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'Underpasses - connecting people, connecting places' project

The Banners Project (2007-2012) MK40

On The Verge successfully delivered the first phase of the Gateways project working with artists in schools and communities on four estates to develop ideas for banners used to mark gateways to estates and play areas. Banners display is now owned locally.

Underpasses Project (2013 - 2017) MK50

On The Verge (OTV), a community interest company, is delivering the *'Underpasses - Connecting People, Connecting Places'* project, an art and heritage led, identity building project focusing on some of the oldest and most socially challenged estates around the central area of Milton Keynes where the public spaces are becoming less safe and more prone to vandalism as the built environment decays.

The underpasses are a key element of the unique urban design of Milton Keynes. They are important connectors for residents and visitors, enabling people to move freely and safely. At present some of them are largely avoided and under-used.

On The Verge are continuing their work with the communities living in these areas, working in close partnership with local residents, heritage organisations and artists to help improve and enhance two underpasses that link the estates, creating a more positive identity and helping to instil greater pride and ownership.

The key aim of On The Verge is to improve 'place identity', engaging with specific communities around the central area of Milton Keynes. The *'Underpasses'* project aims to highlight the role the underpasses have in the design of Milton Keynes and connect residents with the unique heritage of the 'New Town', helping preserve its uniqueness for the future, tying into MK50 anniversary celebrations in 2017, whilst creating more attractive and safer surroundings for residents and visitors to enjoy.

This was done through:

- A programme of community engagement events and school sessions,
- Research into MK, New Town history and heritage
- *'Underpasses'*, an exhibition at CMK Library about the history of MK and the underpasses project.
- Production of two publications for children on MK's New Town history: *'Travelling in Time'* KS1&2 and *'MY MK'* KS3&4 (available from MK public and school libraries)
- A heritage trail 'The Story of Housing in MK' leaflet and a version of it for children; *'Children Activity Trail'*.
- *'My MK- Walking Heritage Tour'* an app linked to the MY MK publication.
- Commissioning of heritage inspired artwork and interpretation panels to revive, improve and enhance 2 underpasses: 'New Griffin' at Conniburrow/Downs Barn underpass and *The Tree Colonnade- ode to Helmut Jacoby* at Fishermead/Oldbrook underpass.
- Interpretation panels were installed at the Secklow Mound and also at the CMK/Campbell Park underpass to celebrate the Boyd and Evans painting 'Underpass'
- A set of 4 postcards to be distributed from libraries

This will ensure that MK's urban heritage is valued and is recognised as the town's future heritage, highlighted for today's communities and to be passed on to the next generation.

OTV aim to:

- Develop place identity, civic pride and ownership of their estate.
- Create high quality heritage inspired public art that encourages community interaction.
- Establish a precedent of good practice for commissioning of heritage inspired art work in existing estates.
- Encourage communities to explore and celebrate MK's history and unique system of underpasses as part of its urban heritage, seeing their environment from a new perspective
- Raise local awareness of the heritage value of the underpasses to be conserved for future generations.
- Help view Heritage inspired artwork as a catalyst to community interaction helping to change attitudes and behaviour in the underpasses and estates.
- View underpass improvements and artwork as providing a strong visual message of positive change, helping to reduce negative perceptions of the area and creating a safer environment

Benefits to local communities:

- Development of a meaningful identity for the site and the estate itself
- Raised awareness of the unique New Town historic environment and increased motivation of residents to improve and care for it
- Safer environment for residents through improvement of the built environment
- Increased sense of ownership, community spirit and pride of place and of the art work
- Better understanding of heritage and art's positive impact to the local environment and community
- Initiation of teamwork and local partnerships between different generations and cultures

For more information or want to be part of the project?

If you would like to get involved with this project and feel that you can support our work please contact:

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Project Partners: *The Parks Trust MK, City Discovery Centre MK and MK Council,*

Project supported by:

