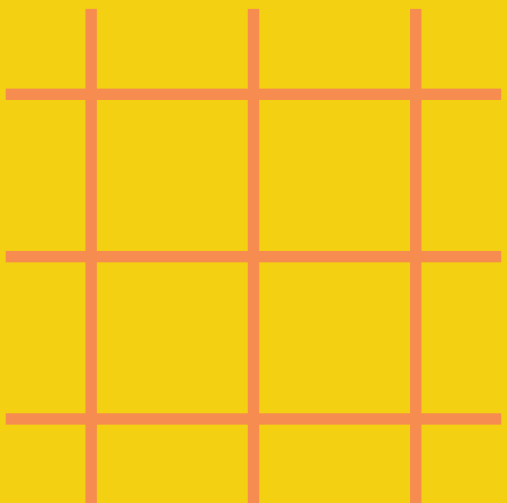


CULTUREMK

Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy 2018–2027



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1 VISION



MILTON KEYNES, WHERE CREATIVE EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES TRANSFORM LIVES.

Milton Keynes will be an internationally recognised creative and cultured city; known for the excellence and diversity of its borough-wide, year-round cultural offer. As a city, Milton Keynes will provide residents and visitors with an inclusive cultural offer, where creative experiences and opportunities transform lives.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Milton Keynes' Creative and Cultural Strategy has been created with city-wide¹ partners, recognising that multiple organisations, stakeholders and partnerships have helped form it and with Milton Keynes Council (MKC) as strategic lead subsequently deliver cultural growth. The strategy sets out an ambitious vision, one that is not owned by a single entity, but instead reflects the collaborative ideas and aspirations of many citizens, businesses, visitors and organisations.

Our cultural vision of city-wide ambition and collective direction will harness public, private and third sector investment together, ensuring future sustainability and profile for Milton Keynes.

Milton Keynes has a reputation for embracing innovation, creativity, experimentation and risk-taking. Alongside the creation of a unique urban environment, the cultivation of a rich and varied cultural life was always at the very heart of Milton Keynes' founding utopian ethos and remains at the heart of our future plans. Milton Keynes always has and will continue to be a growing, forward-thinking city. We will build on the Milton Keynes tradition

Culture no longer simply means being familiar with a select list of works of art and architecture, but the accumulated influence of creativity, the arts, museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage upon all our lives. When we talk about our ‘cultural sectors’, we are referring to an extraordinary network of individuals and organisations, that together preserve, reflect and promote who we are as a nation, in all our rich diversity.

DCMS The Culture White Paper

of a bold pioneering spirit going forward, with our vision to become an internationally renowned creative and cultured city.

Culture is the way that we see ourselves and our place in the world; it is how we live our lives and how we appreciate and understand the lives of others. By harnessing the transformational power of culture in all its forms, we will help address our city’s current and future challenges.



1.2 OUR SHARED GOALS

By sharing our cultural capital throughout the city, we will connect and engage our communities’ young and old – building confidence, encouraging cohesion, improving health and well-being and empowering them to take a lead. As an open and tolerant city built on migration, with one of the fastest growing and most diverse populations in the UK, we will work towards being a city whose cultural offer truly reflects and embraces our diversity.

We will provide our communities with real opportunities for creative learning and routes into cultural sector employment, growing and retaining our home-grown talent. We will work with strategic partners to ensure that creative learning and cultural experiences are provided for all our residents.

We will support and cultivate creativity and innovation through the development of a sustainable, flexible, and productive cultural environment. Through strategic direction, partnership working and artistic collaboration

sourced locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, we will enable our creative industries and cultural sector to reach wider markets and audiences. In turn, we will grow our cultural economy, adding further intellectual and economic value to both tourism and digital/high-technologies.

We will build on our existing cultural offer, changing the perception of our city by defining and articulating our unique selling points (USPs) – igniting interest, sparking debate and encouraging conversation. We will once again be known as a city that champions the radical and commissions the unknown; celebrating and re-purposing our city’s unique blend of ancient historic and modern heritage for the 21st Century, so that once again Milton Keynes is the place that others turn to for innovative ideas and creative inspiration.



2 INTRODUCTION TO MILTON KEYNES



Conceived in 1967, Milton Keynes is the most ambitious social project ever to be realised in the UK. Guided by a set of founding utopian principles: the very best place to live; freedom of choice; ease of movement; everyone welcome; and jobs for all, the city is one of the world's most successful new towns. Designed by a group of maverick and pioneering architects and urban planners, Milton Keynes was famously built on a grid plan of roads that become progressively straighter as you approach the city centre. Milton Keynes was designed to be greener than the surrounding countryside with 22 million trees planted by the MK Development Corporation. Alongside industrial spaces, shops, homes and schools, the city's founders wanted to ensure that all citizens had the opportunity to enjoy a rich and varied cultural life.

