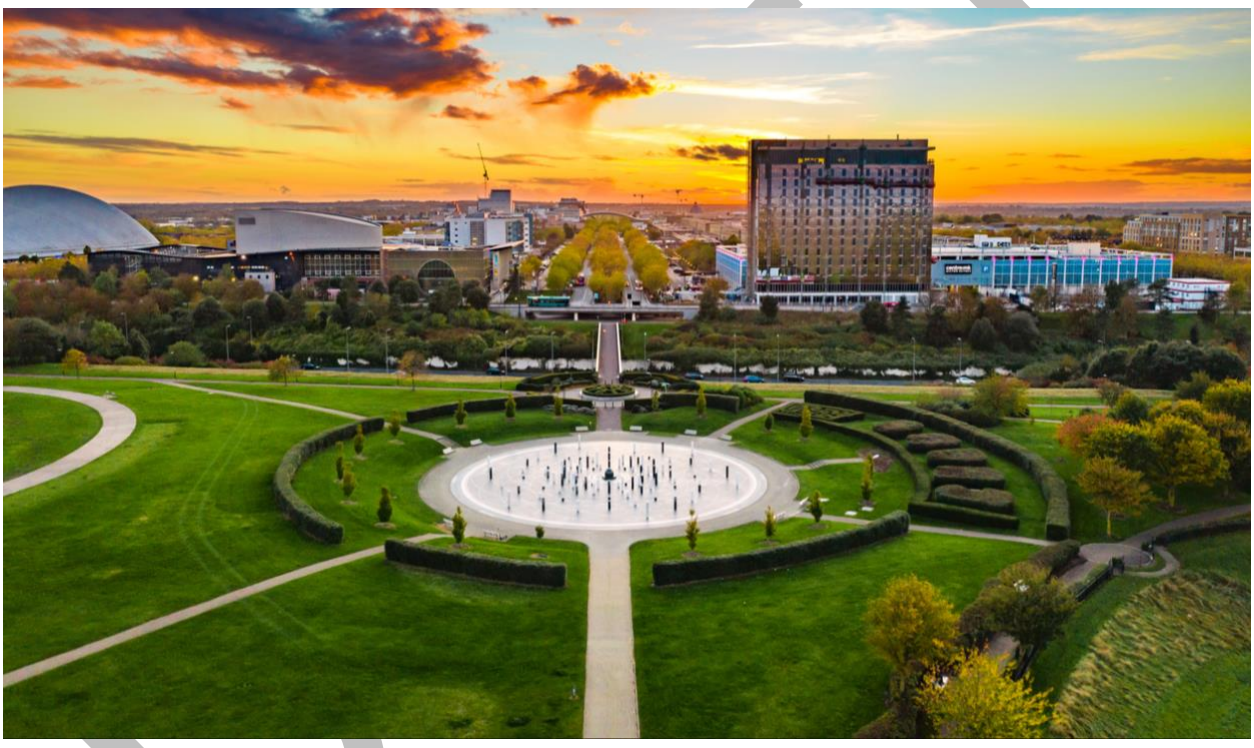
Telosa

Building a World-Class City:
The Importance of Community Connections
Best practices from around the world

Telosa Community Foundation
September 2023

Excerpt

Case Study: Milton Keynes, UK - Design and Environmental Stewardship



"By knowledge, design and understanding" - city motto

Vision/Goals

- Vision: Milton Keynes envisions itself as a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive city that offers a high quality of life for its residents and visitors. The city aims to be a place known for innovation, economic growth, and environmental stewardship, while maintaining its unique character and green spaces.
- Opportunity, freedom of choice; Easy movement, access to good communication; Balance, variety; An attractive city; Public awareness, participation; Efficient, imaginative resource use.

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Background

- A city that started as the dream of politicians and planners in the late 1960s, Milton Keynes is now home to almost 270,000 residents in 2022 and 11,000 businesses. It is a cultural artifact in its own right.
- Milton Keynes was founded as a response to urban overcrowding and the need for new housing and infrastructure. Its history and design principles have contributed to the development of a strong sense of community.
- Located on 22,000 acres in the south of England between London and Birmingham. Considered an edge city - surrounded by London, Birmingham, Oxford and Cambridge. All one hour away by car except Birmingham 1 ½ hours. London ½ hour by transit.
- Milton Keynes was part of the third wave of New Towns Program (32 new towns in the United Kingdom, 21 in England to provide a new future after the ravages of war.)
- The government established a Development Corporation (MKDC) to oversee planning and early development. Operating 1967-1992, MKDC had control over land, finances/budget, and plans.

Social Capital and Belonging

- Diverse ethnic/age population. “People came to MK to be part of something new where everyone could shape their place called home, creating a community keen to progress and move forward.”
- The Social Development Program offered encouragement and opportunities for effective public participation and growth of the city in the early years. Arrival Workers working for the MKDC in the late 1960s/early ‘70s helped people settle in; helped them establish local associations, clubs, community newspapers and all types of arts and crafts, sports and leisure groups.

Access to Effective Government and Services

- **Community Engagement:** Local authorities in Milton Keynes have actively involved residents in decision-making processes, giving them a voice in shaping their community. This participatory approach has empowered residents and made them feel invested in the town's growth and development.
- There is some homelessness. To help address the issue, the MK Council pays for more than 800 families to stay in temporary housing, up from 648 in April 2018 (MK Citizen 2019.08.01).

High Quality Jobs and Economic Opportunities

- **Economic Diversification:** The planners of Milton Keynes focused on creating a diverse economy by attracting a range of industries and businesses. This economic diversity helped create jobs and opportunities, making the town a more attractive destination for residents and investors.
- Above-average economic growth; a jobs boom of 18% according to a study by the Center for Cities Research. MK ranks #1 for job opportunities in the UK based on 2022 research from HR software provider Ciphr.

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- Home to national & international companies: Argos, Domino's Pizza, Mercedes Benz, Marshall Amplification, Volkswagen AG, Red Bull Racing (Formula One), Network Rail, Yamaha Kemble.
- Major local employers: Santander and Open University (The latter arrived in the late 1960s and pioneered distance learning for all).
- Fastest growing economy in the UK. MK is one of the most productive and contributes significantly on a national level making it a great place to work and run a business.

Education and Lifelong Learning

- A focus on educational institutions: Milton Keynes College, University Campus Milton Keynes (a University of Bedfordshire campus)
- Milton Keynes has some of the best schools in Buckinghamshire, UK. As of September 2021, more than 10 primary schools in the town were rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted
- Milton Keynes Education Trust (MKET) was the first multi-academy trust established in Milton Keynes (2011). The aim is to improve education provision by creating and developing a mutually beneficial partnership between local schools.

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

- **Cultural and Recreational Offerings:** The town has actively promoted cultural and recreational events, including music festivals, art exhibitions, and outdoor performances. These events bring people from different backgrounds together, fostering a shared sense of identity and community pride.
- There are free and low-cost arts and heritage activities available.
    - Arts including: MK Gallery, Milton Keynes Art Center, Milton Keynes Theatre, The Stables with film and live programing.
    - Heritage including: Milton Keynes Museum, Bletchley Park, Cowper and Newton Museum, Milton Keynes Libraries.
    - Parks, public art, trails and outdoor activities including: The Parks Trust and MK Trails App (free cultural trails)

Design and Environmental Stewardship

- **Forward-Thinking Design:** The innovative approach to town planning in Milton Keynes, including the incorporation of sustainable features, has attracted residents who share a vision for a modern and environmentally conscious way of living.
- Open city, open spaces with lots of greenery/heavily landscaped, low density housing. City in a forest; town/country mix. Over 22 million trees planted in over 50 years. Parks, lakes and green spaces cover about 25% of MK
- **Community Facilities:** Milton Keynes was designed to have an abundance of community facilities, such as community centers, sports complexes, libraries, and parks.
- Good transportation, very good accessibility – train lines and airport.
- Plenty of parking. Choice of private and public transport.

