

CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES PLACEMAKING PRINCIPLES REVIEW

March 2023



Milton Keynes
City Council

Allies and Morrison












Purpose of the study

Allies and Morrison have been commissioned to undertake a literature review and produce a report that summarises the placemaking outcomes and recommendations in historic strategies, principles, policies, studies and visions for the city centre since the original masterplan in 1970.

Some principles and objectives have stayed true to the original masterplan intent; others have presented new ambitions in response to the changing world.

This piece of work brings together fifteen documents and reviews their placemaking principles under the following themes:

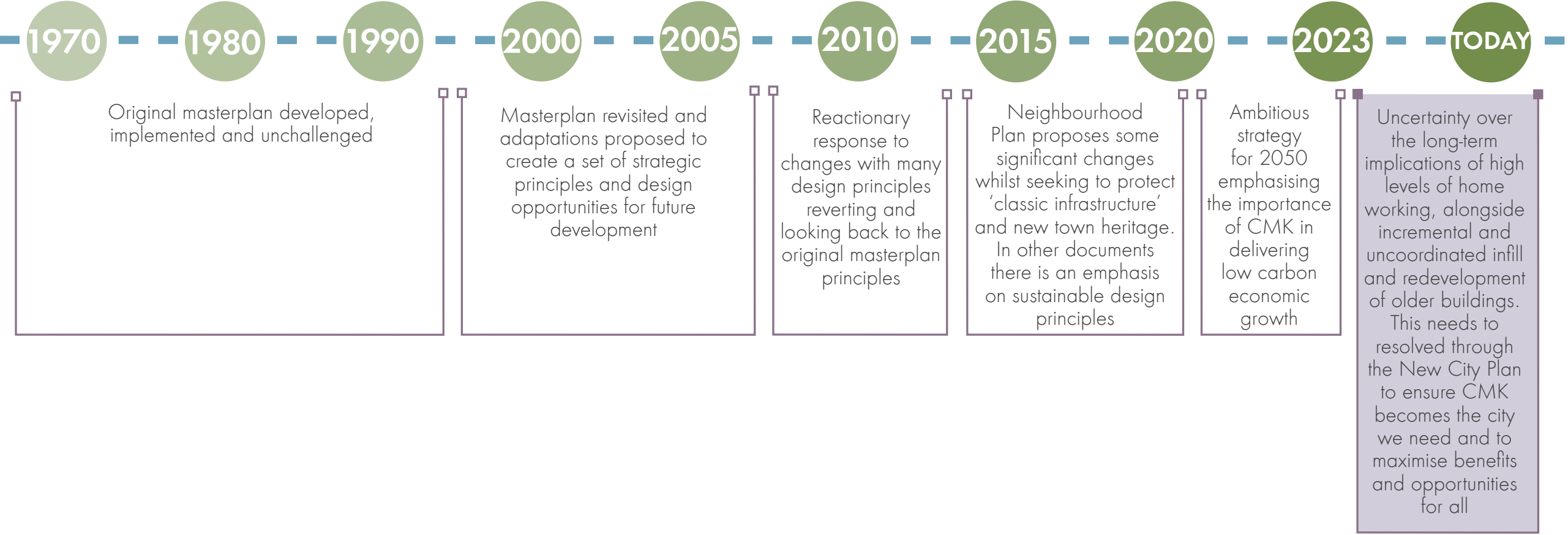
-  Land use
-  Movement
-  Parking
-  Block and grid structure, and the street hierarchy
-  Streets and pavements (including street greening)
-  Gardens, parks and green spaces
-  Density and height
-  Building design
-  Culture, heritage and community

Timeline of documents



* Unpublished internal document

How has the approach to CMK changed over time?



REVIEW OF LITERATURE



1992 – Milton Keynes planning manual (based on the 1970 original masterplan)



CMK has a good range of services and facilities, except those requiring a large amount of land (e.g. higher education) and offers a range of apartments, mews and townhouses

Defined areas of 'special land use emphasis'



Anticipates the need for public transport provision

Road users have priority



Parking delivered around blocks and anticipated need for multi-storey car parks



The block and grid create a strong framework but provides flexibility

There is a three tier road system. Tertiary roads are access/slow roads with parking

Underpasses and porte cochères are used for pedestrian crossings



Soft landscaping within development framework and a strong public art provision

High quality bespoke street furniture

Boulevard frontages have got lively ground floors and covered walkway colonnade

1992 – Milton Keynes planning manual (based on the 1970 original masterplan)



Squares, gardens and courtyards are associated with commercial development



Housing max 100dph; offices 1.75:1m²
(floorspace: site area)

Buildings should not exceed 4 storeys, except between Avebury and Silbury Blvd where they can be 6. Greater height considered for landmarks

