

# Central Milton Keynes.

MK City Plan 2050

Topic Paper

July 2024  
Regulation 18 Version

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# Purpose of this Topic Paper

1.1. The Council's **Strategy for 2050** (January 2021) provides the vision for the future of Milton Keynes. The role of the **MK City Plan 2050** will be to set out the planning policies and approaches that will help us deliver development that meets that overarching vision.

1.2. We are at an early stage of the preparation of the MK City Plan 2050 as we consult on a '**Regulation 18**' plan in the summer of 2024, supported by a suite of documents setting out the key issues and drivers for change across a range of subjects, and to explain the policy approaches to address those challenges. While the individual topic papers can be read as standalone documents, there are many linkages between them and the issues and opportunities they cover.



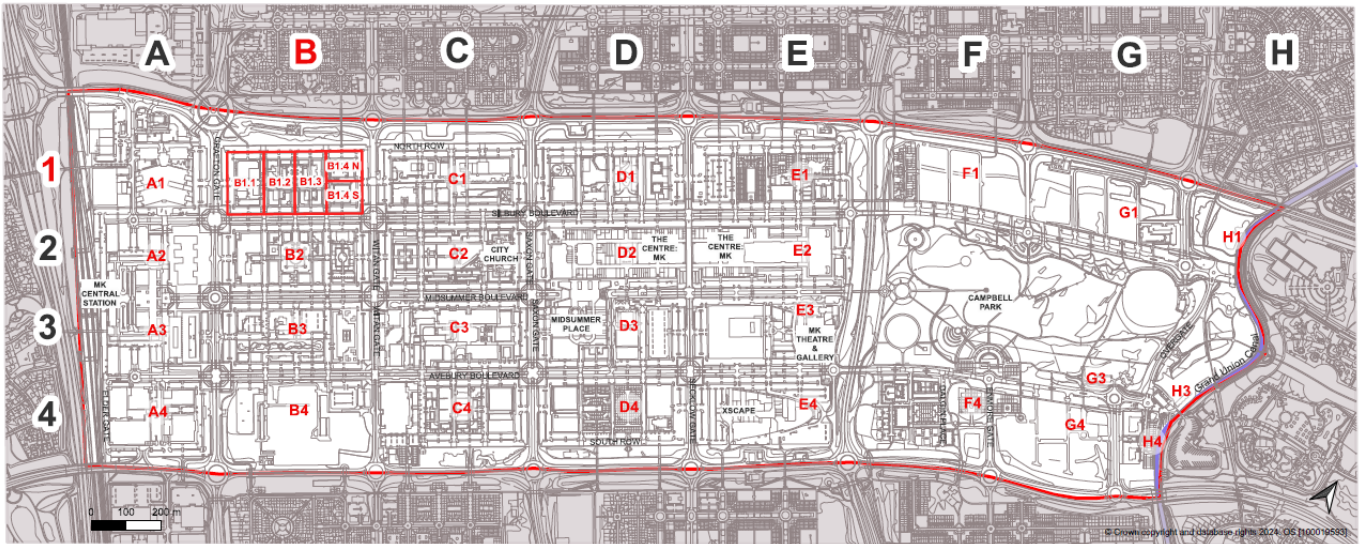
1.3. The suite of topic papers will evolve through the plan-making process as we gather further evidence and receive feedback through engagement and consultation. Our topic papers set out the more detailed justification for policies in the MK City Plan 2050, allowing the Plan itself to be a shorter, user-friendly document.

1.4. This topic paper has been prepared to explain our preferred growth and placemaking strategy for **Central Milton Keynes** at this stage in the preparation of the MK City Plan 2050, and how we think this helps us achieve our Ambition and Objectives.

1.5. To inform this topic paper and our emerging MK City Plan 2050 policies, we have commissioned industry-leading experts to help us establish a comprehensive and robust evidence base for Central Milton Keynes. Our **Central Milton Keynes Growth Opportunity Study** has been informed by a review of the previous strategies, policies and frameworks for the city centre, so we can learn lessons from the past. The draft study will be published alongside this topic paper and our emerging MK City Plan 2050 as part of the Regulation 18 consultation. Not everything within this topic paper or proposed policies follows precisely the content of the draft CMK Growth Opportunity Study, but it has been used extensively to inform and guide our proposed approach. We will consider all feedback as we revise and refine the Study and our policies and approach for the future of Central Milton Keynes.

1.6. In this paper, Central Milton Keynes (CMK) is considered to be the area bound by the railway, the Grand Union Canal, Portway and Childs Way, and includes Campbell Park as an important part of our city centre's context and setting, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Plan of Central Milton Keynes, including Campbell Park



# Central Milton Keynes today

- 2.1. There's no denying that the City of Milton Keynes is a success story, maturing from **New Town** roots to being awarded city status in 2022. Milton Keynes is now home to almost 300,000 people, although relatively few – around 4,800 – live in our city centre<sup>1</sup>. Milton Keynes is a dynamic, forward-thinking place and, as in any city, the success of our city centre is integral to realising our ambitions for the future of our city as a whole.



2.2. City centres play many roles and serve people in many different ways. They are places where people live; where they work, innovate, connect and share knowledge; where they shop, play and spend their free time; and where they study and learn. Central Milton Keynes does all these things, to some extent, but could undoubtedly do some better. The emerging policies in our MK City Plan 2050 aim to make CMK a better place for the people that use it for all of these reasons.

2.3. We also know there will be some uses and activities that our city centre isn't the right place for. For example, even with a growing city centre population and, we hope, many students living and spending time in CMK, we don't believe it will be appropriate to create new sports pitches in the city centre which are better suited to more suburban parts of the city. The city centre is also not the appropriate location for some forms of employment or retail – especially those that require large amounts of space for storage, manufacturing, showrooms or parking – which

are better located outside of the centre.

- 2.4. So while CMK can play a big part in many people's lives, it does not need to be everything to everyone, and it is right that different parts of the city centre concentrate on different uses. This is reflected in our overarching Development Framework (Figure 2) and Land Use quarters (Figure 3), below.

## Better by design

- 2.5. Milton Keynes was the last and largest of the post-war New Town programme. But as a place, it has yet to reach its full potential. As discussed in the CMK Growth Opportunity Study, we have the opportunity to celebrate CMK's modern architecture, the unique layered grid plan and carefully coordinated public realm, while also realising the potential to develop a sense of place

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<sup>1</sup> Data for Central Milton Keynes parish area from Census 2021, ONS. Also see Annex B for further Census data for CMK. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/#E04012225>

that residents and visitors will cherish, underpinned by the scale of population and activity needed to achieve our city’s long-term vision. For the Council to honour its motto – ‘better by design’ – however, this needs to be approached in a way that respects the city’s legacy. And this approach needs to recognise that some of the things that make CMK so distinctive and unique also bring some of its biggest challenges.

- 2.6. CMK’s original layout actively provided for pedestrians, but it doesn’t feel this way. Our boulevards appear green and pleasant, but they are designed for cars rather than being streets where people would choose to spend time. Our grid roads are indeed very accessible, but they are closer in spirit to Los Angeles than Paris. Buildings sit back behind car parks and they do not interact with each other to enclose pedestrian friendly spaces. The ‘international style’ of CMK’s modernist architecture ‘could be anywhere’, yet in a British context, it could hardly be anywhere else.
- 2.7. A lot has changed since Milton Keynes was conceived, however, and we now face challenges that were much less of a concern when CMK was first built. We now need to think about our radically altered patterns of shopping and working, a national shortage of housing, a much greater emphasis on health and wellbeing, and the need to respond to the global climate emergency. If we were building a new city from scratch today, it would not look like Milton Keynes and would not approach the challenges of the day in the way that the 1970 Plan for Milton Keynes did.
- 2.8. But addressing today’s challenges brings with it opportunities that CMK is uniquely placed to grasp: a renewed focus on mixed-use walkable neighbourhoods where different activities take place next to each other rather than being segregated and separated, new uses with better quality public realm that prioritises people over cars, and, above all, a wider range of housing opportunities provided at densities that can sustain our vision for a better future. And we can achieve these opportunities with considered, planned changes and interventions that evolve how Central Milton Keynes works without undermining our distinctive characteristics.