Milton Keynes has a current population of 267,000 and by 2050 the population of the city and surrounding areas will be at least 400,000. Our population is not only growing, it is also changing. In the 2011 Census, 26.1% of people living in Milton Keynes were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups by comparison with 13.2% in 2001. The diverse nature of Milton Keynes' population is reflected in local schools, where 40% of children come from various minority ethnic backgrounds and whose families have links to an ever-increasing number of cultural, linguistic and national heritages.

Economically, our business sector is thriving, with one of the fastest growing economies in the UK. Milton Keynes has an exceptionally high number of business start-ups, particularly within the digital and high-tech arenas.

Milton Keynes is a smart city using real-time data and technological innovation to inform how we live in urban environments in more efficient, effective and responsive ways. The city is also home to the Transport Systems Catapult – a test bed for the innovation of sustainable transport solutions. By 2020, 30%

of our road users will be in electric vehicles and we will be the first city to trial driverless pods.

Like many other cities, Milton Keynes currently faces a number of significant challenges:

Over half of our first phase housing estates rank amongst the highest in the UK for levels of deprivation.

Our resident workforce is less qualified than many other local communities and we suffer from rapid loss of young workers (brain drain) and have little influx (brain gain), which is usually enhanced by having a university.

We are known for our tolerant, open ‘welcoming hands’, but we are struggling to offer real opportunities for social integration.

Central Milton Keynes needs a renaissance – poorly maintained public space, tired infrastructure and high rents deterring an independent retail offer are some of the challenges here.

While our cultural growth over the last ten years has been significant, Milton Keynes’ current cultural offer does not reflect the city’s size, economic success or diversity.



The city has reached a pivotal moment in its history. We look back on our inspiring past in order to inform our optimistic future; once again ensuring that a culture of creativity, experimentation and innovation drives Milton Keynes forward as the very best place to work, live and play.

3 MILTON KEYNES FUTURES 2050 PLAN



Milton Keynes Futures 2050 report **Making a Great City Greater²** sets out a well-received and ambitious vision. It makes the case for transformational growth, but argues that it is vital for Milton Keynes to respect and celebrate its unique heritage. The plan sees a return to the ‘think big’ approach that has served Milton Keynes so well in the past, with six major projects that demonstrate a new commitment to the city’s future:

Hub of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc: Positioning Milton Keynes at the heart of a globally competitive knowledge cluster and delivering major, inclusive growth.

MK:U: A new university created in response to the many urban challenges that we face now and in the future.

Learning 2050: Focusing on science, technology and maths to give students the skills for the future of work and to be able to access MK:U

Smart, Shared, Sustainable Mobility: Everyone must be able to move freely within the city and on demand.

Renaissance CMK: The heart of the 2050 vision – a complete transformation of Central Milton Keynes, with bold proposals that see a return to the spirit of the city’s original concept.

The Creative and Cultured City: A radical repositioning of the city with a new distinct cultural offer that meets our challenges; is relevant to our citizens, attracts and retains creative talent, creates a destination of choice and changes how Milton Keynes feels and how others talk about it.

While each project is distinct, they are intrinsically linked and combine to articulate an ambitious future vision, with culture prioritised within Project Six: The Creative and Cultured City.

PROJECT SIX: MILTON KEYNES – THE CREATIVE AND CULTURED CITY

The MK Futures 2050 report highlights that Milton Keynes is not currently seen as culturally vibrant: the city lacks spontaneity; its cultural offer is fragmented and lacks focus. Our increasingly diverse communities often feel excluded from cultural programmes that are ‘not for them’. Project Six proposes a bold and ambitious vision as a solution:

The city itself is ‘a unique cultural asset in its own right’ – it should be used to its best advantage.

Leverage one of the city’s best cultural assets – the energy and motivation of its people.

Build a distinct cultural offer, based on what is here already, but also includes ambitious plans for the future and a revitalised city centre with landmark cultural facilities.

Deliver a connected programme, which focuses on cultural challenges and builds a strong foundation for the creation of a vibrant, sustainable cultural offer.

Use culture as a tool to address issues of health, wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusive growth.

Establish an urban living environment at MK:U – enabling Milton Keynes to reclaim its place as a bold urban pioneer, leading a global conversation about how to live well in cities now and in the future.

Our earlier strategies (Arts and Public Art and Heritage, Museums and Archives) have now been merged into this single Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy 2018–2027, which will be the tool through which we will deliver Project Six and contribute to the delivery of the wider Milton Keynes Futures 2050 programme, alongside other ambitious strategic plans and growth initiatives. Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy will be a live ‘working document’, reviewed annually and updated to reflect emerging priorities on a three-yearly basis.