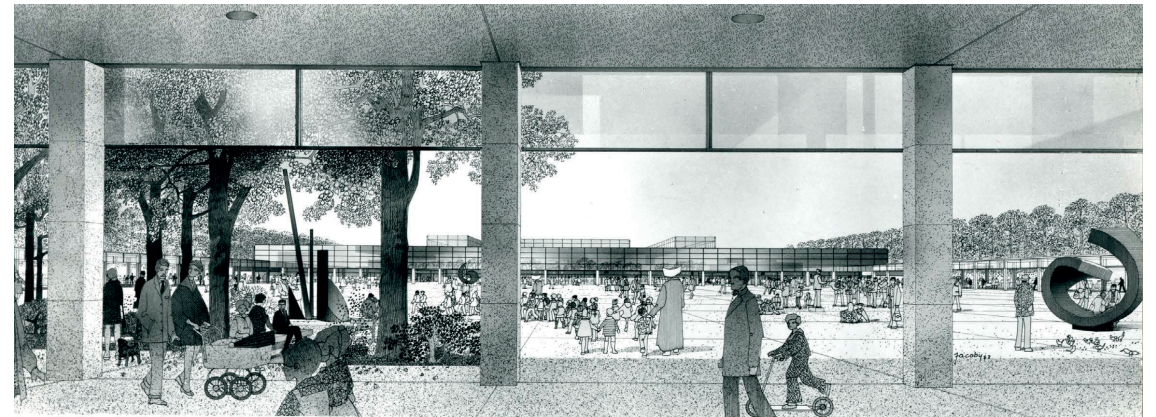


Strong building line, high quality materials, clean and tidy external appearance



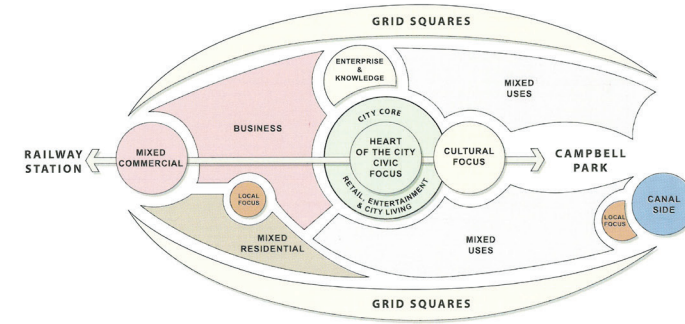
Events are a key part of CMK on streets, squares and parks

A place to see and be seen, to meet friends or to enjoy city life.



Visualisation of CMK public realm showing City Square (now largely built over) and the west elevation of the Shopping Building, by artist Helmut Jacoby

2001 - EDAW CMK development framework



Establish a heart, but move away from 'zoning' approach

Provide a greater mix of size of retail units



Public transport should be emission free. Introduces idea of tracked system

At-grade pedestrian crossing points

Establish dedicated cycle routes

Prioritise public transport, cyclists and pedestrians over cars



Decommission surface level car parks and locate MSCPs on outer roads



Introduce a finer grain of 8 blocks



Narrow street proportions by building on perimeter car parks



Improve visual and physical connection to Campbell Park



Increase density and height. Up to 10 storeys in select locations and landmark buildings



Perimeter blocks on the 8 blocklets with private courtyards

2011 - CMK Handbook for the Public Realm



At-grade pedestrian crossing points



Locate MSCPs on outer roads



Introduce a finer grain of 8 blocks

Building lines to be brought forward on Avebury and Silbury Blvd



'Special Areas' introduced which should have an imaginative design approach and commitment to public art

Improved link to Campbell Park

The Main Features

- 1 Convenient routes on foot.
- 2 Minimum guard railing.
- 3 Active building fronts.
- 4 Cycle priority.
- 5 Street furniture integrated at every opportunity.
- 6 Symmetrical lighting layout achieved.
- 7 Minimum guard railing.
- 8 Trees extend up to the junction.
- 9 Control boxes positioned clear of pedestrian movements.

Gate / Boulevard junction
Straight Pedestrian Crossings at Grade

Where pedestrians cross at ground level, the careful positioning of crossings means that lights, traffic signals and pedestrian facilities can be aligned, minimising street clutter. The advanced building line creates a more traditional feel to the street.

The Main Features

- 1 Clear width to rear of footway.
- 2 Active building fronts.
- 3 Street furniture integrated with parking lay layouts.
- 4 Large signs co-ordinated with lighting column positions.
- 5 Wherever possible utilities housed within building overhang.