## **Our CMK economy**

- 2.9. CMK is a regional centre with around 40,000 people working in offices, shops, restaurants and our cultural and leisure sector; almost a quarter of the city’s total jobs and around 60% of our overall office floorspace are in CMK. Milton Keynes is becoming **increasingly centralised** – activity is intensifying in the city centre with more residents, workers, shoppers and visitors spending time and money here. This means we need the right balance of facilities, services, buildings, spaces and places that help to sustain that role. Our approach to economic development and inward investment needs to work alongside our planning processes and the City Plan 2050 to make sure we can maintain our strong and growing economy. This includes our



emerging proposals to create a Tech and Innovation Quarter in the city centre, where business and education find shared benefits in co-location and knowledge exchange.

## Reasons to visit CMK

- 2.10. The city centre is also a popular **top 10 UK shopping destination** with many leading national brands within our two main shopping centres. As in other town and city centres, we have lost some of our bigger retailers in recent years, as many shoppers do more of their shopping online instead of on the high street.

Similarly, we have seen the closure of some restaurants across CMK, as many struggled during and following the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. We also know that a lot of our offer is from national chains seen across the country

and in the city centre we lack the sorts of spaces at sizes or rents that work best for independent retailers and restaurants.



- 2.11. Despite these challenges, Central Milton Keynes acts as a **cultural hub**, benefiting from several big leisure and cultural facilities. We have hosted large cultural events including the Milton Keynes: International Festival, the City of Codes and Light and several big concerts in Campbell Park working with the Parks Trust and other city partners. We have been working with a range of those city partners to develop a Tourism Strategy to help us understand the opportunities we have to expand and support our visitor economy. Despite being a popular destination for many people from outside of the city, especially business visitors and families, we know that some of our residents feel CMK isn't a place for them. We believe that everyone should feel included, safe and welcome in their city centre.

## Living in CMK

- 2.12. Historically, relatively few people lived in CMK as the original plans from 1970 focussed residential development for this part of the city in the 'Central Area Housing' estates directly adjacent, in Conniburrow, Bradwell Common, Fishermead and Oldbrook. Of the early homes within the CMK boundary, many are now showing their age and experiencing pockets of deprivation, with residents suffering poorer health outcomes, higher levels of childhood obesity, unemployment and vulnerability to climate change, and lacking the day-to-day community facilities that are much more accessible in other parts of the city. We know **CMK residents** have a long walk to get to the nearest doctor's surgery, for example.
- 2.13. Today, more people are choosing to call CMK home, and over recent years we have seen many new homes delivered in the city centre. Some of these homes are in new, purpose-built developments, but there have also been many created through the conversion of office space. We have put in measures through an Article 4 Direction which give us greater control over how and where such conversions take place. Most of the homes built or converted recently are in the private rented sector as part of 'build to rent' schemes, offering flexible leases that enable

residents to secure a tenancy for a period that suits them, from a short-term period to three years or longer. In 2021, around 58% of households rented privately (compared to 21% across the city as a whole) and more than 83% of households lived in flats or apartments (compared to 18% across the city).

- 2.14. The city centre also has a diverse population. In 2021, more than half of residents in CMK were born outside of the UK (55% compared to 26% across Milton Keynes) and 30% had been resident in the UK for five years or less (compared to 6% across the city). The information in Annex B illustrates some of this data.

### Moving around the city centre

- 2.15. Our **grid structure** also plays an important role in the way people move around the city, although it serves cars and their drivers far better than it serves those walking and cycling. CMK has a huge amount of space devoted to cars, both through the dual carriageways that criss-cross our city centre and the car parking that surround our buildings. This makes travel into and around CMK extremely convenient for those lucky enough to have access to a car, but this structure does contribute to some of our challenges. For example, the **low-density, spread-out** nature of the city centre means that we lack some of the buzz of other city centres, and despite our underpasses and crossing points, the dual carriageways can create barriers to movement – walking even short distances can sometimes feel a bit “drawn out” and many citizens have told us that they don’t always feel safe.
- 2.16. As well as being easy to drive into and around, this is the heart of our **public transport network**, served by Milton Keynes Central railway station and with many of the city’s bus routes converging on the city centre. Cycling around CMK, however, can be less straightforward with very few Redway routes within the city centre despite the comprehensive network that serves the rest of our city.





## **The need for action**

- 2.17. So, while there is a lot to be positive about for CMK, we can't be complacent about our future or ignore the challenges that are being faced in our city today. Our approach must learn lessons from the past, and balance our desire to celebrate the unique qualities of CMK with the need to adapt to reflect new priorities and demands.
- 2.18. The MK City Plan 2050 will therefore have to make some potentially difficult choices and provide a clear framework to guide decisions about the sort of place the city centre should be in the future and how things could and should change over the coming decades. For Milton Keynes City Council, working with our delivery partner, **Milton Keynes Development Partnership**, and our **local communities**, we have the opportunity to take the lead in creating a positive future, with CMK at the core of the agenda. Building on our Growth Opportunity Study, we have worked to develop a framework and policies that are deliverable and achievable, that will create lasting, positive change for everyone living, working or spending time in CMK.

# Drivers for change; the challenges and opportunities in our changing city centre

3.1. The plans for Central Milton Keynes were developed more than fifty years ago, and much of what we see today has been developed in line with those original proposals. The original planners for Milton Keynes did not expect that the place they created would remain unchanged as the city grew. Their original plans intentionally provided the space, sites and structure that allows **adaptation, growth and new activity** to happen so our city can respond positively to the different needs and demands of its users and the priorities of the time. Continuing with 'business as usual' and not pro-actively enabling and delivering good growth that benefits our residents and users would put that at risk, jeopardising our competitive advantages and undermining the successes achieved to date.

3.2. As with other places, the last few years have been challenging, as we have dealt with the impacts of a pandemic, changes in the way that we live, work, shop and play, and significant economic challenges, for individuals and businesses alike. Throughout this difficult period, investment in our city centre has continued, demonstrating the confidence the development industry has in Milton Keynes. As an example, as well as providing workspace for thousands of staff, Santander's new UK HQ building Unity Place includes co-working space, premises for other businesses, and facilities open to the public which is bringing new activity to the area around our central railway station and demonstrating to other companies the opportunities that exist in MK. There are now around 4,500 new residential units either allocated in the current local plan or with planning permission across Central Milton Keynes and Campbell Park. There are also proposals for new employment space, and refurbishments proposed for existing office buildings as we see continued interest from businesses looking to move to or expand here.



3.3. Through these schemes and others completed in recent years, we can already see our city centre evolving. Change is inevitable, but making sure that those changes are **positive and benefit** our city and citizens is best achieved with a **strong framework** to guide how proposals are designed and decisions are made. This will require local leadership from Milton Keynes City Council, strong partnership working with Milton Keynes Development Partnership and the buy-in of others investing and developing in the city centre.

## Drivers for change and achieving balance

- 3.4. Some of our challenges and **drivers for change** are shared with other places, like the need to address the climate emergency, creating healthier places for living, or the rising cost of living. For example, the outputs of our Urban Heat Assessment (part of our Carbon and Climate Study) have shown that CMK is a hotspot for overheating during periods of hot weather, which has implications for public health, business continuity and energy use due to high demand for cooling.



- 3.5. Some challenges are more specific to our own circumstances, for example the need to manage and maintain the vast scale of infrastructure assets in our city centre and the cost implications that has for public finances.
- 3.6. All of these various factors and how we respond to each need to be balanced; in some cases, the most appropriate ways to respond to one driver may be in conflict with how we would respond to another. We also recognise that the costs of delivering everything we want to see happen in the city centre, including providing policy compliant levels of affordable housing, making other contributions towards infrastructure or other services, or creating enough value to pay for some of our city-building ambitions, could make developments largely unviable. We therefore need to consider a more pragmatic approach which balances these challenges.
- 3.7. Equally, there may be limits to the interventions the public sector can make to influence the response to these drivers. This is why it is important to agree principles for the future of CMK and a framework for what we want the place to be like, so that investors, developers, businesses and their employees, residents and visitors can all support the vision and work towards delivering it together.