4 CULTURE IN MILTON KEYNES



Milton Keynes' current cultural profile has grown out of a unique set of circumstances.

Culture was as important to our city's founders as the roads – it was an intrinsic part of the original city 'Masterplan' and was seen as a tool for community development, social cohesion, building aspiration and successful place-making.

Milton Keynes was built on and around a network of medieval villages and market towns. The Creative and Cultural Strategy reflects the Borough's unique composite history – from our Iron Age beginnings to our remarkable new town heritage. Nestled between these historic sites and modernity are our parks; green oases which are home to collections of public art and an annual programme of events and festivals.

Public art became an important part of the city's landscape and citizens were given the opportunity to work hand-in-hand with artists, creating artworks that would define the city's identity – including our most famous bovine ambassadors – our Concrete Cows. Outdoor Arts (street arts, festivals and carnivals) brought new communities together, encouraging participation and ownership of the city's public realm.

Following designation in 1967 there was a surge of cultural ambition in the 1970s. Milton Keynes Museum was founded by a group of local people collecting items from farms and factories being cleared to make way for the new town; a 25-year campaign by local residents started for a theatre and gallery – and they delivered one of the most successful theatres in the country; distinguished conductor Hilary Davan Wetton founded the Milton Keynes City Orchestra, which now attracts international musicians to the city.

However, as Milton Keynes was built, changing political and financial realities forced compromise and planned cultural infrastructure schemes were never realised. As a result, Milton Keynes' current cultural offer does not reflect the city's size, economy or diversity.

In 2017, Milton Keynes celebrated its 50th anniversary of its designation as a new town. This was a pivotal moment in the city's cultural history, comprising the successful delivery of an ambitious, well received and far-reaching MK50 cultural programme including MK CityFest and Feast of Fire; the development and delivery of **Different by Design** – the city's bid to become European Capital of Culture; the inaugural Milton Keynes Literature Festival; major capital development projects including the ongoing expansion of MK Gallery; and the delivery of the new galleries at Milton Keynes Museum. Additionally, in response to positive sector-wide discussions contributing to the development of the city's new Creative and Cultural Strategy, Milton Keynes witnessed a renaissance of cultural ambition. The cultural sector reset its aspirations, citizens were enthused and our vision to become an internationally recognised creative and cultured city was formed.



5 GROWING THE CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SECTORS



Over the past ten years, Milton Keynes' cultural sector has witnessed a major step-change and continues to evolve. While it is still 'young', the sector already has many strengths, including a willingness to work in partnership and collaboration. The work of the Arts and Heritage Alliance (AHA-MK), with a membership of 39 cultural organisations, the Heritage MK Consortium, MK Music Hub, and grassroots MK Heritage Association with over 70 local groups, is testament to the cultural sector's commitment to working together in order to develop and deliver a stronger and more inclusive cultural programme for the city. We will build on this strength, supporting a comprehensive professional development programme shaped and driven by the city's creative and cultural sectors that provides real opportunities for individual and organisational development.

Milton Keynes benefits from existing pillars of cultural excellence. We will learn from and build on these examples in order to deliver an enhanced cultural offer that has breadth, depth, quality and distinction. Through high-level cultural leadership, we will work to further unite the cultural sector creating a supportive environment, where local, regional, national and international opportunities are exploited to the full. In addition, we will identify and deliver strategic interventions to ensure that the creative industries are equally supported and can thrive.

Milton Keynes takes inspiration from its unique heritage in order to inform cultural programming. The city is so much more than a new town – its innovative and pioneering approach to place making blends together historic towns and villages, ancient sites and landscapes with new town and modern developments – connecting communities together to create a sense of place that is uniquely Milton Keynes. The city's influence on national and international urban design is testament to the importance of our heritage, which we will fully utilise and exploit going forward.

Through an innovative, ambitious and strategic approach to working within the public realm, we will become known for our contribution to the reinvigoration and re-imagination of the Outdoor Arts sector and make use of unexpected spaces both indoor and out. Milton Keynes is uniquely positioned to do this due to our expanse of parks, large boulevards and designated public realm. We are home to the award-winning IF: Milton Keynes International Festival, nationally acclaimed Festive Road and a number of other pioneering performance companies. The city's public realm spaces lend themselves to this way of working and audiences are responsive, enthusiastic and supportive.

Public Art has always been part of Milton Keynes' DNA and the city now boasts over 250 artworks within the public realm. Milton Keynes Council's ongoing commitment to an ambitious and strategic public art commissioning and percent for art policy ensures that ambitious new public artworks respond to and reflect our changing city, whilst making a significant contribution to wider debates and dialogues within the public art sector.



