ANDREW JONES, EDAW: CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES AND CAMPBELL PARK

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Andrew Jones, Edaw: Central Milton Keynes and Campbell Park

I shall be talking about making a better place here in Milton Keynes, meeting the needs of a maturing settlement as Milton Keynes, and central Milton Keynes particularly, grows out of its adolescent phase into adulthood. Efficient use of land and resources is a challenge for all towns and cities in the United Kingdom, along with the need to create positive conditions and the context for growth.

This image is the 1970s vision for Milton Keynes and is very useful for the context [1]. On the left there, a visualisation by Jacobi, the architectural artist showing the city centre as it was envisaged in the early 1970s. Then Milton Keynes as a whole, the slightly Sergeant Pepper version of what was envisaged for this new city those decades ago [1 right]. Much of that has
been delivered now and the city centre is a fairly substantial place. If you came by train you will know how far the distance is to get from the station on the left to here [2]. The red area alone is three times the size of Nottingham city centre. But the population of Milton Keynes is one third of the size of Nottingham. The aspirations for growth and development were substantial even back 30 or 40 years ago. Campbell Park is the city’s central park, bounded on the right in white.

The city centre context here is to the far west is the West Coast railway line and to the far east is the Grand Union Canal and the main links in from the M1. The city centre, broadly the orange there as the central business district, the blue a retail park, in town/out of town retail park, and the yellow area a destination and leisure park within the city centre. What it is not is a fully mature city centre that mixes all those things together. You can see here the substantial challenge that still exists with undeveloped land around the city centre, particularly in this corner at the bottom here and Campbell Park up in the far top of the image [3].
But there is a need for change not only acknowledged by the stakeholders here in Milton Keynes but also the House of Commons Select Committee Report in 2001 looking at the future of the new towns, fundamentally recognising that they did not usually have locally accountable spatial planning frameworks that gave confidence to all for delivery; that their town centres were fundamentally shopping centres and not full service town centres; and that they were dominated by the car and very weak public transport. I would add to that, particularly in Milton Keynes, the lack of people living in the city centre and in terms of a community there that has ownership in its city centre, which gives my final point on this slide about civic pride and people’s feeling that this was the heart of their city rather than the estate or neighbourhood in which they lived, or indeed the older town of Milton Keynes that they associate themselves with.

So the Milton Keynes context is to establish that spatial planning framework that gave the confidence for delivery that is so important in terms of the pace and nature and quality of growth. That spatial framework clearly needs to relate to the city centre but also the growth areas towards the edges of the city centre and in terms of regeneration of older towns and estates throughout the city. It is given back-up through Regional Planning Guidance and the identification of this area as a powerhouse of the economy in the South East, and clearly the Sustainable Communities Plan is a big issue because growth is forecast or projected here. This city and city centre needs to be ready for that growth.

The framework comes out of joint working between local stakeholders, English Partnerships and Milton Keynes Council, but also the Central Milton Keynes Partnership, which is a grouping of local stakeholders from the private voluntary and public sectors who come together to reflect the wider community needs for the city centre. Also the South East England Development Agency and the Milton Keynes Parks Trust are all working together as, effectively, a joint delivery agency for central Milton Keynes that is driving forward the new generation of development in the city centre. Working now as a joint venture between English Partnerships and Milton Keynes is very important.

This major review was the first major review of the city centre in its lifetime [4]. Thirty years on it was time to
have a fundamental look at the way the city was emerging. Best use of urban land assets is a key component along with focus on the quality of the environment and the quality of the place that we are creating for the citizens of Milton Keynes and the wider subregion.

So the plan went out in its very formative state to public consultation during early 2001 and the consultation attracted just over 1000 questionnaire responses and there have been 3000 people involved through web promotion and a schools programme [5]. The consultation hit residents, workers and visitors to the town centre and was probably one of the most intensive consultation programmes that we have been involved in. Coming out of that and out of the wider technical work came 12 goals for the city centre that have been the linchpin for taking this framework forward [6]. They have moved from cultural richness, vitality and diversity that every vision has in it, but it is very important here because we are starting from a relatively low base, through, in the middle there, high quality of urban design and the public and private environment, reinforcing public transport and making that absolutely the best conditions for that to thrive. The last component, maintaining the relationships for the rest of Milton Keynes, this is not a city centre in isolation, this is part of the city, promoting central Milton Keynes’ identity image and also helping to promote civic governance.

1. Promote Cultural Richness, Vitality & Diversity
2. Improve Social Access & Inclusiveness
3. Maintain & Strengthen Economic Success Development & Growth
4. A Demonstration of Sustainability
5. Stimulate Knowledge, Learning & Education
6. A High Quality of Urban Design & Public Realm
7. Improve Accessibility & Movement Within CMK
8. A Viable & Attractive Public Transport System
9. Maintain Relationships With Rest of MK
10. Promote CMK’s Identity & Image
11. Civic Governance
Moving away from the grid form that you will have experienced on your journey here today, we tried to envisage central Milton Keynes as a place that was perhaps more organic in its growth, with the heart of city right in the middle, with the civic focus, cultural and retail and leisure activities surrounded by a variety of mixed use quarters, very importantly, growing a stronger business community but also a new residential community with its own neighbourhood focus [7].