# Outcomes of the Ambitions and Objectives Consultation

4.1. In 2023, we asked for feedback on our draft Ambitions and Objectives for the MK City Plan 2050. We received many comments relating to Central Milton Keynes which have been invaluable in developing our emerging policy approaches. The bullet points below summarise some of the key points relating to the future of CMK:

- Recognise the value of Campbell Park as an asset to the city centre, but more green spaces will be needed as CMK grows to cater for the needs of residents and visitors.
- There is a need to balance the demand for tall buildings with the need to be sensitive to the character of the city centre.
- CMK is in need of regeneration in parts, but development and investment in the city centre should not be at the expense of the rest of the city.
- A range of homes are needed in CMK, including homes suitable for families. There should be a variety of tenures, sizes, types and costs, to meet a wide range of needs and aspirations from different sorts of households. Alongside new homes, there is also a need for community facilities for our growing city centre population.
- Importance of greater connectivity in CMK and with neighbouring areas. Improvements to how people move into and around the city centre are needed.
- More should be done to recognise and conserve CMK's unique character, including using some statutory tools that help to also protect CMK's special infrastructure.
- There is a need for more leisure, culture and other activities/opportunities to balance the loss of footfall from changing retail habits. CMK will struggle if more shopping centres are permitted elsewhere which will further take shoppers away from our city centre.

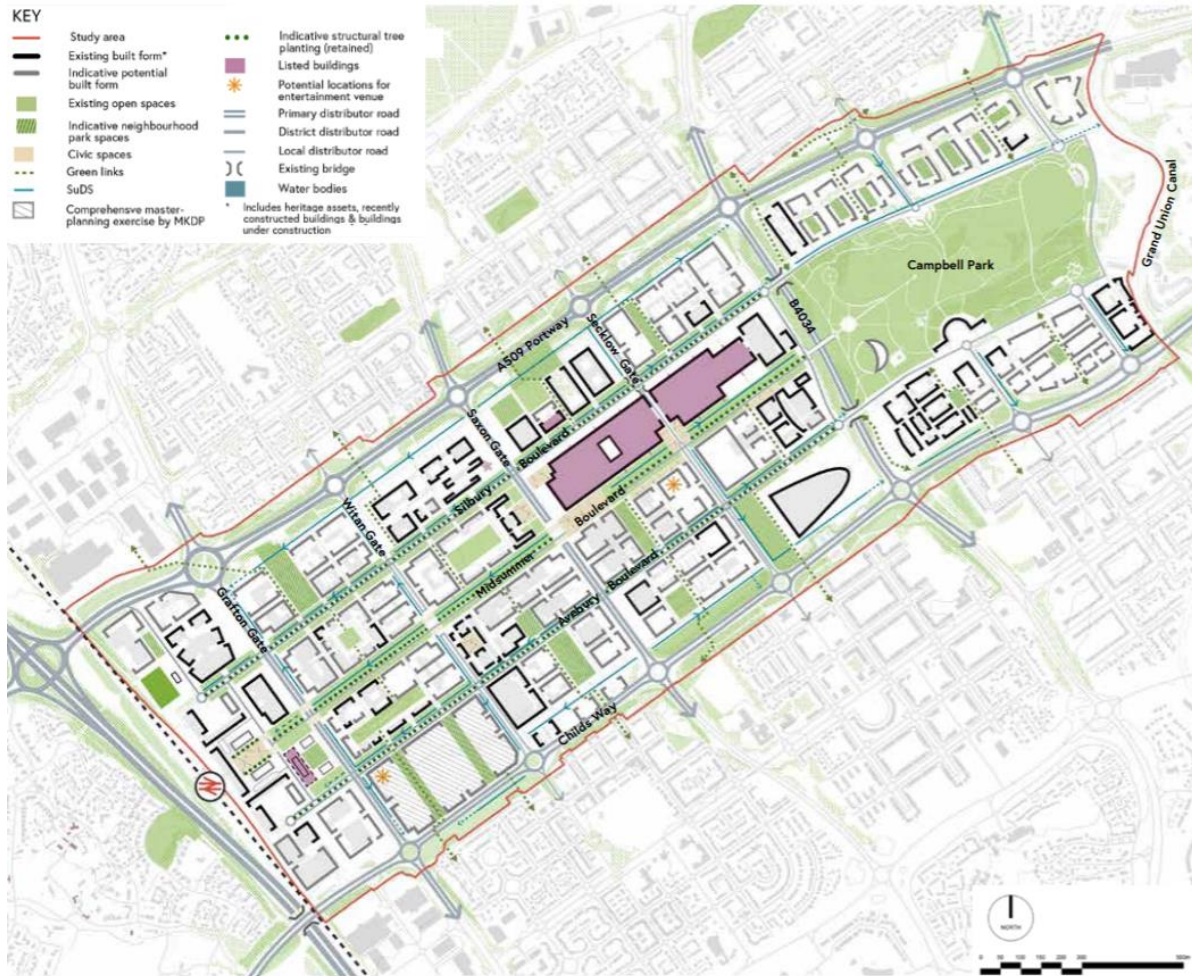
## Principles and Policies for the future of CMK

5.1. As mentioned in Section 1, we have been working with a consultant team to develop a **CMK Growth Opportunity Study** and recommend an overarching framework to inform the principles and proposals for the future of CMK to guide our planning policies, decisions and interventions. The recommendations set out below are covered in more detail in the draft Study, available as part of our evidence base supporting this suite of topic papers. They are also reflected in the proposed policies in our emerging MK City Plan 2050 which will help to manage development over the coming decades.

### Overarching CMK Development Framework

5.2. CMK needs to work for a range of **different users and their needs**. Our city centre will need to balance its role as a growing residential neighbourhood for a whole range of households with the facilities needed by its local community; a regional employment hub; a major shopping destination; a place for leisure and cultural activity; the heart of our transport network; and a civic space where the life of the city is played out.

**Figure 2 – Draft Central Milton Keynes Development Framework**



5.3. The policies proposed in the emerging Milton Keynes City Plan 2050 set out the parameters and approaches that we expect development proposals to deliver in the city centre, in accordance with our emerging overarching CMK Development Framework, as laid out in Figure 2.

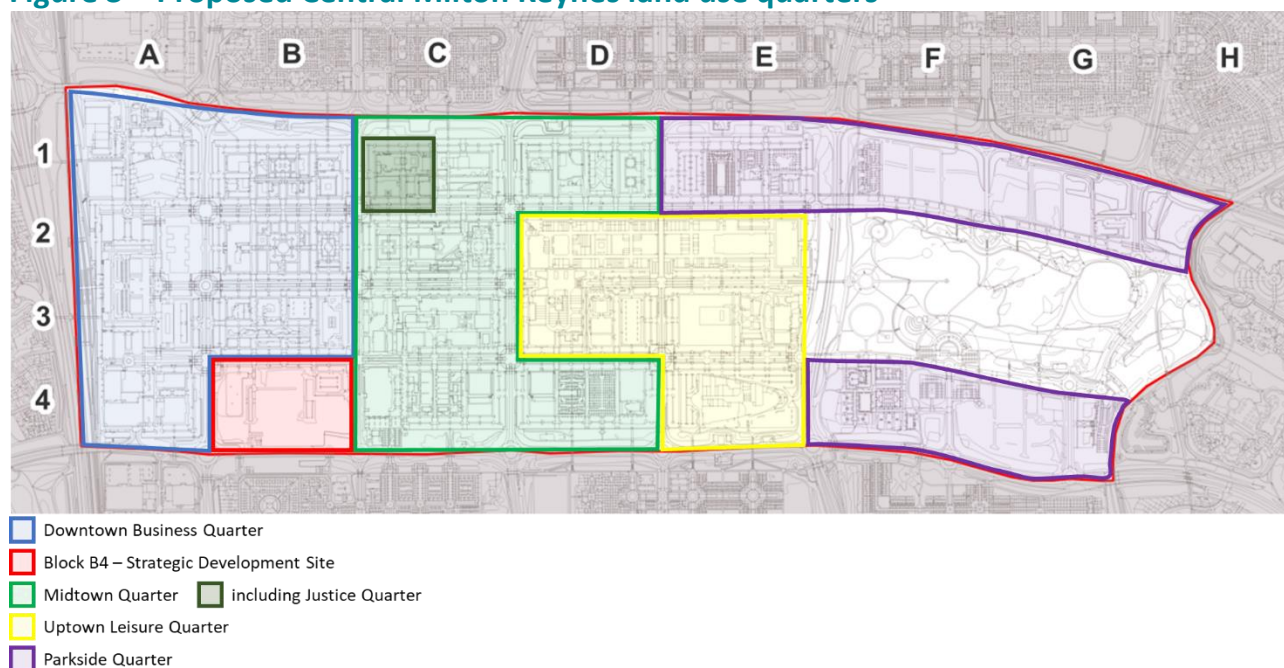
## CMK Quarters

5.4. We propose that different parts of CMK will have a different but **complementary focus** which will guide the sort of development we want to see brought forward in each broad area (Figure 3). This reinforces existing patterns of development without strict land-use zoning, whilst encouraging flexible buildings that could be adapted for other uses as needs change.

- The 'Downtown' business quarter will use the benefits of proximity to the central station and existing businesses to reinforce the employment focus of this part of our city centre and provide strong linkages with the proposals to develop an undergraduate university as part of a Smart City 'Tech and Innovation Area'.
- The 'Midtown' quarter will provide a greater mix of uses; residential-led development with office, cultural, retail and civic uses, including plans for much improved justice facilities with a new Crown Court.
- The 'Uptown' quarter will encourage a greater focus on retail, cultural and leisure facilities, reflecting the existing mix of uses and activities already taking place here.

- Finally, Campbell Park and the ‘Parkside’ areas adjacent will be mainly residential and provide the opportunity to create a far greater mix of types of homes for future residents of CMK.

**Figure 3 – Proposed Central Milton Keynes land use quarters**



- 5.5. Proposals for several parts of these areas are currently being developed by Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) as they control significant landholdings in the city centre. MKDP intend to work with other developers, investors and landowners to bring forward comprehensive development schemes at Block B4 and the surrounding area within the Downtown Business Quarter, along Midsummer Boulevard East and other blocks within the Uptown Leisure Quarter, and at their land on the northern side of Campbell Park, within the Parkside Quarter.
- 5.6. To help provide further clarity around our expectations and ambitions for what happens in each of these quarters, we have set out some initial thoughts in Annex C.

## **Design parameters and working with the grid**

- 5.7. As discussed above, Central Milton Keynes’ modernist grid and generous public realm have given us an adaptable structure which will help us effectively and efficiently accommodate future growth and meet the needs of our residents, employees and visitors. However, we need to make sure that buildings and schemes within that structure are of a quality that meets the ambitions of our growing city. The emerging planning policies include a comprehensive set of placemaking principles that we expect development proposals to be designed in accordance with.
- 5.8. We also intend to establish a [Design Review Panel](#) to operate across the city, including in CMK, to help improve the design and architectural quality of new proposals and deliver more schemes that demonstrate innovation and exceptional design.

5.9. Some of the growth in CMK will be guided by the needs of the city as evidenced through studies including our Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment and the Retail and Leisure Study. But our plans should also be guided by our ambitions for Milton Keynes and the sort of place we want CMK to be moving forward, recognising this will evolve over time. We will build in **flexibility** so the city centre and the buildings and spaces it contains can be adapted to changing demands over time, as happened through the original Plan for Milton Keynes in 1970.

5.10. The scale of CMK is huge in comparison to other city centres (see Annex D for some illustrative examples) which gives us plenty of opportunity for the sort of development we want to see happen and achieve a more **sustainable and efficient** use of land. But we need to achieve this whilst retaining the **unique character** and feel of CMK, delivering change in a sensitive way that recognises what is special about CMK.



5.11. With this in mind, we believe there is potential to use some areas of our public realm and generous surface level car parking in a different way, whilst **respecting and retaining the grid structure** and street hierarchy that exists today.

5.12. This would include supporting proposals that:

- Retain and reinforce the established building line along Silbury and Midsummer Boulevards.
- Take a comprehensive masterplan approach at the Block B4 site which may follow the building lines established by nearby developments on Avebury Boulevard, including Vizion and The Hub.
- Allow the building line along the Gates to flex in order to make more efficient use of land and to create a more pleasant, people-friendly street.
- Explore the opportunity for some development on North and South Row, especially where it helps to create surveillance to routes into the adjacent residential areas or allow a more comprehensive approach to development of a block.

5.13. As the last remaining undeveloped block in Central Milton Keynes, we believe that proposals for development at Block B4 must be planned on a comprehensive, masterplan basis, rather than coming forward as piecemeal development. The scale of potential for the site is massive, and we need to be confident that what happens in that part of the city centre is thoroughly considered within its wider context, aligns with our placemaking principles for the city centre, and meets the ambitions we have for CMK.

## **Skyline Strategy**

5.14. We sometimes hear people use the phrase ‘nothing taller than the tallest tree’ about buildings in CMK, as a promise from the former Milton Keynes Development Corporation. This is in fact a myth; it was used only in an advertising campaign rather than as a policy used to guide development. When the city centre was first developed there was plenty of land available, fewer uses and activities to fit into it for a much smaller population and little pressure to take a more

resource intensive approach, so inevitably the first decades of development happened in lower rise buildings. This led to the spread out feel of CMK which has brought its own challenges. The original planners recognised that the lower density approach they took would evolve as the city grew, and we have seen greater interest from the development industry to build taller in the last few years. These applications, however, have not always been in the places we would want.

- 5.15. The MK City Plan 2050 will allow us to be much stronger in our policies for where **taller buildings** will be appropriate in our city centre. The focus will largely be on mid-rise developments of up to 15 storeys. The masterplan approach however provides a skyline strategy for increased height along Midsummer Boulevard, stepping down towards the periphery of CMK. This is intended to create a 'skyline cluster' in the central area and close to the station, that maximises access to public transport, and softens the transition between the city centre and adjacent residential neighbourhoods. This approach also takes into account the need to be sensitive to the setting of CMK's listed buildings – the Central Library, the Shopping Building and the Old Bus Station.

## Creating homes and neighbourhoods in CMK

- 5.16. Many more people will call CMK home in the future. Our CMK Growth Opportunity Study has shown that there is capacity, even at fairly conservative densities and predominantly mid-rise buildings, to deliver around **15,000 homes across CMK and Campbell Park** over the coming decades, including the 4,500 units that are already identified in Plan:MK or have existing planning permission. The delivery of these homes will be phased over many years, with around 11,000 of them being built within the plan period to 2050. In the long term, we believe this will create a city centre population of around **35,000 to 40,000 residents** living in a sustainable, people-friendly neighbourhood around the middle of this century.

## Providing a mix of homes

- 5.17. Over recent years, residential development or conversions in CMK have largely been build-to-rent schemes and this is likely to continue in many new proposals in the future. Build-to-rent (BtR) or Private Rented Sector (PRS) schemes can be a successful way to create new, mixed communities, especially when done at a scale that provides flexibility for residents' changing needs with a range of unit sizes or types, and providing more affordable options too. Alongside these **build-to-rent models** we will encourage other tenures, sizes and types of homes, to help to



diversify our population and provide different options for current and future residents. As now, many of these residents will be young professionals living on their own, in a couple or with friends. The 2021 Census showed that around 45% of households in CMK were people living alone (compared to 26% across Milton Keynes). In the future, we will also encourage a mix of units that will be attractive to an undergraduate student population, as well as families and older households.



5.18. To that end, we believe that while much of the residential development that takes place in the city centre will be in flats and apartments, there are areas which would be particularly suited to larger units and family homes in townhouses or other low-rise blocks. The masterplan framework recommends that development on North and South Row and in particular on the blocks surrounding Campbell Park would be best suited to deliver **family housing**, helping to create a more mixed community of city centre residents. These sorts of units are inherently flexible and readily adapted to alternative uses should demand change in the future. This has been seen in many other towns and cities across the country where three- or four-storey terraces originally constructed as single-family homes have been converted into flats or offices, often with retail, cafes or other services on the ground floor, and sometimes then changed back into family homes at a later date.

## Providing local facilities

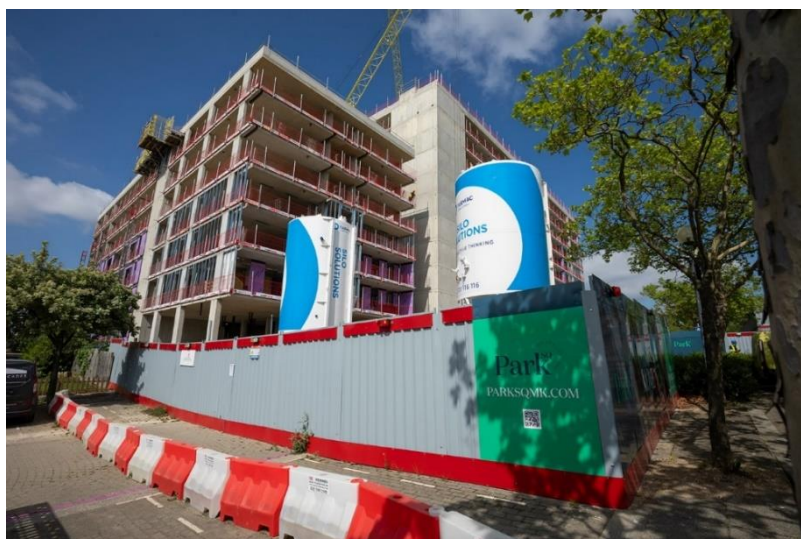
5.19. To support our resident population, we will promote a **network of local services** to meet their everyday needs, within easy walking or wheeling distance. By planning for the city centre on this strategic scale, we can make sure that the facilities our CMK residents need are considered as part of proposals. This will include shops, schools, community and medical/health facilities, play areas and green spaces, integrated within or very close to our city centre. Our Milton Keynes Infrastructure Study and Strategy (MKISS) and other MK City Plan 2050 evidence studies will help us to understand what facilities are needed, at what scale and when. Making sure they are easily accessible to the people that need to access them as part of a people-friendly place will be essential.

## Supporting a thriving CMK

5.20. CMK is the heart of our city's cultural life and the place that many people come to play, shop, eat and drink. We want to find ways to sustain that in the future, and enhance the **vitality and vibrancy** of the city centre. By creating new reasons for people to visit and spend time here, bringing a buzz and activity to the streets at all times of the day and week, we can help to make people feel safer and make the city feel more vibrant.

## Retail in CMK

5.21. CMK is a **national shopping destination**, but we need to be able to be resilient in the face of ongoing changes to the way we shop. People are now making more purchases online rather than in-store and there is a move towards shopping being part of an 'experience' where people might spend the whole day and into the evening in a city centre, combining shopping with leisure, culture, eating and drinking. We



also know that shoppers want to see more independent retailers added to our shopping offer.

- 5.22. Our CMK Framework encourages more opportunities for retail including spaces for smaller, independent units and an improved open market. The existing primary shopping area at the Centre:MK and Midsummer Place will continue to be protected for retail and related uses. Our Retail and Leisure Study also recommends that at least 37,000 sqm of additional comparison retail floorspace should be provided in CMK over the years to 2050 to meet the city's needs as our population grows and to keep up with demand from people visiting CMK to shop.

Convenience shopping provision will also be important for the many thousands of people that will live and work in the city centre and need easy access to meet their day-to-day shopping needs.



## Leisure and Culture

- 5.23. New **cultural and leisure facilities and activities** will further add to the life of the city centre. Over recent years, MK has built its reputation as a cultural destination, hosting big events and celebrations that attract residents and visitors alike. We are a city that is proud to do things differently, take risks and push boundaries and this is true in our cultural sector as much as anywhere; we really are “Better by Design”.
- 5.24. Within the city, this also means celebrating our urban environment and the things that make CMK special. We have set out how we will ‘celebrate the grid’ as the city centre changes and develops over the decades to come. But we will also use interactive trails, a sensitive and considered approach to public realm maintenance, and our cultural programming to help our citizens understand the story of Milton Keynes and its unique design heritage. We recently launched our Look Again trails<sup>2</sup> helping people in CMK learn more about the history of their city centre and some of the stories behind its creation. We will also encourage the re-use and **re-purposing of existing buildings** and spaces for cultural and other activities that help to bring more life to the city centre, all year round

## A new Events Venue

- 5.25. In addition, we have been developing proposals for a new **multi-use events venue** for CMK. Our evidence has demonstrated that a venue for a maximum capacity of around 6,000 people would be right for CMK, which can be used for a range of music, comedy and family shows, corporate events, conferences and exhibitions and event Esports or immersive experiences. This sized

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<sup>2</sup> <https://lookagainmk.city/>

venue would offer lots of flexibility to cater for a wide range of events, making sure it is busy throughout the week, during both the day and evening

- 5.26. We will work with MKDP to make the events venue project a reality. Our preferred locations are for this to be sited either on Block B4 or adjacent to the shopping centre on Midsummer Boulevard East. We expect to have certainty on this by the time we get to the Regulation 19 stage in order to allocate a site and to commence the planning process.



## **A city centre university**

- 5.27. As Milton Keynes matures, there are other city-scale uses and facilities that we will want to deliver, to meet our growing needs. We are already working with the **Open University (OU)** on a project which we hope will bring their existing operations and face-to-face teaching through a new undergraduate offer, to Central Milton Keynes, recognising the massive benefits that a university and thousands of students will bring to the city. These include bringing new activity into CMK, creating the opportunity for local students to build skills and knowledge, as well as undergraduates and other learners from outside of the city, and helping our economic competitiveness by building better links between our business and academic sectors. This project is discussed further below as part of our wider Tech and Innovation ambitions.

## **Justice Quarter**

- 5.28. We also have ambitions to deliver a **Crown Court** in Central Milton Keynes, and improve our existing County and Magistrates Courts to address the issues they face in terms of capacity and maintenance, and to meet the needs of our growing population. We will continue to work with key partners including the Ministry of Justice, His Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service and Thames Valley Police, to bring forward proposals for an expanded and enhanced '**Justice Quarter**' on Silbury Boulevard which could also provide offices for solicitors firms and flexible workspaces for visiting legal professionals, as well as facilities for people attending court hearings.

## **Active and Sustainable Travel**

- 5.29. An essential element of our approach to CMK being a people-friendly and healthy place is to give people more choice in how they move around. This includes sustainable, cost-effective and reliable mobility options across a network of different modes and which meant people don't rely on access to a private car. Central to this will be the delivery of **Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)** and

safer, easier **active travel**, giving people more choice for how they travel around. CMK is at the heart of our MRT proposals as a key destination for many people’s journeys. Active travel is also important for our mental and physical health and wellbeing, our ambitions to become carbon neutral, and to reduce inequality across the city.



## Midsummer Boulevard Greenway

5.30. A key intervention for the future of CMK and recommended by the CMK Growth Opportunity Study is to create a **‘Greenway’** along Midsummer Boulevard. Our vision is for the Boulevard to become a route for our Mass Rapid Transit services and active travel, with general traffic instead focussed on Silbury and Avebury Boulevards. This would create a safe, traffic-free space for people walking, cycling, wheeling or scooting through the city centre, and a segregated route for MRT to allow easy and speedy transit through the city centre without getting caught up in general traffic. Over time, by removing traffic we can create new opportunities for play or other pop-up activities along Midsummer Boulevard to encourage even more activity along the street. The image below shows an artist’s impression of the Midsummer Boulevard Greenway when fully complete.



## Safety and Wayfinding

5.31. We need to make interventions that help **everyone to feel as safe as they can** when spending time in our city centre, at all times of the day and night. We tend to feel safer when there are more people around, so the city centre being a busier place with more natural surveillance and

greater activity on the street from lots more people living and spending time in CMK will help everyone feel more comfortable.

- 5.32. We want activity that faces out onto the street and more active travel to get people out of their cars and on the streets. We will consider ways that our built form could be adapted and improved to make places feel safer to everyone and help improve their enjoyment of being in CMK. The Midsummer Boulevard Greenway would be an example of this, giving people alternative ways to cross over roads with greater visibility of what is happening around them. We will also explore development along North and South Row which gives more natural surveillance to the pedestrian crossings into neighbouring estates.
- 5.33. And we need to make sure people can navigate around the city centre easily, so we will improve **wayfinding and signage**, and use the built environment to help people better understand the place with gateway buildings and clear routes. This will also help people to find some of our lesser-known open spaces and public art.

## **New and Improved Green Spaces**

- 5.34. The CMK Growth Opportunity Study has recommended other interventions to help enhance the **green character** of Central Milton Keynes. With many more of us living, working and spending time in the city centre, access to good quality green and open spaces will become more important, so the CMK Framework recommends the creation of new areas of open space and better access to our existing green spaces.
- 5.35. So, as part of the phased development of our Midsummer Boulevard 'Greenway', we intend to green some of the car parking alongside the route as areas for sustainable drainage and planting. Some of these spaces could provide the opportunity to make significant improvements in biodiversity and biosecurity with a greater range of species within CMK, helping our planting to be more resilient to future disease, and enable new development in the city centre to meet their biodiversity net gain requirements (if not achieved on-site).
- 5.36. We also need to make better use of our existing assets and help people find spaces they might not know about; places like Grafton Park and Fred Roche Gardens are a great resource but they feel hidden away and underused. We recognise that access to Campbell Park from the rest of Central Milton Keynes is not legible or attractive, so we have an ambition to **extend the Greenway into the park** with a new, wider green bridge, providing safer and easier access for people walking, wheeling, cycling or scooting through the city centre. We will work with the Parks Trust to create more ways for everyone to enjoy Campbell Park.