While Outdoor Arts and Public Art are intrinsic components of the city's cultural USP, Milton Keynes is equally committed to supporting the evolution and growth of other art forms, supported through capacity building and partnership development. Building the independent, alternative music and film scene is vital for our young people and in attracting students to MK:U. We will support emerging arts practitioners, cultural initiatives and the creative industries through capacity building initiatives and partnership development. Talent attraction, development and retention is key and the cultural/creative industries will work in collaboration across the public and private sectors to build on existing initiatives, enhancing Milton Keynes' viability as a creative and cultural workplace. Provision and access to affordable workspace is an important priority going forward.

As of 2018, three of the city's cultural organisations are supported through Arts Council England's National Portfolio scheme.³ Sustainable resourcing of the cultural sector is a significant future priority, and we will use our existing resources strategically and more effectively in order to grow Milton Keynes' cultural economy. Our strategy includes a particular focus on the brokering of

long-term, mutually beneficial economic partnerships between Milton Keynes' businesses and the cultural sector.

Growing the city's economy through cultural tourism is also a priority. The city itself is a unique cultural asset. We will take inspiration from our past in order to shape and define our future. By successfully communicating what we have already to an external audience, whilst also working to enhance our cultural offer, Milton Keynes will become a destination of choice.

Current and planned capital projects will have significant impact on our success. To date, these include Bletchley Park, MK Theatre, The Stables, MK Gallery's expansion, City Club, and the new galleries at Milton Keynes Museum. Future cultural infrastructure developments includes ideas to develop a new central Milton Keynes cultural quarter; ambitious plans for the National Bowl reimagining this local icon as a new music venue for the future; a major



upgrade for Bradwell Abbey, home of the City Discovery Centre; a new redeveloped Central Library and City Archive and Cultural Showcases, and an ambitious proposal to refurbish and improve Milton Keynes Arts Centre. As well as enhancing our cultural assets, we will safeguard existing spaces, building their capacity, programmes, audiences and profile. Milton Keynes will be a creative incubator for new creative projects, including the introduction of new cultural venues and spaces with strategic and far-reaching support for partners.

Milton Keynes citizens love their city. We have exceptionally high-levels of volunteering and know from recent evaluations and research that our communities have a keen appetite for more cultural activity. We also see evidence that our current audiences are risk averse and do not yet have the confidence to engage with more challenging cultural outputs.⁴ Our current cultural audiences are underrepresented by BAME communities and we are struggling to engage with citizens from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Through the delivery of a comprehensive audience development programme and strategic cultural leadership initiatives, we will create multiple entry points for our citizens, supporting them with the skills, confidence and knowledge

to engage with, and participate in, the city's evolving cultural offer on their own terms. A significant area of focus will include a robust and far-reaching research and audience development project which will identify, understand and address barriers to cultural participation and engagement currently experienced by the city's BAME communities. We will understand preferred leisure and cultural options for the breadth of our communities and how we can culturally enhance those or create links into the city's cultural programme.



Since its inception Milton Keynes has offered its residents the freedom and opportunity to shape and own their city as it grows. As a result, numerous community arts, heritage groups and societies were established by communities, for communities. These grass roots initiatives continue to provide clear pathways into the cultural sector for aspiring creatives, the culturally curious, and those that are keen to get involved. This bottom up approach continues to inform the creation of an accessible, non-hierarchical cultural offer, where everyone can enjoy the social, economic, health, and well-being benefits.

Our commitment to realising our cultural ambitions is unwavering, but we also recognise that we have a number of significant challenges. It is these challenges that have informed and shaped our strategic creative and cultural priorities going forwards.

GET INVOLVED

If you like to talk to Milton Keynes Council's Culture team about how you would like to be involved in the Creative and Cultural Strategy's delivery and to access a copy of the current Delivery Framework please email culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Footnotes

- 1 City refers to the Borough and City of Milton Keynes; urban and rural, old and new.
- 2 www.mkfutures2050.com
- 3 MK Gallery, The Stables, and Milton Keynes Arts Centre
- 4 Identified by consultants DHA in our European Capital of Culture feasibility research

Image credits

- 3 Light Pyramid, Liliane Lijn, image courtesy: Andy Stagg
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- 5 MK Rose, Gordon Young, image courtesy: Andy Stagg
- 6 Station Square, image courtesy: Andy Stagg
- 7 Redway Rendezvous (part of Pedalling Culture), image courtesy: Willie Robb
- 8 MK Gallery expansion, 6a architects with Gareth Jones and Nils Norman, image courtesy: MK Gallery
- 10 IF Milton Keynes International Festival 2018. Casus Circus in The Spiegel tent. Photo © Shaun Armstrong
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- 15 Bletchley Park, image courtesy: Bletchley Park