

UNIT 8 LANDSCAPE AND URBAN PLANNING

NEW TOWNS: A DESIGN FOR MILTON KEYNES CITY CENTRE PARK

Milton Keynes was the last of the British new towns; it was created on a vast green field site in Buckinghamshire. It was also a notable departure from the townscape layouts of previous new towns, in that it was based on a grid defined by snaking roads. Individual developments took place in each of the grid-squares and were hidden by massive banks and heavy planting. The grid of the central area of the city, whose centrepiece was a great shopping building in the style of Mies van der Rohe, overlooked an adjacent grid-square of sweeping parkland. Andrew Mahaddie, a landscape designer with the city's development corporation, worked out a major design for the park.

The focal point of Mahaddie's landscape was a great truncated cone set on a low podium of the same formation. Access to it was directly from the belvedere, a low mound heavily planted with concentric rings of trees and reached from the city's shopping zone via a pedestrian bridge over one of the main city grid roads. From the top of the cone a long staircase led down to the next focal point, a vast circular pool, with a series of zigzag ramps from the skirting slope providing an easier alternative route. From the pool pedestrians either descended a narrow staircase to the bottom of the ravine or continued at ground level via a glass bridge over the ravine. This bridge ran across to a round green containing an inverted cone to an anechoic sound grotto, or in some versions of the design a round pond surrounded by seating decorated in a variety of geometric motifs, each making reference to an animal. Beyond that the path led to a children's play-castle and an earth promontory from which the remainder of the parkland, wild garden and sculpture park could be viewed. North of this prospect point a path led to the edge of a vast bowl for public performances and thence west to the belvedere and back to the shopping centre. Paths around the perimeter of the site provided access to the rolling parkland and sculpture park.

The design was founded in a set of heterogeneous ideas to do with prehistoric mysticism, together with an understanding of some of the more pleasurable aspects of Italian Renaissance garden design, some of the more austere aspects of neo-classicism and a hard-edged hi-tech element. For British traditional landscape designers at the time it represented an unwelcome intrusion on the soft-edged post-Picturesque principles on which they operated.

The mystical element is by no means fanciful. A group of new-town designers were for a period heavily involved in exploring mysticism: such things as ley lines and primitive nature symbolism. They named the principal roads running alongside the adjacent shopping centre Avebury (after the megalithic site near Stonehenge), Silbury and Midsummer Boulevards, and reorientated them from their original alignment so that they caught the sun during the midsummer solstice. Mahaddie orientated his design on true north. The central cone itself is a conscious reference to one of Britain's most mysterious man-made earth-forms, Silbury Hill in Wiltshire. It also has an architectural precedent in the published designs of the late-eighteenth-century French neo-classical architect Ledoux, whose work was being rediscovered at the time. The steep range of steps from the flat platform on top down through a great sloping circular symbol is probably a reference to Mayan and Aztec temples. Randomly arranged bumps in the surrounding parkland make reference to prehistoric barrows.

In contrast, the zigzagging ramps on either side of the formal stairway down the lower reaches of the podium cone have a clear Italian source, as has the juxtaposition of the great circular tank at its foot: this is a pool which reads as a sheet of water without an apparent container; a gutter around the perimeter takes displaced water. The pool has two paths over it and a rectangular water carpet. The walkways are either solid blocks, the top face level with the surrounding water, with wide water-filled open joints, or they are suspended mesh grids, also laid almost submerged in the water. On the secondary path the paving takes a number of forms, including linked floated paving which undulates as it is walked on, paving-stones which, in the Renaissance manner, squirt a jet when they are walked on or which light up the path from beneath, hydraulically linked rise-and-sink paving pads, zones of fog and mist jets, concealed underground lighting for the evening and adjoining cantilevered razor-edged pools which appear to hang horizontal sheets of water over sections of the pool. All the materials here are hard-edged, glass, concrete or steel, with bright colours confined to the narrow linear highlights in shallow recesses in the materials.

The design underwent a number of revisions and refinements but before a definitive scheme could be started, political, financial and aesthetic pressures forced it to be pulled from the new-town construction programme.

From: Lyall Sutherland, "A Design for Milton Keynes Park", in *Designing the New Landscape*, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1991, pp. 192-195.

GLOSSARY

departure = partenza	understanding = conoscenza, visione
layout = configurazione	fanciful = fantasioso
grid = reticolo	ley lines = linee che uniscono i luoghi preistorici della Grand Bretagna
snaking = serpeggiante	true north = nord geografico
to overlook = affacciarsi su	bump = gobba, cunetta
sweeping = ampio, vasto	barrow = tumulo
to work = elaborare	reaches = tratto, area
mound = rialzo del terreno	tank = serbatoio, vasca
skirting slope = pendio in costa	sheet of water = specchio d'acqua
ravine = burrone	gutter = canale di scolo
green = spiazzo erboso	to squirt a jet = spruzzare un getto d'acqua
wild garden = giardino incolto	mist jet = spruzzo di vapore
bowl = anfiteatro	highlight = sottolineatura
thence = da lì	to be pulled from = essere ritirato
rolling parkland = terreno a parco ondulato	
to do with = avere a che fare con	

NOTES

Note the order of the adjectives in ... *late 18th-century French neo-classical architect*.

The most common order of adjectives in English is as follows:

opinion – size – shape – age – colour – origin – material – purpose/type – noun.

Advanced technologies in industries are referred to as *high technology*, *high-tech*, or *hi-tech*, the opposite being *low-tech* (no other spelling variant exists).

COMPREHENSION

Exercise 1

Put the following paraphrased sentences in order of appearance in the passage by numbering the boxes 1–8.

- There are two paths over the pool with a rectangular water carpet.
- Pedestrians have two choices once they leave the pool – they can either go down a narrow staircase to the bottom of the ravine or cross a glass bridge.
- The materials used are hard-edged, glass, concrete or steel, with bright

colours confined to the narrow linear highlights in shallow recesses in the materials.

- Mayan and Aztec influence can be seen in the steep range of steps from the flat platform on top down through a great sloping circular symbol.
- Enormous banks and heavy planting covered the individual developments in each of the grid-squares .
- Mahaddie oriented his design on true north.
- British traditional landscape designers were not happy with this design because it followed different principles.
- Entrance to the rolling parkland and sculpture park was by means of paths around the perimeter of the site.

VOCABULARY

Exercise 2

Which object(s) in the reading passage have the following shapes?

1. snaking _____
2. concentric _____
3. zigzag _____
4. round _____
5. geometric _____
6. circular _____
7. rectangular _____

FURTHER VOCABULARY

Exercise 3

The reading passage mentions the displacement of water in landscaping design. Match the following types of water, on the left, to the corresponding definition, on the right.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. ground water | a. water that is suitable for drinking. |
| 2. potable water | b. untreated wastewater from showers, sinks, etc. |
| 3. storm water | c. the generic term for all water that has been used, including from toilets. |
| 4. waste water | d. water found underground. |
| 5. grey water | e. an unusually large amount of water resulting from a lot of rain. |

WORD STUDY

Exercise 4

Adjectives can be formed from verbs by adding the suffixes *-ive*, *-ative*, *-able*. For example, *to invent* → *inventive*, *to talk* → *talkative*, *to note* → *notable*. Complete the following sentences by transforming the verb in brackets.

1. The New Towns formed an integral part of _____ proposals for post-war London. (*to alternate*)
2. These proposals all included the _____ measure of traffic segregation. (*to innovate*)
3. Prefabricated housing became more common since it was considered particularly _____. (*to rely*)
4. Milton Keynes is _____ owing to its long-standing success. (*to remark*)
5. It was a _____ change from previous plans for New Towns. (*to note*)
6. Andrew Mahaddie's proposal shows great _____ potential. (*to create*)
7. However, British traditional landscape designers had _____ reservations since it opposed their more conservative principles. (*to understand*)
8. The study of these plans provides _____ insights to the thoughts of that period. (*to value*)

MILTON KEYNES – THE MODEL OF A MODERN CITY

In early 1967, more than 22,000 acres of land in the Buckinghamshire countryside were designated for building. Milton Keynes started with 40,000 residents in the existing areas of Bletchley and 16 surrounding villages. Its design objectives were based on what we now call 'sustainability':

- a grid of roads connecting homes with workplaces;
- a central area with shops, leisure facilities and offices;
- parks and open spaces built along river valleys;
- schools and kindergartens within walking distance of residential areas;
- 150 miles of footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways.

"The designers were right on the button," says David Lock, a town planning consultant who has worked in Milton Keynes for 25 years.

"It began life as part of old Labour's public-service, white-heat-of-technology concept, creating housing and development on a scale the private sector wouldn't have achieved. Then Thatcher came in and the

public development corporation helped bring in private investment. Now it's New Labour's 'third way', with land sold off to private companies in line with local planning guidelines.

'The only thing that's seriously wrong with the place is public transport. It's not the fault of our forefathers, who built a town large enough for buses and cars. But the authorities just can't crack running a proper transport system.' A visit to Milton Keynes—which has applied for city status—confirms that thought. It feels overwhelmingly spacious, and you can cross the whole town by car in less than 15 minutes. But bus journeys can take five times as long and are expensive too.

To celebrate the town's 35th birthday, the Town Hall and regeneration English Partnerships have carved out plans for a new central area to address some of the problems, including:

- the 'deadness' of the centre—only 1,500 of MK's 220,000 residents live there.
- the sterile local design—until recently some streets bore names like H5 and H6.
- the distance between local facilities, and poor public transport links with an insufficient number of bus stops.
- the many open spaces which are windy, unpleasant and with few landmarks.

The regeneration is likely to create more mixed-use developments in the centre, including apartments and houses for 9,000 more residents and to put cars in multi-storey parks on the outskirts instead of the present vast, ground-level car parks.

Jane Hamilton, planning director for English Partnerships, says: "Funding exists to provide a solution to the transport problem. The council could use its considerable income from car parking for public transport, and could encourage developers to contribute when they are given planning permission for large new projects."

Notwithstanding current problems, the town is flourishing. According to local estate agents, an industrial site has sold for a UK record of more than £500,000 an acre. Commercial property agency Knight Frank says prime office space fetches £16.50 a sq. ft.—one of the highest prices outside large conurbations.

Simon Wood, of Knight Frank, says: "KPMG, Virgin, Hays Logistics and Regus have all moved to Milton Keynes."

Residential sites are going for around £1m an acre. Developer ING is building Campbell Heights, one of the town's largest developments, which

has 129 homes set in two mews squares and a crescent to take advantage of the space available. Prices will range from £185,000 to £215,000.

The population is confident and affluent. In 1999 it was the first to hold a council tax referendum, voting for a 10% rise to preserve council services.

The Government recognises how well Milton Keynes has aged. The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions says that although future new towns may not look like it, its principles of urban development are right.

“Milton Keynes did three things which new towns today must emulate,” says Lock, who is involved in planning two new towns, near Exeter and Cambridge, and will shortly become chair of the Town and Country Planning Association.

He reckons public transport must be central to all plans; small local shops must be given space alongside well-known high street outlets; and money and time must be spent on building the community – “there must be a dahlia society and after-school groups, as well as wide roads.

“But most of all, be bold. Make a few difficult decisions and build half a dozen big, new towns—don’t build hundreds of small developments close to every existing town—that risks spoiling communities everywhere.”

From: Graham Norwood, “The Model of a Modern City”, The Observer, January 27, 2002.

GLOSSARY

sustainability = sostenibilità

leisure facilities = servizi per il tempo libero

within walking distance = raggiungibile a piedi

footpath = passaggio pedonale, sentiero

cycle route = pista ciclabile

bridleway = sentiero per gite a cavallo

kindergarten = scuola materna

to be right on the button = avere perfettamente ragione

forefather = antenato

to crack something = risolvere qualcosa

proper = adeguato, conveniente

overwhelmingly = enormemente

Town Hall = municipio

to carve out = fare, ricavare

bus stop = fermata dell'autobus

multi-storey park = parcheggio a più piani

outskirts = periferia

income = entrata, reddito

notwithstanding = nonostante

flourishing = florido

prime office space = terreno, spazio per uffici di lusso

to fetch (a price) = spuntare (un prezzo)

to go for = valere

mews square = piazzetta elegante

affluent = benestante

to age = invecchiare

to reckon = calcolare, ritenere

high street outlet = punto vendita
sulla strada principale

after-school group = gruppo dopo
scuola

bold = coraggioso

to spoil = rovinare

NOTES

Note the use of *around* to express an approximate quantity, e.g. *around £1 million an acre*. Other similar expressions are: *about*, *approximately*, *roughly*.

Note also the expression *more than* (*more than £500,000 an acre*), which can also be expressed with *over*. Similarly, *less than* and *under*.

British measurements of area also differ from the metric system. Some common measurements are:

Square foot (sq. ft.) = 0.09290303 m²

Square yard (sq. yd.) = 0.83612736 m²

Square mile = 2,589,998.11 m².

COMPREHENSION

Exercise 5

Are the following statements True or False according to the passage?

	T	F
1. The passage is a governmental evaluation of town planning in the 1960s.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The author believes the planning of Milton Keynes was unsuccessful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The problems outweigh the positive aspects of life in Milton Keynes today.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. One of the greatest problems is the poor public transport system.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The number of people working in Milton Keynes has increased considerably.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. House prices have fallen recently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Less than 50% of the inhabitants live in the city centre.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Plans are currently underway for regeneration.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

VOCABULARY

Exercise 6

Amenities play an important role in the creation of a community-friendly living area. Below is a list of common amenities from the reading passage. Choose the most appropriate amenity for each situation.

bus stop	estate agent	Town Hall
leisure facility	kindergarten	bridle path

Where do you go if

1. you want to do some sport with a friend?
2. you have a child aged 3-5 and you work in the mornings?
3. you want to ride a horse ?
4. you want to buy a house?
5. you are thinking of getting married?
6. you have to go travel to work but your car is being repaired?

Exercise 7

Match a noun, on the left, with its opposite, on the right.

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. outskirts | a. expenditure |
| 2. foot path | b. buyer |
| 3. outlet | c. centre |
| 4. income | d. road |

Match a verb, on the left, with its opposite, on the right.

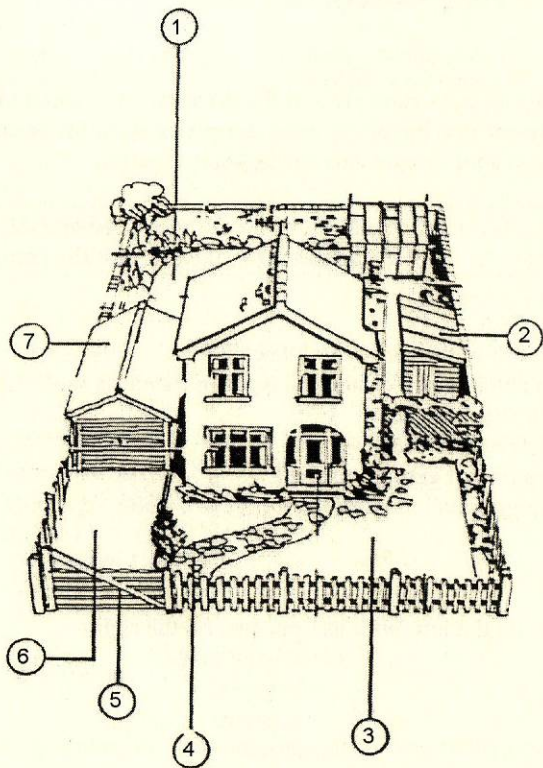
- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 5. to age | e. to improve |
| 6. to go for (a price) | f. to deteriorate |
| 7. to flourish | g. to get younger |
| 8. to spoil | h. to buy |

FURTHER VOCABULARY

Exercise 8

Look at the diagram below of a house and garden and label the parts using the words in the box.

back garden	driveway	front door	front garden
gate	shed	garage	



1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____

5. _____
 6. _____
 7. _____