- 5.37. Our open spaces should include more **play spaces** for children – and adults – of all ages. Some of these will be created within the Midsummer Boulevard Greenway, but we should provide opportunities across the city centre for fun, creating places where people choose to linger and spend time, play and watch the world go by.
- 5.38. An issue that needs to be considered in developing new areas of public realm and open space in the city centre – and across the city more widely – is around ongoing maintenance and stewardship, and how we manage **privately-owned public spaces**. This has become an increasing concern in other cities and the Council will need to determine its approach as such spaces are likely to be part of new major schemes.
- 5.39. The development of our city centre will contribute a very significant part of Milton Keynes’ growth over the coming decades, so it is essential that it is delivered in a way that responds to the climate emergency and helps to reduce our carbon footprint. The Council has an ambition for Milton Keynes to be carbon negative by 2050, so new development needs to be more **sustainable and resource-efficient** for both existing and new buildings, as well as other parts of our urban fabric. This is discussed in more detail in the topic paper on Climate and Environmental Action.
- 5.40. Within CMK, our sustainability agenda might include using roof tops or creating canopies over parking areas for solar panels, supporting cleaner sources of heat and power, and encouraging the refit of existing buildings – rather than replacement with new buildings – because of the embodied carbon they contain. We must also consider how climate change and more extreme weather conditions impact our health, and the role of the built environment in minimising and mitigating impacts. This includes avoiding single-aspect apartments and creating greater tree coverage to provide shade and shelter.

## **Investing in a prosperous economy in CMK**

- 5.41. Central Milton Keynes is fundamental to Milton Keynes’ economic success. The city is becoming increasingly centralised, with more and more of our employment and economic activity taking place in CMK. Our city’s ongoing success, therefore, is reliant on us maintaining and enhancing CMK’s **role as an economic hub**, helping to attract more businesses to our city centre and supporting the growth of those already here.

- 5.42. We have big ambitions to attract more knowledge intensive, tech and digital businesses to the city, as expressed in our Strategy for 2050, Tech Ecosystem Report and Tech, Smart City, Digital and Creative Industries Strategy. We aim to attract and support tech sector companies and



provide the facilities our city centre needs to make them successful. Through our Inward Investment team – **Invest Milton Keynes** – we will make interventions that will help to build a skilled local workforce, create a more attractive environment for workers, support start-ups and innovative ideas, and forge stronger links between businesses and the academic sector.

## **Creating space for innovation and business**

5.43. A key part of our plans for CMK will be to bring forward a **Tech, Design, and Innovation Area** within the Downtown Business quarter. This will help us to make the most of the connections with other major employers in this part of CMK, like Santander and Aiimi, and also, we hope, include the Open University as a key part of the plans as discussed below.

5.44. For CMK to be successful, we need to be economically competitive against other places on a global, national and regional stage. We need to be able to attract investors that might otherwise look to other places, secure the right investment into the right projects and give confidence about our ambitions for our city centre. Our MK City Plan 2050 will be the way we can use the planning and development process to help demonstrate our inward investment and economic growth ambitions.

5.45. Part of this will be ensuring we make provision for the office floorspace that will be needed to sustain our economic growth. The Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) says that we need c.288,000 – 312,000 sq.m. of additional office floorspace in the period to 2050 – the equivalent of around three and a half Unity Places – which would contribute towards the creation of around 26,900 additional jobs. Demonstrating the important role that CMK plays in the Milton Keynes economy, around 60% of the city’s office floorspace will continue to be in Central Milton Keynes. Our CMK Growth Opportunity Study demonstrates that even at relatively modest densities and focussing office space in the blocks closest to the station as part of the Downtown quarter, there is sufficient space in the city centre to accommodate this level of employment growth.



5.46. Milton Keynes has long held the ambition for a **city centre undergraduate university** offering face-to-face teaching. The Open University is exploring the opportunity to move their existing operations, currently based at Walton Hall, to CMK as well as creating in-person learning opportunities for up to 15,000 undergraduate and post-graduate level students. As part of Campus 2030 and working in partnership with MKDP, we will make sure there are new student residential units provided to reduce the impact on our private rented homes, and plan for the other uses and service that a large cohort of students living and spending time in CMK would need. We will also explore the potential for Milton Keynes College to relocate some of its activities to the city centre, and support the further growth of other Higher Education providers, including MK:U. Creating much stronger linkages between academia and business, including

helping to create a stronger supply of skilled graduates is important to our economic strategy for the future of our city.

## Next steps and delivery

### The value of action

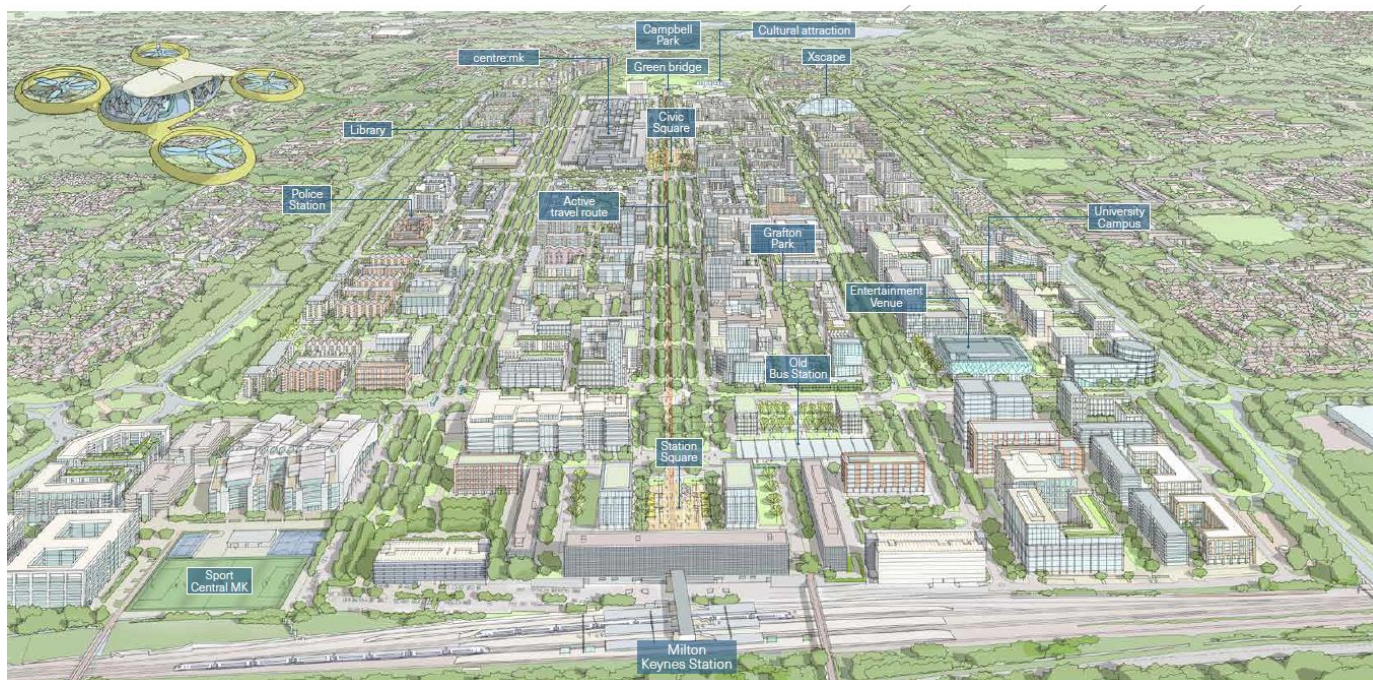
- 6.1. **It is clear that Central Milton Keynes has the capacity and opportunity to have a really strong, exciting and vibrant future. Our challenge will be making sure that the changes we see in the years and decades ahead are all helping towards achieving that positive future, that investment decisions in CMK are the right ones and that partners and stakeholders are working together towards a shared ambition.**
- 6.2. As described throughout this paper, the opportunities within CMK are immense. We have the chance to address some of the major challenges facing the city centre – some of which are unique to CMK, and others which are shared with other towns and cities – and to ensure that CMK can become an even more successful place for residents, for business, for visitors and for students.
- 6.3. And the implications of not taking these opportunities and guiding how we want the city centre to develop over the coming decades could be very stark.
- 6.4. While the city centre – and as a result Milton Keynes as a whole – is currently economically successful, this would be jeopardised without taking action to ensure its ongoing competitiveness, meaning MK would miss out on jobs and the investment our city needs to make sure it can run effectively for all its citizens.
- 6.5. With new homes being created in the city centre – some of them through conversions of employment space which can be done without planning permission in some cases – the city centre population will continue to increase. Our job is to make sure that CMK works well for those residents. As an example, we know the doctors' surgery serving CMK residents is already struggling to keep up with demand and is some distance away from many homes within the city centre, so further growth without a planned approach to delivering essential health facilities like this will undermine our plans for people-friendly, healthy places.
- 6.6. It is therefore essential that we have a clear framework and effective policies in place to manage and balance these challenges. All residents of the city – not just those in the city centre – stand to benefit from our plans for CMK.

### Delivery

- 6.7. We believe that the growth and development proposals in the CMK Framework and set out in this topic paper are deliverable and achievable, but they will not happen overnight. Change will happen over time, **phased in the years to 2050 and beyond**. And these changes will make the city centre look, feel and work differently to today, whilst still being recognisably Central Milton Keynes. It will truly meet our motto of 'Better by Design'.



- 6.8. To make this happen, we will work with Milton Keynes Development Partnership and other investors, landowners and developers, as well as other stakeholders, to make sure that the changes that happen are the right ones, that they fit with the vision for CMK and help in the journey towards our long-term ambitions, and that are focussed around the people that will live, work and spend time in the city centre.
- 6.9. We also recognise that the planning system can only achieve so much, and that we will need to work with other Council departments and partners to ensure that other policies and strategies align to help manage and deliver good growth in the city centre. This is the start of the next stage of the growth of Central Milton Keynes.



# Annex A – The current policy context for CMK

The MK City Plan 2050 is not starting from a blank sheet in terms of existing planning policies and the city’s ambitions for CMK. The documents below summarise our current policy context.

## Plan:MK

Our existing local plan, [Plan:MK](#) (March 2019), includes policies that promote the development of CMK as a vibrant cultural centre, recognising the multi-functional role that CMK plays. It encourages higher dwelling densities compared to the rest of the borough, focusses further knowledge-based businesses and additional office floorspace in CMK, reflects CMK as the top of the retail hierarchy as a regional shopping area and ensures the city centre is accessible by a variety of means, without the need for a private car. It also highlights the potential for CMK to be the location for new further and higher education facilities.

## Central Milton Keynes Business Neighbourhood Plan

The [Central Milton Keynes Alliance Plan](#) (June 2015) is a Business Neighbourhood Plan covering the city centre and also includes planning policies covering CMK. The Alliance Plan was the first to encourage taller buildings of up to eight storeys and beyond, where outstanding economic or social benefits could be offered. It also recognised the heritage value of the city centre’s “classic infrastructure”. When adopted, the MK City Plan 2050 will supersede many of the policies in both the Alliance Plan and Plan:MK.

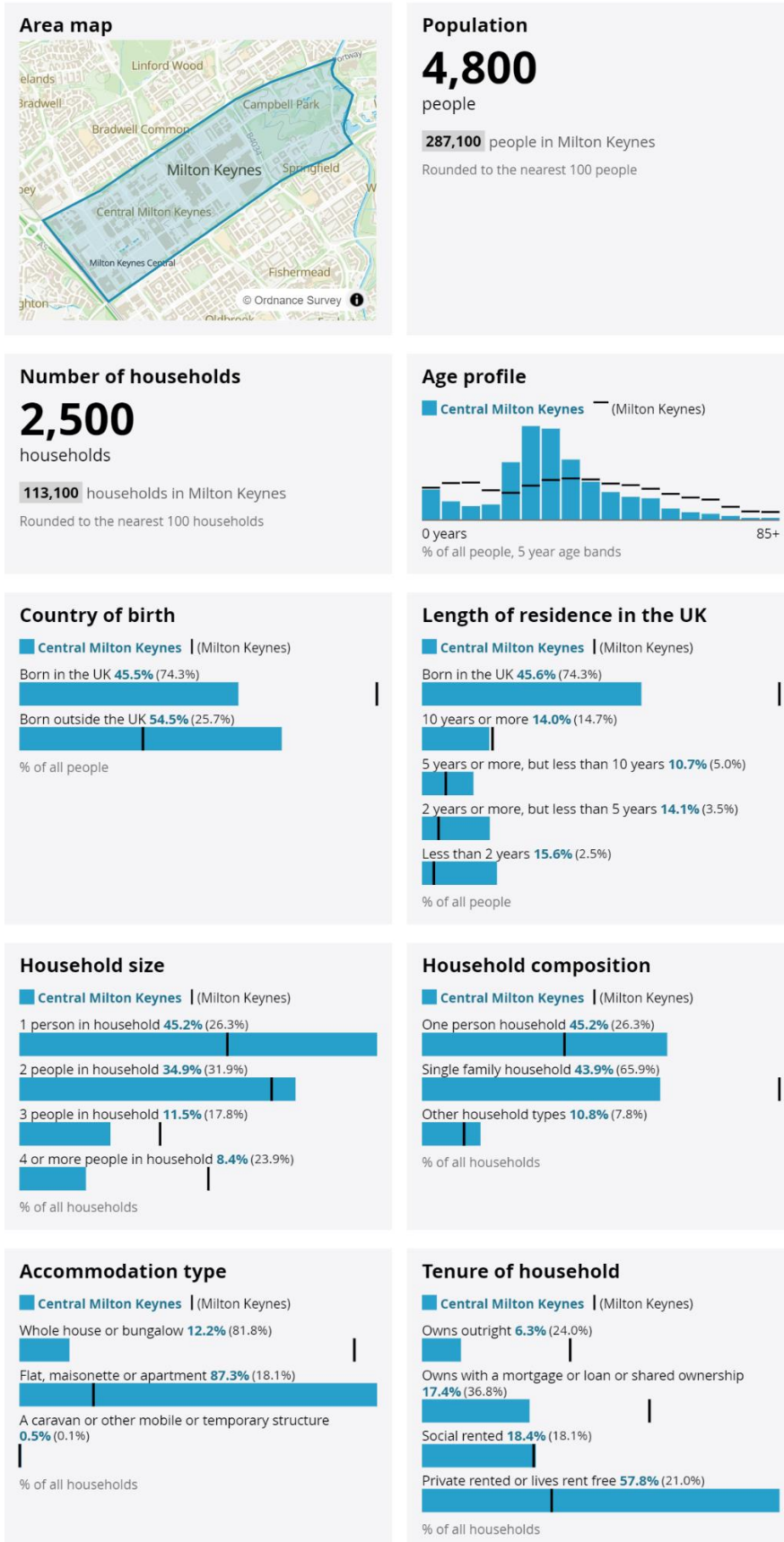
## Strategy for 2050

Milton Keynes City Council adopted its Strategy for 2050 in January 2021, setting out a vision for the future of Milton Keynes, including the ongoing growth of the city to a population of around 410,000. The Strategy also includes a section relating to Central Milton Keynes, reflecting on the importance of CMK as a shopping, office, culture and leisure location. The Strategy proposes the residential population of CMK would grow to around 25,000 people by 2050, including Campbell Park, and that CMK would be home to a further 18,000 jobs. The Strategy for 2050 also discusses other ambitions for CMK, including for a new events venue, a city centre university, better linked up and improved people-friendly public spaces, and an extended and rejuvenated open market.

## National Planning Policy Framework

The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) sets out a range of policies relevant to the future of Central Milton Keynes, including those relating to achieving sustainable development (including with regards sustainable transport, use of resources and climate change), the vitality of town centres, building a strong, competitive economy, promoting healthy and safe communities, creating well-designed places and making effective use of land. The MK City Plan 2050 will need to ensure it reflects – but does not repeat – the government’s approach laid out in the NPPF.

# Annex B – Central Milton Keynes and Milton Keynes Borough in 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

# Annex C – Initial proposals for activity and uses in the CMK Quarters

## Downtown Business Quarter

- Office focus, with supporting, complementary uses including a home for undergraduate teaching. A new centre for UK tech and innovation anchored by the Open University, bringing to life the city’s official motto ‘by knowledge, design and understanding’.
- Where innovation happens, a place that encourages tech and innovation, with the sorts of spaces that are flexible and adaptable for different business users of different scales, including start-up and scale-up, as well as the potential for major flagship employers.
- A strong inward investment and economic development strategy that enables strong collaboration between businesses and academia, including spin-out businesses and commercialisation of research outputs. Uses existing local businesses to act as ambassadors for the city and co-creates the vision for the area.
- Few permanent residents, but purpose-built student accommodation within this part of the city centre is acceptable alongside plans for in-person university teaching.
- Creates a much stronger gateway to the city through Station Square with some sensitive development that brings new activity to this part of the city centre.
- Includes other uses that have a strong relationship with surrounding businesses. This could include the multi-use events venue which links with the local tech sector through the creation of immersive experiences within the venue, or their use for conferencing, exhibitions, major lectures or graduation ceremonies.
- Where we demonstrate the Milton Keynes ‘City as Testbed’ approach, home to our MK:Smart lab, connecting ideas that help create a future facing city with a real world environment to test them in.
- The ‘world class campus’ of the UK’s largest higher education provider, opening learning to all and to use the newest technologies to deliver learning.

## Midtown Quarter

- An area characterised by its mix of uses and activities, creating the transition between the office-led Downtown and the more leisure- and retail-led Uptown area, and between the neighbouring residential areas and the city centre.
- The location of most of the city’s civic activity, including the Council Offices, the Central Library, the courts and central police station.
- Enhanced Justice Quarter to be delivered which provides a new Crown Court and expands capacity within existing County Court, alongside other space for solicitors firms and flexible workspace for visiting legal professionals, and potentially re-provision of the central police station facility.
- New homes provided which includes some sensitive townhouse style development along North and South Row which creates better surveillance for routes into neighbouring estates and creates a lower density transition to the edge of the city centre. Higher density development and taller apartment blocks focussed more towards Midsummer Boulevard.
- Better access and wayfinding for spaces like Fred Roche Gardens as well as provision of new open spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy.

## Uptown Leisure Quarter

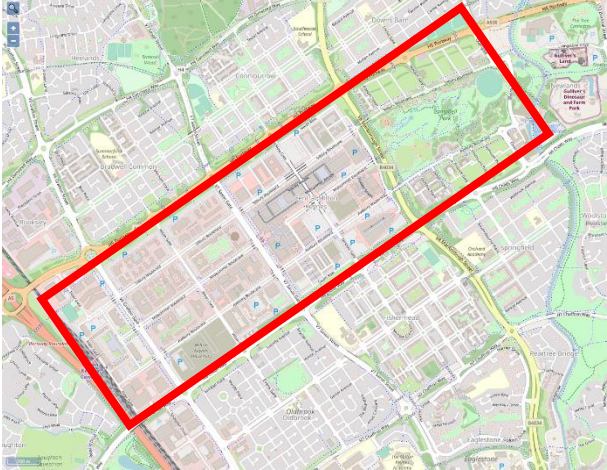
- Further develops the existing surrounding uses to create the cultural heart of the city centre.
- Enables the delivery of the Midsummer Boulevard Greenway – a safe, traffic free route for active travel and the Mass Rapid Transit system.
- Cars are no longer dominant in the space and it becomes a far more people-focussed environment. People spill out of the shopping centre to use other nearby spaces and buildings, moving around the area on foot instead of by car.
- New shopping spaces are created that diversify the offer – more independent and pop-up spaces, a re-provided and improved market place.
- Creates a space for events to take place throughout the year; somewhere that you can watch the world go by or get involved in whatever is happening.
- Creates far better linkages to Campbell Park with a green bridge that improves legibility and accessibility to the park.
- May include the multi-use events venue which would provide an anchor for the night-time economy, helping to create a centre for entertainment, and strengthening Milton Keynes' appeal as a leisure and cultural destination.
- Milton Keynes' cultural centre for entertainment, retail, hospitality and nightlife; already home to MK Gallery, MK Theatre, centre:MK and Xscape, with plans for more reasons to spend your time in our city centre.
- A cultural centre with excellent connections to the city it serves and nationally.
- At the heart of a thriving city centre, a place where people set up home and stay for years.

## Parkside Residential Quarter

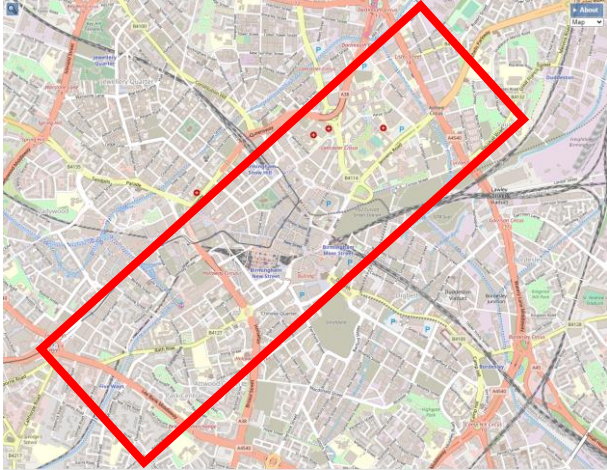
- Residential focus, benefiting from close proximity to Campbell Park and the canal, as well as easy access to the city centre.
- Mixture of densities and building heights ranging from low to moderate, including some townhouse terraces and mansion block scale units to encourage a mixed community, including families.
- Provides other uses needed as part of a walkable neighbourhood, including shops and community facilities as appropriate within a new residential area.

# Annex D – Comparison of CMK with other city centres shown at the same scale

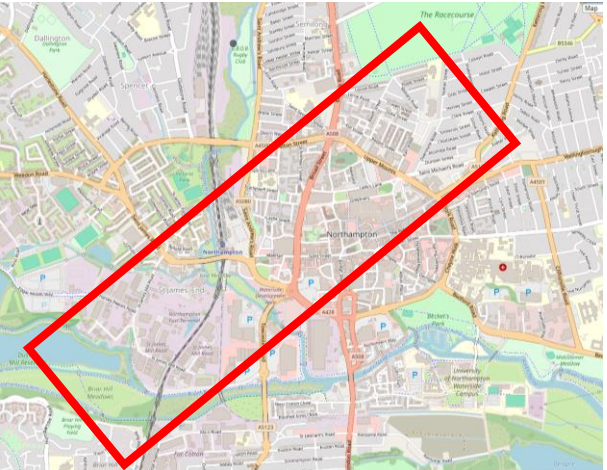
Created using [Same Scale \(joshuahhh.com\)](http://SameScale(joshuahhh.com))



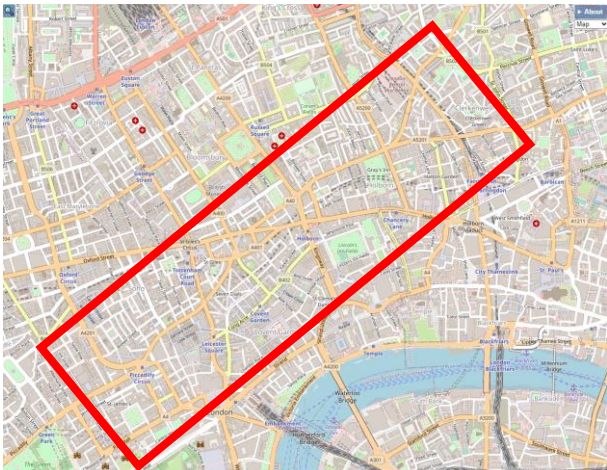
Central Milton Keynes



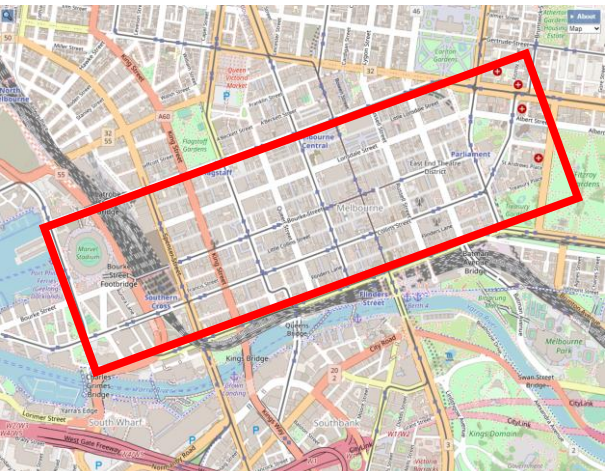
Birmingham



Northampton



London



Melbourne



Manhattan