Boulevard
Building Line Forward

With buildings now at the back of the footway, lay-bys for deliveries and occasional parking are needed. These are carefully integrated into the lighting and landscaping strategy, so that a clear pedestrian zone, continuous line of trees and effective lighting are achieved. A 9m wide footpath allows for a continuous line of trees to the back of the lay-bys. This will help act as a deterrent to parking on the pavement.

2011- Lessons Learnt note (appendix to 2013 development plan)



The quarters are over-complicated, don't make commercial sense and are indistinguishable



Retain 'slow streets'



Surface level car parking should be retained but continue to try to deliver MSCPs



The ad-hoc bringing forward of building break the geometry of the grid and interrupt pedestrian desire lines and legibility



A Local List of heritage assets including public art should be prepared and adopted by the council and kept under review. This local list should include considering the setting of the building or piece of public art for any new development

This note was created by Milton Keynes Council as part of the preparation of the 2013 CMK Development Framework. A review of the 2011 Development Framework was carried out in 2011 and included interviews with members of the development industry active in CMK and members of the business community.

2013 - CMK Development Framework SPD



Reinforce character areas with predominant land use

Create smaller development plots leading to a finer grain of development.

Introduce the idea of a university at B4

Family housing not encouraged



Encourage development that preserves public surface level parking

Provide new parking in either basements or in decked car parks



Introduce a hopper service that runs every few minutes

Provide a quality waiting environment for public transport

Re-establish a 24hr north - south pedestrian route through the centre:mk

Retain all underpasses

Provide cycle parking and associated facilities, as well as cycle hire scheme



No requirement to add streets to the existing overall CMK grid structure

2013 - CMK Development Framework SPD



Servicing access should be limited wherever possible to streets only



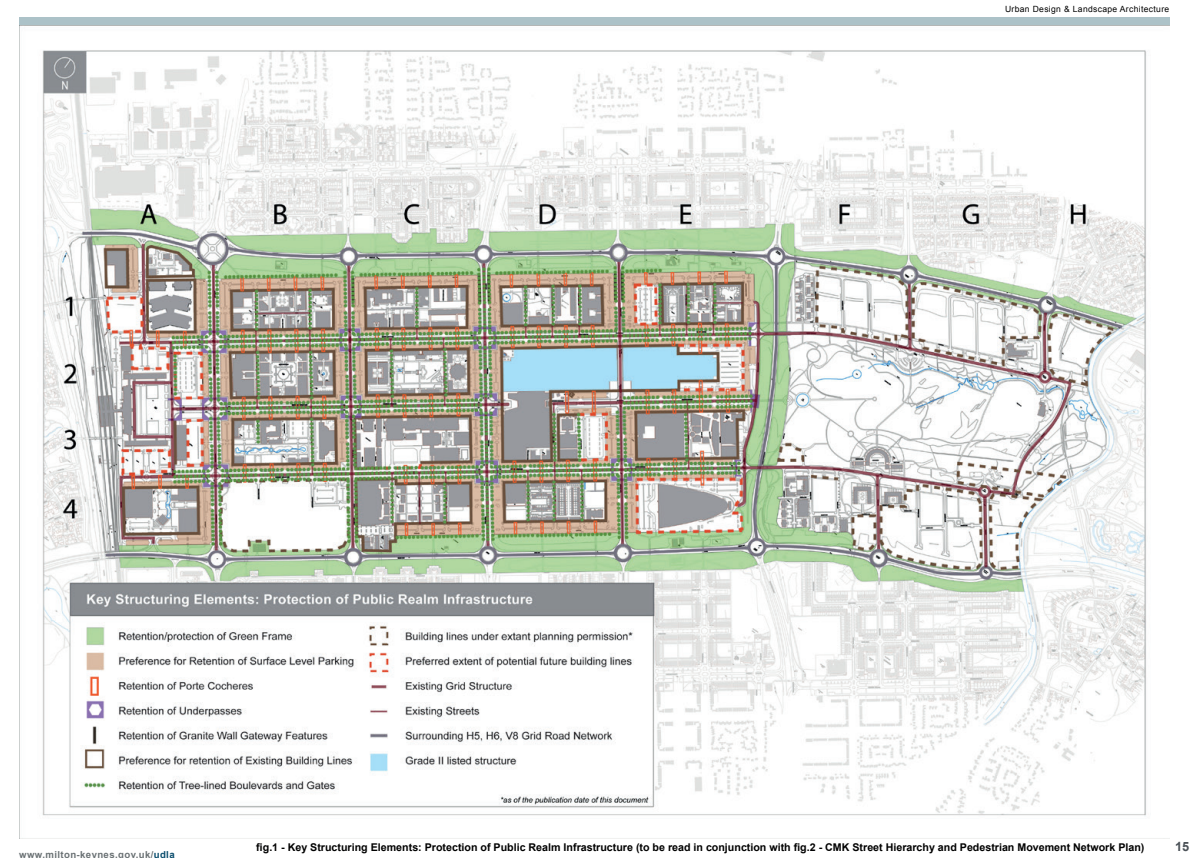
Create a new civic square south of Midsummer Boulevard

Improve visual and physical connections to Campbell Park

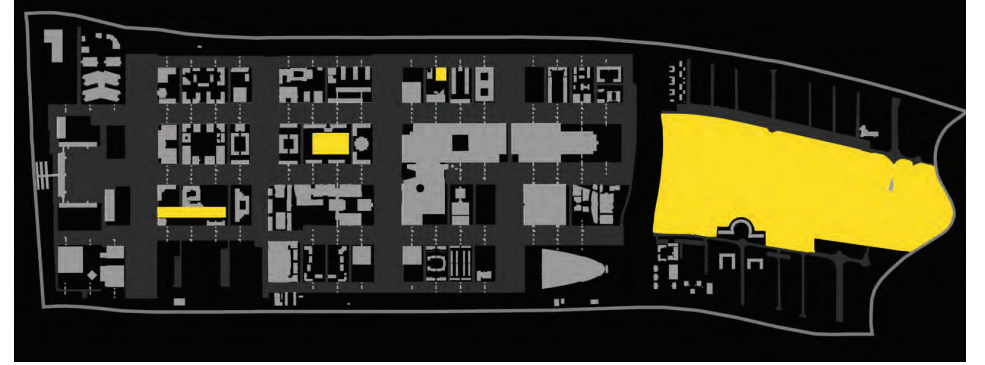
Consider creative use of central reservations on Boulevards



Buildings up to 8 storeys encouraged along Boulevards and Gates (not near listed centre:mk). Elsewhere 3-4 storeys



2014 - CMK Alliance Business Neighbourhood Plan



Move away from 'zoning' approach

Create a finer grain of development for variety and diversity

B4 and F1 should host major strategically important developments

Create a covered market hall



Deliver a hop-on, hop-off shuttle

Improve the pedestrian experience including with routes through blocklets

Create a cycle hire within the city centre

Retain slow streets



Encourage greater animation of public and green spaces with public art, regular events and through routes



Residential development 250dph from Station End and Marlborough Gate, and 100-200dph around Campbell Park

Buildings on Gates and Boulevards no taller than eight storeys. Landmark buildings considered



Perimeter blocks on the 8 blocklets. Private courtyards

Refurbish/retrofit existing building stock to be sustainable

2016 - MK Futures 2050 Commission



Create a new university in CMK
Encourage future growth in the existing built-up area



Emission-free shared transport for all



Sub-divide blocks to provide a greater degree of permeability



Encourage higher density, infill and redevelopment in existing built up areas



Connecting to Milton Keynes' rich heritage placing it front and centre, with trails of artefacts around the city

MILTON KEYNES:
**MAKING A
GREAT CITY
GREATER**



Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission



"All the acknowledged great cities benefit from scale. They are large enough to attract all sorts of businesses and activities. Population density makes frequent public transport both a necessity and economically viable."

"Somewhere that is diverse, that is healthy, and provides opportunities for all."

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CITY?

"A sense of public pride that you live there."

"A place where inequalities are removed, and people's lives become better year on year. A place where leaders feel supported to make good decisions and not just those which will lead to political power."

"We are a very modern city, not afraid to do things differently."

"The feeling that it is still growing and that there is plenty to discover both new and old beyond the residential area in which you live."

"It's a city built for convenience."

WHAT MAKES MK GREAT?

"Green spaces and ease of movement."

"Excellent employment opportunities that continue to grow and change with demand."

"The community spirit within individual estates."

"There is no central hub that you feel proud of in MK, and the one thing MK misses compared to some older cities that have a great central atmosphere."

"At least one landmark piece of public architecture – one that is good enough to win an architecture award."

WHAT COULD MAKE MK GREATER?

"Prioritising opportunities and culture for intelligent and socially mobile youth."

"There needs to be a coherence of movement, not dependent on individual vehicles."

"Having a well educated population is essential to success."

You will find more quotes from people who participated throughout this report¹.

Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission Report

2017 - New Town Heritage Register Statement of Significance



“MK is significant for the following reasons: For the architectural set-piece of Central Milton Keynes, which includes some outstanding buildings, most notably the Shopping Building, and has a distinctive character due to its low-rise skyline and tree-lined boulevards.

For the consistent high quality of landscaping and public realm, with generous provision of trees, planting, parkland and public art”

3.4 Public Artworks

The post-war period saw a shift from commemorative sculpture to artworks which made an aesthetic contribution to the public realm. New Towners saw this as an opportunity to use art to create an emblem of civic renewal and social progress. MKDC embraced this idea and developed a policy of commissioning and acquiring outdoor and indoor works for public display. Public Art is still an integral part of the design and development of Milton Keynes's built environment and the early MKDC vision and policy is still in place today, underpinned by securing funding through the planning process.

Public Art invites the vision, creativity and skills of artists to enliven and enhance public spaces and places. MKDC commissioned and purchased artwork for many prominent sites outside significant buildings, as well as carrying out a pioneering Community Art programme in the newly established residential areas. This programme was very popular and helped new residents contribute to the local identity of their grid square.

As a result of this, there is a large collection of public sculptures and artworks in MK, many by high profile artists, including Black Horse by Elisabeth Frink (1978), The Whisper by Andre Wallace (1984), Concrete Cows by Liz Leyh (1978), and Triceratops by Bill Billings (1979).



Sculptures in Fred Roche Gardens, 28 Series by Bernard Schottlander: No. 4 (left) and No. 4 (right) (1968-78)



The Whisper (1984) by Andre Wallace outside the Public Library



Detail of Fiction, Non-Fiction and Reference (1984) by Boyd and Evans in the Public Library

3.2.4 Silbury Boulevard-Midsummer Boulevard

This area was largely completed during the MKDC era. Most significantly, it includes the celebrated Shopping Building (1975-79), by the MKDC Architects' Department. Its rational architectural design and monumental 60m-long glass is generated by repeating a strict structural steel module (12 x 6 x 6m), infilled with shop fronts and mirrored glass. It is celebrated both as a local emblem of MK and as the outstanding post-war retail development in England' (Historic England, 2010).

Facing the west elevation of the Shopping Building is the Church of Christ the Cornerstone (1988-91), described in the Buildings of England as 'graceful' and 'lumpy' in its use of classical motifs (Williamson, 489). To the south of that is Fred Roche Gardens, named after MKDC's influential General Manager during 1970-81, and more conventional office buildings leading down to Station Square.



Shopping Building (1975-79): north elevation



Shopping Building (1975-79): interior of east end



Church of Christ the Cornerstone (1988-91)



28 Series No. 21168b-70 by Bernard Schottlander in Fred Roche Gardens

2019 - Central Milton Keynes Prospectus



Commitment to MK:U university



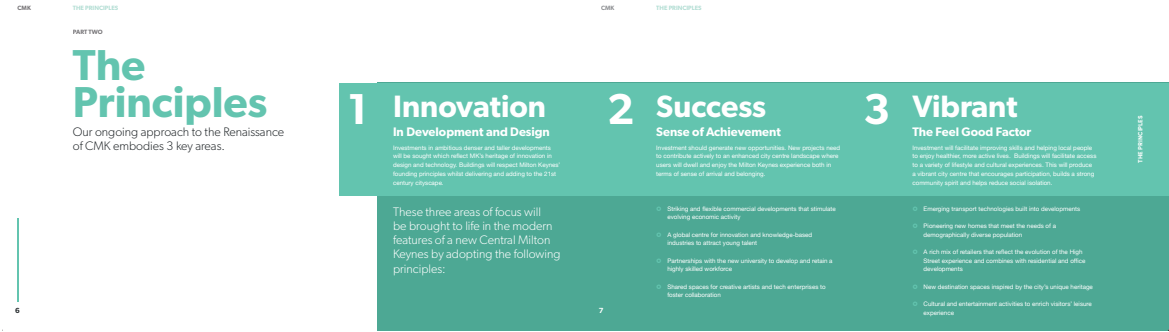
Promote the transformation of Midsummer Boulevard East and Station Square to become high quality public open spaces



Taller and denser development is part of the 3 key principles - including 20 storey New City Place



Create shared spaces for creative artists and tech enterprises to foster collaboration



2019 - Plan: MK 2016-2031



Create different character areas through the use of varied densities

Encourage new leisure uses to diversify MK's offer



Improve prioritisation of pedestrians and cyclists

Deliver smart, shared, sustainable mobility for all



New development should be based on the principles that have shaped the original city, especially grid road system



Improve safety by creating passive surveillance and active frontages

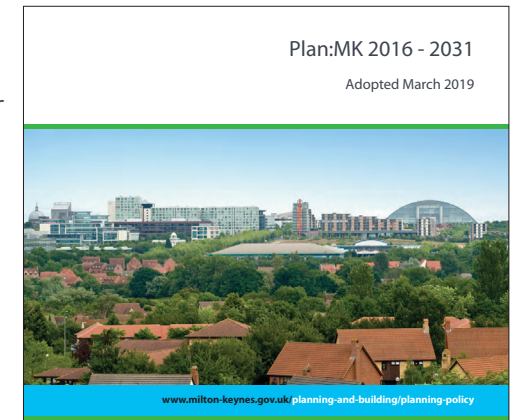


Increase density of businesses in city centre

Density should be 150-500dph in CMK (excluding Campbell Park)



Housing is arranged according to perimeter block principles with fronts overlooking public spaces



2020 - Central Milton Keynes Governing Objectives



Support the delivery of new public transport systems and mass transit

'Healthy streets' with pedestrians and cyclists as the main users



Short-term intervention: create new children's interactive play route



Create a 'green Lung' pedestrian/cycle route opened through CMK down Midsummer Blvd



Densify CMK with mixed typologies, and bring urban living to the centre

Build higher density, MMC (Modern Methods of Construction) housing (zero carbon) near station



Work with 'older commercial building stock' in CMK to make sure it is not left behind



Create a local artists cultural trail (walking and cycling)

2021 - Milton Keynes Strategy for 2050



Establish MK:U and building of student accommodation

Bring forward ambition for a new city centre music venue



Have the MRT system operational by 2050

Replace some low demand bus routes with Demand Responsive Transport

Promote more cycling through creating more direct cycling routes for commuting



Design dementia-friendly places



Create a pedestrianised zone between Midsummer Boulevard East and the area between the shopping building and the Point and towards Campbell Park

Make improvements our open market

Seven Big Ambitions for Milton Keynes in 2050

We want everyone living in Milton Keynes to lead happy, healthy lives and we believe that growing our city and economy is the best way to provide this. Our aim is to grow by a steady population increase to around 410,000 people living in the borough by 2050. Our flexible development framework can support growth beyond this total under the right conditions.

This Strategy for 2050 offers Seven Big Ambitions which together act as our promise to those living here today and those who wish to make their homes here in future. We will:

- 1** Strengthen those qualities that make Milton Keynes SPECIAL
- 2** Make Milton Keynes a LEADING GREEN AND CULTURAL CITY - by global standards
- 3** Ensure everyone has their own DECENT HOME to rent or buy
- 4** Build safe communities that support HEALTH AND WELLBEING
- 5** PROVIDE JOBS FOR EVERYONE by supporting our businesses, and attracting new ones
- 6** Offer better opportunities for everyone TO LEARN and develop their skills
- 7** Make it EASIER FOR EVERYONE to travel on foot, by bike and with better public transport

SUMMARY OF THE THEMES

A photograph of a modern building with a glass facade and a concrete walkway. The text "SUMMARY OF THE THEMES" is overlaid in large white letters. Below the text, a group of people is walking on the walkway. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The building has a prominent glass section with a grid pattern. The walkway is made of large, light-colored concrete panels. There are trees and a railing in the background.



Land use

Discussions about the desire for 'character areas', 'zones' or 'predominant land uses' vary and are inconsistent between documents

There is a strong and consistent theme of encouraging a mix of uses

There has been continued support for MK:U since 2013, but support for HE institution in CMK is contrary to the original plan and land uses

New uses, such as markets, university, student accommodation, music venues, sports facilities have been proposed and are supported

Flexibility is seen as key to promote diversity and change of use

CMK is a liveable city with a strong and vibrant community. Continue to promote a mix of uses and diversity of spaces whilst maintaining flexibility to easily adapt to changing priorities and available opportunities.



Movement

The ambition to provide high quality public transit system has not yet been delivered and there is debate on how it should be delivered

There has been a drive to promote more active travel and thereby reduce dominance of cars

There has been a drive to re-prioritise modes and improve the pedestrian experience through interventions such as at-grade crossing points, introducing a finer grain of streets, narrowing street proportions and improving connections to CMK

Continue to develop CMK with the knowledge that a sustainable public transit system will be delivered in the future. Capitalise on the flexibility and space afforded by the classic infrastructure to achieve this. Continue to encourage active travel, modal shift and reprioritisation of pedestrians.

Parking

The fate of the surface level car parks is much discussed with some documents looking to develop these areas and others seek retain

The impact of Covid-19 has meant that changes in office working and retail habits has resulted in car parks that are now usually not full

Parking should not be made difficult as it is a key asset to CMK

Convenience of parking remains a key asset to Milton Keynes, however the amount of central surface level parking should be reassessed to reflect the changes in working and shopping habits. Support ease of movement around CMK through sustainable transport options.



Grid and block structure

The grid structure is the core of the classical infrastructure in CMK and should be retained

Several documents have suggested a finer grain of block structure to evolve and improve pedestrian and cyclist permeability

Street hierarchy is respected and celebrated. The bringing forward of the building line has somewhat interrupted the hierarchy

The grid makes CMK special and this should be celebrated through future development. Acknowledge the ways in which this can be adapted and flexed to create a place that works with the changing ways of experiencing and using the city.



Streets and pavements

The public realm is well recognised as a key asset. Principles have sought to make more of CMK's classic infrastructure and to ensure upkeep and maintenance to key elements

Principles seek to ensure that main boulevards, streets and gates have active fronts and interesting streetscapes so that these places feel safe and pleasant to walk down

Upkeep of the classic infrastructure is important to ensure that CMK retains its unique heritage and character. Carefully evaluate the current stock to understand the level of maintenance required. Energise and activate main streets with active frontages, playful features, attractive lighting and outdoor seating in order to keep them interesting, inclusive and safe for all people to walk down and dwell in.



Gardens, parks and green space

Squares, gardens, courtyards and parks are at the heart of MK and this should be reflected more in CMK. There is a continued desire to improve the link and presence of Campbell Park in CMK

Principles continue to point towards greater animation of squares and parks, partly through a regular programme of events and creating direct and attractive routes through these spaces, plus improved natural surveillance

Make the green city greener by making more of CMK's green character and encouraging use of green spaces for walking through and spending time in. This includes improving links to and the presence of Campbell Park.



Heights and densities

The placemaking principles gradually call for greater densities over the years

Some frameworks and principles have specified heights and densities in certain areas. There has been a move towards taller heights and more dense developments overtime

Heights and densities can help to establish character areas and therefore help with legibility and wayfinding

Focusing growth through intensification of certain areas will lead to greater sustainability. Understanding areas where greater height and density is appropriate as well as where it is not will help create a more vibrant and legible city centre with clearer character areas.



Building design

The original principles set out design excellence and forward-thinking architecture

Buildings should be sustainable, and have active frontages and private backs (for residential buildings)

Celebrate CMK's design heritage by continuing to support buildings with high quality, sustainable, innovative and forward-looking design.

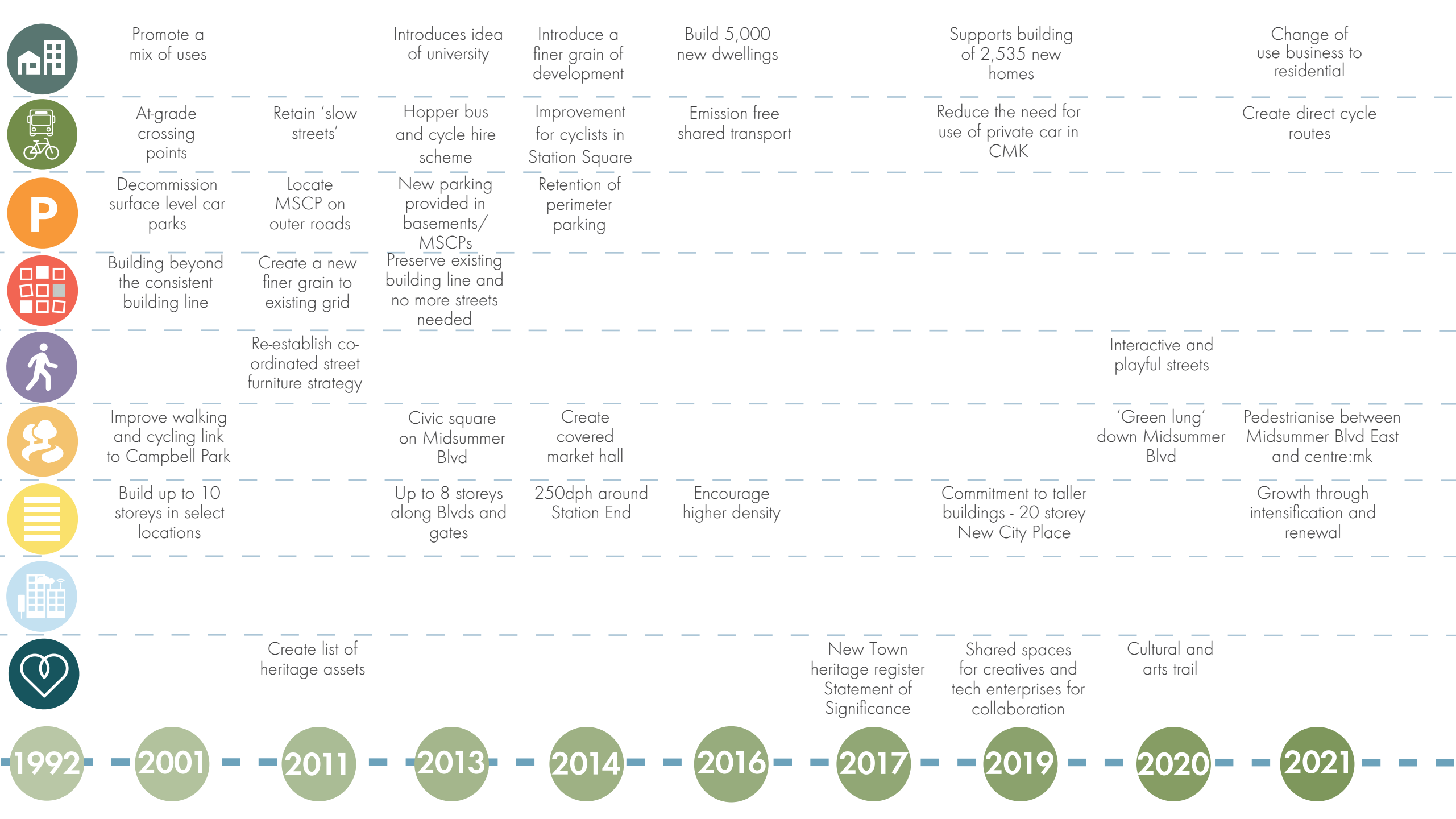


Community, heritage and culture

The original principles did not set emphasis on closeness of community. Subsequent development frameworks and placemaking principles have called for more opportunities for people to get together or to meet in CMK. Principles include a regular programme of events and festivals, fostering collaboration, and celebrating CMKs design heritage through trails and interpretation boards

Community events and activities are a key part of CMK's future and bring both residents and visitors together. Creating opportunities for collaboration, by providing public and co-working spaces, will encourage creativity and entrepreneurship.





Promote a mix of uses

Introduces idea of university

Introduce a finer grain of development

Build 5,000 new dwellings

Supports building of 2,535 new homes

Change of use business to residential



At-grade crossing points

Retain 'slow streets'

Hopper bus and cycle hire scheme

Improvement for cyclists in Station Square

Emission free shared transport

Reduce the need for use of private car in CMK

Create direct cycle routes

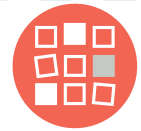


Decommission surface level car parks

Locate MSCP on outer roads

New parking provided in basements/ MSCPs

Retention of perimeter parking



Building beyond the consistent building line

Create a new finer grain to existing grid

Preserve existing building line and no more streets needed



Re-establish co-ordinated street furniture strategy

Interactive and playful streets



Improve walking and cycling link to Campbell Park

Civic square on Midsummer Blvd

Create covered market hall

'Green lung' down Midsummer Blvd

Pedestrianise between Midsummer Blvd East and centre:mk



Build up to 10 storeys in select locations

Up to 8 storeys along Blvds and gates

250dph around Station End

Encourage higher density

Commitment to taller buildings - 20 storey New City Place

Growth through intensification and renewal



Create list of heritage assets

New Town heritage register Statement of Significance

Shared spaces for creatives and tech enterprises for collaboration

Cultural and arts trail



Conclusion

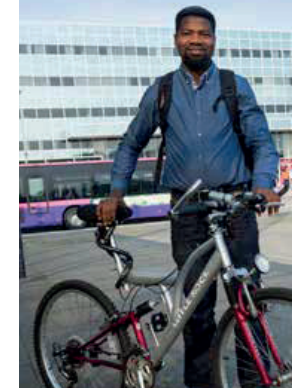
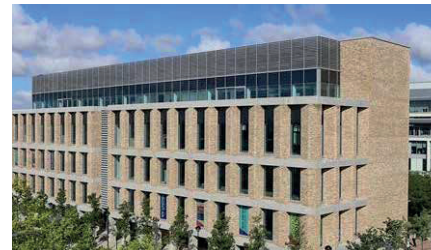
Over the course of 50 years, these documents, papers, guides and notes have tracked the changing vision of CMK in dialogue with an evolving world and shifting ideas. This review has highlighted CMK's key priorities and issues since the start of its development in the 1970s.

Today there are some tensions in key areas that have developed as CMK has sought to balance the safeguarding of its strong original principles and New Town heritage with the changing nature of the city in a society that has changed enormously in 50 years.

The key issues include: reassessing the amount of surface level parking needed and the delivery of a sustainable public transit system, alongside the maintenance of CMK's classical infrastructure;

attracting business investment whilst understanding flexible working patterns and the rise of online shopping; and considering the role of density to promote vibrancy whilst at the same time sustaining the green and open nature of the city.

The forthcoming Growth Opportunities Study which will be developed and published later in 2023/24 will use this review to develop these principles and ensure that CMK maximises its benefits and opportunities and continues to evolve the city its residents, workers and visitors need.



Allies and Morrison

March 2023

