

UK New Towns Sharing Day – Reinventing New Towns through Heritage

23rd January 2019, Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre

Welcome – Martin Petchey, Mayor of Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes still retains its ambitious new town mentality, that of building, expanding and not restricting development. General feedback from residents is that they like how the Development Corporation designed and built Milton Keynes, and that it was forward-thinking in terms of its archaeological excavations. It's important to link the town's older heritage with its newer heritage.

Introduction – Shane Downer, Milton Keynes Council

The UK new towns share common issues, especially those related to no longer being new.

- The rapid expansion and diversification through migration has caused transportation and infrastructure issues across new towns.
- Our unique modernist heritage is not understood by funders, who can't see the different needs of new town heritage.

PART ONE: LEARNING FROM THE NETWORK – STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Milton Keynes Context: MK Futures 2050 - Fiona Robinson, Milton Keynes Council

Historical context - Pooleyville
 - Development Corporation – plan allowed for flexibility, low density, existing settlements now conservation areas, grid roads follow contours of landscape, landscape defines the city.

Facing a challenge of scale and pace of expansion and development – public transport is difficult, local centres under-used and looking to have more of a role in the future. Want to encourage innovation as opposed to 'anywhere' development. All planning powers now rest with Milton Keynes Council for the first time in its history, but wondering now if a Development Corporation would be useful for the planned scale of development?

MK Futures 2050 Commission – planning for a population of 500,000 people, need to address education and mobility. Big six projects to take this forward:

- Project 1 = hub of the Oxford – Cambridge corridor: where will the growth be? Ideas of a mass rapid transit system ('bus not bus')

- Project 2 = MK:U – STEM-focused university concentrating on subjects Milton Keynes already does well. Structuring the courses differently to attract variety of students. Launch of design competition with aim of opening in 2023.
- Project 3 = Learning 2050 – tilting the curriculum towards STEM subjects.
- Project 4 = Smart, Shared Sustainable Mobility – autonomous vehicles etc.
- Project 5 = Central MK Renaissance – regeneration of undeveloped sites
- Project 6 = Creative & Cultural City – year-round vibrancy and build on MK’s USP

New Town Heritage Research Network: the value of recognising the heritage of New Towns

– Sabine Coady-Schaebitz, Coventry University

Context of the network

- anniversaries are providing a time for reflection and coming at a time in planning crisis
- there is a renewed debate about Garden Cities
- question of the role of the state in planning

Objective of the network is to bring people together and share ideas.

Examples: Harlow – still works with its original master plan, which informs current decisions;
 Peterborough – an expansion new town = more pronounced
 “competition” between old and newer heritage; Rotterdam –
 showing new town heritage can be brought back to life

New Town Heritage Agenda

- A call to action for four towns to take it on

New towns are not monuments, but complex entities – they have been rapidly developed over a short time

- What do we do with them now?

New town heritage needs to be highlighted and reiterated if we want it understood, it is part of the present and the future.

Example of Berlin Palace – original building built 15th century, it was demolished by the German Democratic Republic in the 1950s. The Palace of the Republic was built in the modernist style in its place. This, too, was demolished after a vote in the Bundestag to rebuild the Berlin Palace. A lack of understanding of modernist heritage.

- Need to investigate how communities relate to building
- Should those in power decide?

Mustn’t forget the critical side of new town heritage – what was built doesn’t work for everyone.

New Towns Internationally – A New Narrative - Michelle Provoost, International New Towns Institute

Why is now the time for the reinvention of new towns?

- Age
- Reflection on the ideology i.e. welfare state
- Top-down planning is outdated – inhabitants need a say

New towns have a shared DNA – if you compare their maps, they were built for a car infrastructure, similar sizes, residential areas with small amenities.

What is considered heritage? How is it being dealt with?

- Listing = most traditional form of recognising built heritage. The listing describes and protects. Emphasises restoration. Gives a feeling of pride and puts a place 'on the map'.
- Keeping the structure = e.g. Pendrecht have demolished buildings, but kept the structure/layout as the important aspect of heritage.
- Conceptual = the heritage you can't see e.g. the ideals of the town, the communities. Calls for reinterpretation of the sense of community.
- Master plans and the urban qualities = part of the heritage of a new town.

New towns were built for pioneers, but the social narrative needs to be reinvented. The planned for stability has led to homogenous communities.

- Diversification happening due to migration
- There's a paradox of new towns initially being welcoming for newcomers, to being protective of 'our city'.
- Inner cities are increasingly being regenerated to attract tourists, which moves inhabitants out to suburbs and then to new towns.

The growth agenda requires a need for different types of housing. The aging population requires a rethink on social care. All towns and cities require advances in sustainable mobility.

How do we get inhabitants involved in planning for the future?

- Different groups – professionals, locals, interested parties – together in labs/workshops.

Panel Discussion – Fiona Robinson, Sabine Coady-Schaebitz, Michelle Provoost

- Solutions to opening up the city to migrants and dealing with newcomers?
- It is all about inclusion, projects that aim for inclusion of different groups in to the fabric of the city and its culture - the processes seeking to achieve this need to actively incorporate this. Shaping public space should have these considerations to provide a site for people to meet and socialise.

Example from the Netherlands of passport collection office incorporating cafés and shops to make those newcomers welcome to the place. Housing stock and diversity also needs to tackle and attract beyond the usual people.

- Depends on the growth agenda of the city, are the cities shrinking or declining? Acceptance is important as it makes people less inclined to come to cities – festivals and events organise to personally welcome and integrate people into cities and towns are crucial.

- Infrastructure – growth agenda in MK is serious and intriguing, are the NIC offering you financial resource to accommodate various issues that come with such extreme growth - growth agenda methods and how is this relationship being built?

- We seconded someone into the NIC for 12 months and there are ongoing discussions for a housing deal with central government. Joint working is also in the heart of what we are doing especially in regard to the growth study we are working with South Northants and Aylesbury showing Milton Keynes are thinking cross boundary.

- Physical and mental heritage – Expertise is being lost, we have forgotten the art of building a city, how does a programme like this mine the expertise that it needs to grow?

- We have to be proactive and be aware that people will naturally move jobs and places while continuing the learning and education. Essential that we continue to maintain archives for ongoing education to transfer this expertise.

- MK are planning a centralised city archive to identify a place where knowledge is stored and accessed. There is a generational leap to get this expertise and knowledge across to the new euthanised groups of young people and we need to be able to provide these opportunities for widespread engagement.

- Peterborough case study – have set up an archive and now they need to be able to support the research aspect of the archive and getting researchers in to ensure the quality of the archive is upheld

- Characteristic of MK is the high investment in design quality and innovative design – important to be aware of the history but you should be prepared to invest and building design quality and involve architects in the processes.

- Garden Cities the roots of new towns – shouldn't forget and there are lessons to be learned e.g. projects to record memories and experiences from its citizens.

- Seem to be continually reinventing the wheel every so often with principles around eco towns to healthy new towns. Having power to tackle developer led design by getting them to be aware of how better design would work in the neighbourhoods and communities they are building would be a massive victory.

- Bicester doing interesting things.

- Suggestion of densification around grid roads to get more homes into the centre in order to facilitate the aims to grow the population. Mobility is also key - pushing forward the cycling culture here as MK has that existing infrastructure it could be perfect to implement that mind set to move away from the car.

- Mind set shift is important. People are often put off from cycling due to the complexity of the redway network. We could be solving the mobility issue by introducing more forms of 'mobility as a service' to incorporate important first and last mile modes of transport to tackle how people think about the way they move around the city.

- Densification could be a great thing but could also mean that cities lose character – how do you maintain that character and also densify around the town centre to accommodate growing housing pressures. How do we get developers to do the right kind of intensification?

- Drastic change from designers and architects having roles in Local Authorities to around only 1% - issues can be solved with commitment to good design.

- Lack of awareness and knowledge about New Towns – increase visibility by strength in numbers to rally to ensure appreciation of character and heritage in New Towns with an aim to make this a national discussion point.

- Inform your residents of the heritage to swell the numbers of people who are proud of where you live. Telling the story of a place can win people over making sure they understand the place and comprehending the history and why it was designed like that. Building up connections with new towns to develop those communities.

- Are new towns inward looking vs cosmopolitan? Narrative that has fostered a divide between large cities and small towns and villages – New towns in the south east are fighting with the draw of London where there is imminent migration from the towns to London.

- Changing the perception of New Towns and achieving a balance between how people from outside view new towns compared to those who live within them who are very committed and love the place.

- Serving the various demographics in the city with an aging population from the original MK citizens and now there is a growing young population which has put a strain on the housing stock as nothing is available for this demographic. The need to adapt housing stock is key while looking to preserve those original principles.

- What are future tactics for attracting new people away from the creature comforts of home, friends and family? – relating to the community workers from the MK Dev Corp to welcome people in to new communities.

- Notion of community has changed – growth of individualism. Studentification of cities is becoming more prominent and has been tackled in some places to ensure that there will be a certain demographic balance to keep equilibrium. In diverse cities you have to welcome and accommodate student populations as they are of equal value to the city as any other community groups.

- More urban design competitions could attract more innovative designs that will pander to those demographics the issue being that there is not enough resource to run these types of competitions.

- Signing up developers to be committed to the communities, bringing them on board and ensuring they follow the principles and processes of the New Town.
- MK is an exception city in that it has expressed an ambition to grow, but surprisingly it wants to maintain itself as a suburban city – will be interesting to see how it contends with this in the future.

PART TWO: CASE STUDIES

Milton Keynes: The New Town Heritage Register – Simon Peart, Milton Keynes Council

Heritage should not be seen as a constraint – it is about understanding the value and significance.

New Town Heritage Register (NTHR) was kicked off by the demolition of Bletchley Leisure Centre – no thought to the value and significance of this building before permission to demolish was given.

NTHR is about local significance and what contributes to the character of Milton Keynes

- Aim is to provide a context for decision-making

MK Council sought objective view of external consultants to produce criteria on what makes MK special

Nominations sought from residents – 220 received (around 170 from MK Forum – the civic society)

Will be decided by a selection panel made up of professionals and non-professionals.

Telford at 50: The significance of celebrating our heritage – Jodie Lloyd, Telford@50

Telford is a fast-growing town. 50th anniversary wanted to celebrate the past and look to the future.

The focus was on people and places, and bringing the Borough towns together. Wanted to regenerate pride and encourage engagement with the Council.

The Council committed £2 million.

The celebrations were community-led, which required a lot of consultation.

- Funded 53 community events – stipulation that events were open to all.
- Regeneration grants for small buildings.
- Pool of central volunteers matched up with what they wanted to do.

Found engagement with schools difficult – usually had their own plans, which were difficult to fit in with. However, 60% of schools held an event.

Opening event connected the five Borough towns using laser art – created a buzz.

Peterborough: The role of community in growth – Stacey Kennedy, Vivacity Peterborough

Culture services in Peterborough managed by a charitable trust – Vivacity.

As an expansion new town, the new town heritage has to 'compete' with the older heritage e.g. the cathedral and more attractive central area.

The new town heritage of Peterborough is not talked about or recognised – it is seen as just part of the timeline.

The master plan doesn't inform current planning. With a 28% population increase, there is a recognised skills deficit and the need for a university.

The new town areas of Peterborough are not looked after compared with more central traditionally historic areas, which causes tension and a lack of civic pride.

Peterborough Development Corporation archive collection made up of around 400 boxes.

Catalogued using 114 volunteers and enhanced with oral history project.

Harlow: The Masterplan Heritage – Dianne Cooper, Harlow Council

Harlow's master plan starts with an introduction that reminds people of the need for change and flexibility – was never meant to be static.

Harlow has very tight boundaries defined by the surrounding landscape. The master plan tested further neighbourhoods for future expansion and development.

Expansion areas outside Harlow (e.g. into Epping Forest area) did not follow the new town principles

- Other developments have learnt from that mistake

Need for consulting the local community to update the original principles and make sure they still work for residents.

- Locals bought into a plan for higher density because of the commitment to keep shared green spaces ('green wedges')

Architecture as a driving force for city development – Jeroen de Bok, Rotterdam City Planner

Rotterdam was heavily damaged during the Second World War and has been rebuilt since.

Focus is on quality architectural design and they are always experimenting

- Invite new architects to infill spare space to encourage fresh talent
- Selling off housing for €1 for new owners to renovate

This focus on quality and encouragement of experimentalism has attracted architectural practices to the city.

Try to emphasise the economic benefits of urban architecture quality to ensure this continues.

Densification can be an opportunity for cultural heritage (if done right) – renovation of historic buildings for new purposes.

Difficult to measure if the approach works, but Rotterdam has been attracting a lot of attention.

Panel Discussion – Simon Peart, Jodie Lloyd, Stacey Kennedy, Dianne Cooper, Jeroen de Bok

- Telford celebrations were brilliant at engaging people in the Telford 50 events, is there a plan to transform the engagement from the birthday celebrations into sustained public engagement?

- Aim was to plant the seed and then continue with sponsorship from businesses, retaining volunteers and continuing to deliver headline events via sponsors - pass on the torch for civic engagement. Empower the community and local businesses to take the lead - 2019 objective is for the council to step back and allow the momentum to continue on its own.

- MK suffered a dip in 2018, but have learned lessons and created cultural leadership groups and models to galvanise and sustain the level of engagement. Capitalising on big events happening in the borough to ensure partnership working continues.

- Population growth is a beast to contend with. How do smaller towns create and chase this brand to kick start growth?

- Setting out the basic principles of the city like in Harlow is important. Crawley could set aside specific zones for agriculture and social structures.

- Heritage registers are important at telling the story of the town/city on top of planning processes. Focus and retention of the people who have been committed to the town/city from the beginning, make sure these people are retained to give you the widespread knowledge.

- Finding the link of 'who' built that building. Harlow Australian architect who travelled to the UK to design the buildings. Significant growth is a challenge in small and shrinking spaces when you are running out of land and money – bring the developers on side and sell them the vision of place, if you follow these principles it will benefit your planning applications making it easier to build in line with your vision.

- Telford case study – all about selling the Telford identity and the overall brand for the place, periphery villages are now looking to jump onto the brand and are keen to be involved but there is a long way to go.

- Peterborough case study – where does the conversation start to get people on board for the history and civic pride:

- Ensure that people have access to the archive to understand the history and the culture of the place they live in and to learn about the living substance of the place they are habitants of.

- Reaching out to schools in order to get that engagement embedded from an early stage in its residents and communities' lives.

- How cities perceive themselves? Is it to do with the local press, political pressures and how do you deal with internal schisms?

- Open engagement through activities such as stakeholder engagement. Civic events like firework displays and festivals are brilliant at bringing together citizens to give them that sense of civic pride.

All five afternoon presentations are like recipe for 'perfect' heritage of new town

- Master Plan
- Heritage Register
- Archives
- Celebration
- Architecture/design

- How do you provide evidence that heritage improves community wellbeing?

- Lots of evidence – heritage sector is justified by providing people with a sense of belonging that in turn benefits resident mental health and wellbeing.

- Change Minds – Norfolk (<http://changeminds.org.uk/>)

Architecture competitions

- Densification of urban spaces to preserve the green spaces. MK is low density and spread out with low building heights. People have moved to these places for particular reasons - how does heritage deal with changing the original offer?
- Original builders were planning in the flexibility for the future of MK, building height was incorporated for market pressures at the time of construction which is not the case now as we know the demand exists.
- Green wedges in Harlow will allow reflective sustainability planning to build transport and other useful features as part of the sustainability and health agendas.
- Vision at the time is important – densification can be a great tool to enhance city and town centres especially when you want to preserve green and open spaces – retrofitting buildings is a great way of doing this.