Trust, played an important part in providing the town with the sculpture collection it still holds today.



Model of housing development at Fishermead - rear view of 3 storey flats on front of square. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



'Underpass' by Fionnuala Boyd and Leslie Evans, 1983. Image courtesy of the artists.



'Black Horse' in bronze by Dame Elisabeth Frink 1978. Image courtesy of Milton Keynes Council Public Art Team.



Essence sculpture by Wendy Taylor situated outside Saxon Court, Avebury Boulevard. Sculpture by Wendy Taylor. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

⁶ "Derek Walker: Milton Keynes - The Art of Illusion". MK Gallery. 5 May 2011. Retrieved 16 October 2014.

⁷ The Story of the original CMK – told by the people who shaped the initial ideas of Central Milton Keynes ed. Marion Hill (Living Archive, MK, 2007) p. 10.

⁸ "Modern Milton Keynes: A Plan for a New City". MKweb. Retrieved 5 January 2007. Subsequent census data is 1971:46,500; 1981:95,800; 1991:144,700; 2001:177,500.

⁹ <http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/your-council-and-elections/statistics/population-statistics>.

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Fishermead MK6

Fishermead, located to the south of Central Milton Keynes takes its name from a 1923 conveyance field in little Woolstone – 'Fisher Mead'. Fishermead's road names reference Cornish fishing villages, with names such as Gurnards Avenue, Mullion Place, and Padstow Avenue.¹⁰

Construction began on phase one of Fishermead in March 1974 with the building of 280 houses and flats. As part of the inner city grid, its housing was developed as a higher density than in other areas of Milton Keynes.

Initially 75% of dwellings were designed for renting and 25% for sale. The weekly rent for a two-person flat on Fishermead in 1975 was £9.26, increasing to £13 for a four bedroom six-person house with a car-port.

The next four phases of development saw 1,150 dwellings being created. The mixture of flats and maisonettes included a number of properties that were specially designed to cater for the elderly and disabled.

Fishermead Boulevard was the location for the innovative Channel 40, a community cable TV station for Milton Keynes. Jointly funded by the MKDC and Post Office Telecommunications (which preceded British Telecom) it broadcast from 1976 to 1979. The team of seven full-time staff, along with community volunteers, made, produced and starred in the shows. The channel was a first of its kind in the UK, available to all new homes in Milton Keynes via the Post Office Cabling system. It was a free service for three hours each week, and competed against the likes of 'Crossroads' and 'Nationwide' during the early primetime viewing slot.

During the mid-1980s women in Fishermead and the adjacent estate of Oldbrook were instrumental in the successful campaign to get a chemist shop and general practitioners' surgery for the estate.¹¹ The appearance of shrubbery at the ends of Redways, where they met roads, was also the result of local councillors reaction to the actions of mothers highlighting the accidents at these locations.



Fishermead phases 1 and 2 under construction, 1974. Images courtesy Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Corner shop with flats above at Fishermead Boulevard with flats across tree lined central reservation of Porthleven Place, September 1978. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Introduction of Channel 40 cable TV to Fishermead estate. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Aerial view of housing under construction at Fishermead, 1975. Photograph by John Donat. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Fishermead housing development looking south, 1975. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

¹⁰ Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre Fishermead Information file B060/53. Research Document created by Caroline Hamilton, April 2016.

¹¹ 'A Social History of Milton Keynes' by Mark Clapson (ISSN 1467-1441) pages 157/8

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Oldbrook MK6

The name Oldbrook derives from the field name "Holbrook/Oldbrook". Again the street names were themed referencing cricket terms and famous cricketers. Even the layout of the estate was based on a cricket field.¹² Street names include The Boundary, Boycott Avenue and Sutcliffe Avenue.

As with many estates, Oldbrook was built in phases. In 1978, construction began on the 184 dwellings that formed the first phase of the estate's development. Housing was built to Parker Morris Standards; these were considered generous in terms of the space allocated.

Sir Parker Morris had led a committee that drew up an influential report on space standards in public housing in the UK titled 'Homes for Today and Tomorrow'. The report concluded that the quality of social housing needed to be improved to match the rise in living standards.

In 1963, these standards were set out in the Ministry of Housing's 'Design Bulletin 6 – Space in the Home'. The report provided the dimensions furniture items that the designer should accommodate. By 1967 these space standards became mandatory for all housing built in new towns. This was extended to all council housing in 1969, although they had already been adopted by many local councils by then.

For many of Milton Keynes' new residents these homes were a significant improvement on their previous accommodation, not just in terms of space but in the quality of their amenities. All of the homes were fully equipped with gas-fired central heating. To qualify for a new home in Milton Keynes you were required to have a job or the offer of one.



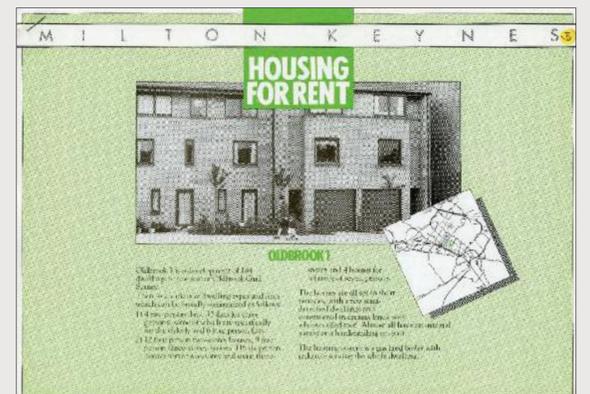
Houses for rent - Shackleton Place, Oldbrook. Three storey with integral garages and balconies. June 1984. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



View of cricket pitch with housing and Cricketers pub. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Underpass below the V7 at Oldbrook and Fishermead. Image courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Rental pamphlet for housing on Oldbrook. Courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

¹² Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, Oldbrook information file B060/52. Research Document created by Caroline Hamilton, April 2016.