Towards the eastern end, Campbell Park, there is a hollow in that diagram, but surrounded by mixed-use development that created a life and activity in the town’s central park. Finally, a new canalside development on the Grand Union Canal that weaves its way through the city but is a hidden waterway if you are in the city centre. There, that plan stretched out to fit the grid plan the central Milton Keynes that I will come on to talk about throughout this discussion [8].
Then the Masterplan [9]. We will come back to that diagram later on, but there in blue was the existing development, and in orange is new development. There is as much new development in central Milton Keynes as there is already. This is going to be a very large and vibrant and active city centre and will continue to build on the success of the place.
Now I shall show you how we have changed the form of the city centre. Going down to one block [11, 12], the Civic Centre where we are today, is one within the wider structure of boulevards and gates within the city centre. Traditionally, they are pavilion buildings surrounded by car parking and we are moving to a situation where, within those blocks, we have a finer grain of development with a finer grain of streets within that.
But fundamentally bringing buildings out to the street frontage and putting car parking in the back or, indeed, out to the edge of the city centre so that it does not dominate the street scene and creates livable and walkable streets as well [13, 14].
There is a typical block and how it could come forward [15].

Running through the centre of central Milton Keynes, from the left-hand side of your screen, the western side, at the railway station is a public transport spine running right the way through to the edge of Campbell Park as well [16].
Then areas of density and intensity, creating diversity in the environment with tall buildings and locations where we are going to promote activity and animation in the street [17]. A very strong landscape structure built on the plane trees that make up the boulevards – we are not changing that in any way but reinforcing that, something that the people of Milton Keynes and indeed outside observers and visitors really latch onto as a key component of the city [18].
So those urban design components come through to create the masterplan that we have that we are now working with. This is supplementary planning guidance and individual components are coming forward as more detailed guidance as well, both to advise the Local Plan and be part of the Local Plan, but also in creating development briefs for individual sites, many of which were encouraging residential use above active ground floors in the heart of the city centre, but also clearly a range of other commercial and entertainment and retail activities as well.

Right at the western end, the new station square will be a new transport interchange that will link rail, bus and any future high quality public transport system that comes into central Milton Keynes. The environment for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport will be improved greatly [19].

Moving on from the transport interchange, around the station and moving up through the city centre, the large area of undeveloped land will become a new residential quarter that is being prepared as a masterplan by Rick Mather Architects. There will be an additional 2000 homes, probably 4000 people, living in the city centre [20]. That more than doubles the population that is already here in the city centre, with urban living very much a new way forward for Milton Keynes that has been characterised by suburban growth in the past.

Moving on from the residential quarter and up through the city centre, the commercial district will be enhanced by hotels and conference and exhibition facilities, all being planned as part of this wider strategic framework [21]. Distinct projects are being brought forward by the partners within the joint venture that was established to accelerate the development of this land and to bring forward English Partnership’s and others’ land assets, a venture which thinks about the city centre and not just about individual land holdings.
A key component as we move up in the heart of the city is about the civic focus, moving the focus of government from the inside in this council chamber – one of worse council chambers in Britain. I say this as a resident of Milton Keynes. It is enclosed, it is hidden, but it is should be out there open to the people, along with other meeting facilities and civic facilities, with a front of house with access to community, council and voluntary sector information which is a key development project that is being brought to forward as a civic hub [22, 23]. That would have a new learning resource centre associated with that as well in the centre of the city, just off Midsummer Boulevard, which would be the main spine running through the centre of the town.

That would be on the opposite side of the road to new and enlivened shopping facilities that are already coming through [24]. Jane Hamilton of English Partnerships has mentioned the pace of development or in decision-making in Northampton to illustrate how joined-up thinking and working together can deliver more rapid and efficient planning decisions. This major expansion of shopping facilities here in Milton Keynes was one that was worked through with the local authority and the partners as well as developers in a very short period of time compared with what it might have taken without this joined-up thinking.
The final component is Campbell Park. This is one of the key projects in the city centre that is coming forward. I have talked about the residential quarter delivering 2000 homes. Campbell Park has the potential to deliver just as many again and with a great park setting associated with that. That is all part of this wider vision for central Milton Keynes. It is a constituent part, part of the growth of the city as a whole but also of the city centre.

The city centre masterplan and development framework delivers some incredible outputs (25, 26). I have talked about the scale of development. Endorsement is a key output, that all the key parties are signed up to this approach. It delivers new city-wide facilities and assets that perhaps would not have been achieved if we had just rolled out the old masterplan and the land would have run out and we would have had a city centre dominated by the car in the future.

There are also issues about social inclusion and there are many projects within this that strive to bring additional and new people who do not use the city centre into the city. Over the 25 to 30 years of the development framework there are more than 20,000 new jobs to be created in the city centre, together with growth of multiplier jobs outside in the rest of Milton Keynes. Those jobs are moving to a knowledge-based focus. Learning is a key component and there is a lot of work going on to bring a new higher education institution into the city and into the city centre specifically.