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- **Planned Development:** Milton Keynes was meticulously planned with a focus on creating a balanced and self-contained community. The town was designed to be pedestrian-friendly, with a "grid" road system that promotes easy navigation and reduces traffic congestion. This layout encourages people to walk and interact with their neighbors, fostering a sense of community.
- No congestion. MK distinguishes between corridors of movement. The grid roads with landscaping shield the daily life of people from the noise and air pollution of fast movement.
- **Mixed-Use Neighborhoods:** The town's design incorporates mixed-use neighborhoods, where residential areas are often interspersed with local amenities, shops, schools, and green spaces.
- Extensive network of shared paths for leisure cyclists and pedestrians. Ways of crossing are bridges or underpasses. MK underpasses are generous in width and visual approach, so it feels safer. Cyclists/pedestrians do not have to compete with cars and never need to encounter vehicles at crossing points.
- Trailblazing in the use of smart city technologies to improve the environment for business & local residents – e.g.: download an app to your phone that will enable you to find a parking space in real time or book that parking space.
- Britain’s first driverless car trial through pedestrianized parts of MK was a success in 2015-16.
- Amenities include a large theatre (1999), municipal art gallery, three museums, Arts Centre, multiplex cinema, open air National Bowl, professional sports teams (football, ice hockey, Formula One racing), street skateboarding plaza, etc.

Success/Failure Factors

- Built with flexibility and space for organic growth. Earlier towns in the New Towns program had been too rigidly built. Richard Llewelyn-Davies, who led the architectural team responsible for the city’s masterplan, described the future as indeterminate. “In planning of this sort it’s futile to make guesses. You have to design a city with as much freedom and looseness of texture as possible. Don’t tie people up in knots.” In retrospect, at least one member of the initial planning team believes some areas of the masterplan should have been clearer and more forceful, e.g.: should have devised land policies and pricing strategies along with tough design briefs to anticipate and work around market forces (Britain’s notoriously conservative volume housebuilding firms regarding their densities).
- The founders planned and implemented the parks before the development arrived, so housing and industrial infrastructure had to fit in with it. Plan left 40% green space within the city and two valleys as linear parks with lakes to hold flood waters. One of the lessons and successes of MK is the way it managed its green infrastructure in the long term through the Parks Trust.
- **Accessibility and Connectivity:** The town's well-designed road network, efficient public transportation, and proximity to major cities like London contributed to its accessibility. The ease of getting around made Milton Keynes an appealing place to live and work.

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- The strong sense of community in Milton Keynes can be attributed to its design, which incorporates mixed-use neighborhoods, community centers, and local facilities within walking distance of residences.
- The importance of economic diversification to create jobs and a more resilient economy.
- Being proactive in supporting new arrivals in early years led to greater community interaction.

Best Practices for Telosa

- **Long-Term Vision:** The planners of Milton Keynes had a long-term vision for the town's growth and development. This forward-thinking approach ensured that the town continued to thrive and meet the needs of its residents as it expanded.
- The design approach of MK was multidisciplinary – architects, planners, landscape architects, engineers, economists, sociologists, commercial people, etc. all worked together. Lots of diversity and difference of opinion, but viewed as exciting, creative.
- Purpose built down to every detail. When designing MK, they were developing a blueprint for growth.
- The intentional design, emphasis on amenities, and opportunities for engagement have helped create a place where residents feel connected and a part of something larger than themselves
- **Green Spaces and Environment:** The incorporation of green spaces, parks, and sustainable features into the town's design enhanced the quality of life for residents. These features not only provided recreational opportunities but also contributed to a healthier and more appealing living environment.
- Lofty and empty abstractions (choice, flexibility, diversity, sustainability) are great words for building consensus, but avoid use in the plan unless elaborated into precise requirements, otherwise they can be lost.
- Be proactive in supporting the new residents, especially in the early developmental years.

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