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Conniburrow MK14

Conniburrow is located within one of the inner grid squares close to the city centre. The estate was named after Connie Burrough Hill which is listed on a map from 1641 of Great Linford. The word conniburrow means rabbit burrow or warren. As with the other estates, road names are themed; they reference wildflowers with street names including Teasel, Fennel and Bramble.

Construction began on the Conniburrow estate in 1975 and developed over two phases. The design extends the principles first applied at Fishermead. The estate is made up of higher density, three-storey properties with integral car-ports, giving an urban scale and texture.

The range of properties included single occupancy flats through to homes for families of seven. The larger family homes were located between smaller dwellings. Corner blocks in the first phase contained flats on the upper floors whilst the ground floors were to remain flexible, providing for future community needs such as shops, offices or neighbourhood centres. The estate included primary and middle schools, along with a school for children with special educational needs. Playfields, an adventure playground, a church and allotments were also provided for the new residents.

The structure of the development allowed for enclosed, semi-private spaces that were accessible from the gardens of a property. These protected areas provided spaces for children to play, along with landscaped areas to enjoy.

Despite good intentions, some elements needed to be reconsidered in the light of feedback from the new residents. After suffering continual leaks, the residents of the estate petitioned for a more traditional pitched style roof, so the original flat roofs were replaced in 1988.



Aerial view of Conniburrow – you can also see Downs Barn, Fishermead, and Central Milton Keynes, 1977. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

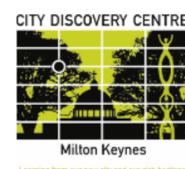


Conniburrow play area, two boys sitting at top of climbing frame silhouetted against clouds in sky. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Reroofing of houses and flats in Conniburrow, scaffolding, man with dog on Redway bordered by white flowers. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

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Downs Barn MK14

The name Downs Barn referenced a farm located in Willen Parish, west of the Great Linford to Woolstone Road. In 1989, the surviving barn was renovated to create a Pavilion for the Downs Barn playing field.

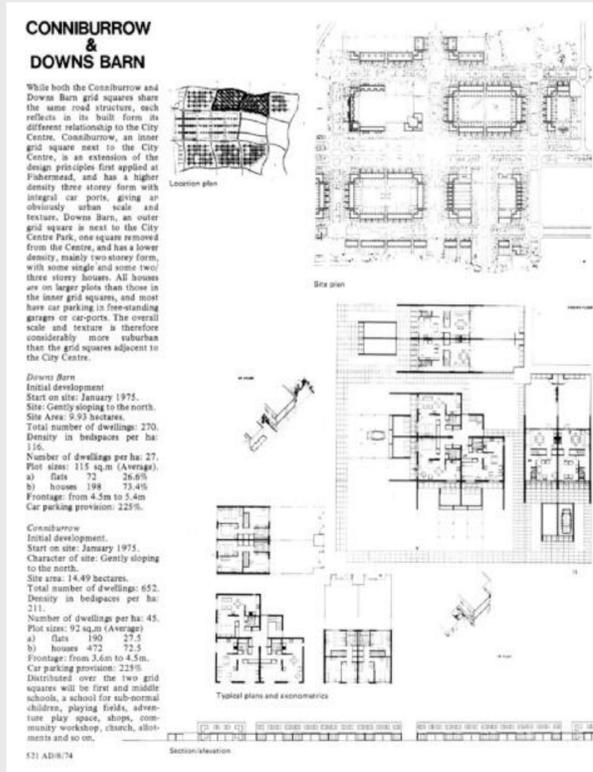
The area was referred to as 'Horse Ground' in the 17th Century.¹² This equestrian history inspired the naming of the new roads.

Celebrated horses and associated items provided names such as Farrier Place, Saddlers Avenue, and Pannier Place.

The development of Downs Barn began in January 1975. A total of 207 dwellings comprising of flats and houses were planned. The marketing for Downs Barn from 1977 highlights the rental homes being split level with the individual garage being a key feature.

Although Conniburrow and Downs Barn were planned on the same principles, the feel of the two estates is quite different. Conniburrow is a relatively high-density with three-storey properties, whilst the housing in Downs Barn are two-storey.

During this period, one of the many innovations in Milton Keynes designed to help make life easier for the new residents was the 'Dial a Bus' scheme. Public phones, located across the estates, enabled residents to literally dial a bus to come and pick them up. The scheme unfortunately became a victim of its own success. As the town grew, the numerous detours the drivers were required to make as people dialled up to request a pick-up meant increasingly longer journey times. Eventually, pre-determined routes were adopted, along with timetables.



Plans for Conniburrow and Downs Barn. Courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

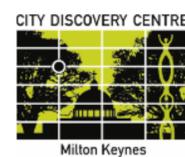


View of Downs Barn housing development December 1977. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.



Looking under Marlborough Street towards Downs Barn along Redway with Redway signs. Image copyright of Homes & Communities Agency, courtesy of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre.

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