High quality transport is a key component as well of the new framework, creating patronage within the city and as a key mode to arrive. Development opportunity variety across all sectors, employment, destination, retail, leisure and, very importantly, residential, to give that ownership and the living city which is so important today.
This is a shifting gear for Milton Keynes. Many of you remember the red balloon campaigns on the television and the little boy sitting in the back of the car saying there is where he wanted to come to live. A lot of that impetus and clarity about what Milton Keynes was all about has waned over the past few years. Now there is a new impetus on development of new growth and a new generation of development in central Milton Keynes. It is about building the brand – marketing, yes. It is all part of having some images and some convincing story to tell, but it is also about delivery, where if you have got this joined-up approach by the public sector, land owners and local authority, then there is a far clearer approach to bringing forward development more quickly in the city centre.

Looking at Campbell Park more clearly, it is the area bounded by white here on the far end [27]. The townscape, the town’s park, the city centre park, but also a development area. What does it do today? It fulfils a number of roles. It is the beautiful landscaped environment with a variety of experiences there that are both rural and urban in the same place. It is also a place where events take place, including fireworks displays and whatever else [28]. But otherwise it is a very quiet and underused asset, surrounded by development sites that have yet to come forward.
It is linked to the surrounding communities by underpasses you can see on the top left there [29]. Many of the trails through the park leading to the city centre from other communities are beautiful but fairly isolated and regarded as unsafe. Some of the development that has come forward does not really think about that block structure that I was talking about of perimeter blocks. Here on the bottom [29] we have got a major route in from the grid road structure outside central Milton Keynes into the city centre with people’s back gardens facing on to the main street. It does not work and we need to start to deliver and repair this when bringing forward future development in Campbell Park.

Here is a view from way above the rest of central Milton Keynes, with the shopping centre and theatre just at the bottom of the picture, with a new link going into the park and developments surrounding the park both on the north and the south sides, down to the canal that you can barely see there at the far end [30]. This builds on the structure that I was talking about in terms of supplementary planning guidance and public consultation as well.
Four images: down there at the bottom on the left is the original 2000 plan for Campbell Park by Terry Farrell & Partners which was influenced by the development framework put in place and then Campbell Park supplementary planning guidance, and then also public consultation and the emerging plans for Campbell Park [31]. So those images tell a story themselves in the way that this is coming through, with joint working between the various partners but also community involvement as well.

There are five key components to that masterplan that are sitting there numbered at the top. Visual dominance of the car is a big one. That is as important in Campbell Park and the setting there as it is in Milton Keynes. The quality of the environment and the links with the rest of the community are also very important.
So the Campbell Park masterplan [33] broadly bringing forward a number of quarters there, with the central park in the middle and the link to central Milton Keynes being absolutely fundamental.

The design principles maximise the use of urban land assets, reduce the dominance of cars, addressing those points discussed earlier. A series of perimeter blocks with servicing and car parking in the middle and street frontages facing onto the street and towards the park [33].
Secure courtyards with this very clear definition between public areas on the front and private areas in the back is reinforced, here with private garden areas within the residential quarters of Campbell Park [34]. Then a quality pedestrian environment to make these boulevards like those of the Champs Elysees. They are beautiful places to walk, with as much active use on the boulevards as we possibly can as they run along the side of this fantastic landscaped asset in the heart of the city centre [35].
A new waterside environment [36] with a major new marina and a focal point for water activity in central Milton Keynes, but also a new destination, creating a new focal point for the city centre and the city as a whole as it grows and develops and demands additional attractions and additional destinations to service this population.

A neighbourhood centre as well, away from this heart of the city where we are today where all the high-level activities are that meet city-wide need [37]. This is about meeting local need as well, about having local shops and local pubs so you feel that you have got a part of the city centre that is yours if you live here rather than it is somebody else’s or part of the wider city’s environment as well. That is an important component of this masterplan.

Wider connections are very important as well. I spoke about social inclusion, but the people who live just the opposite side of the main roads from this park are poorly served [37]. I showed a picture of an underpass. That is the main route to the city centre but also into their main park, so enhancing the routes with wider and broader links that are at grade rather than going through underpasses is a priority, but also having park extensions that work their way through to these communities at the edge of the city. Using landmark architecture and bridge architecture to improve the linkages where we cannot build new ones.
The final component is the landscaped park and making this a useful and active part of the community [38]. At the moment it is isolated. It is surrounded by development plots. But the park itself is beautiful. We are trying to achieve conditions where this park really becomes the focal point for the city and is used more intensively and more actively by the people for a variety of purposes [39]. You can see the cricket field in the middle, quintessentially English. Indeed, much of the park’s landscape structure is quintessentially English as well. But here we have perimeter blocks surrounding the park and distinctive developments in and around that, with this major new marina a new focal point for the city down on the canalside.

The final point to mention there as you can see the canal heading to the bottom of screen, which is actually heading east, and that is the proposed new Bedford to Milton Keynes waterway. This would be a node at the end of that as and when that comes forward as a project.