Milton Keynes
Tech, Smart City, Digital, and Creative Industries Strategy

2024 – 2029

MK **Milton Keynes**
City Council

Milton Keynes.
Better by design

Milton Keynes Tech, Smart City, Digital, and Creative Industries Strategy, 2024 – 2029

This Strategy has been prepared to set out the way forward for Milton Keynes to build its leadership in Tech and innovation. With a strong and proven foundation in Smart City Technology, Innovation and Tech employment, we believe that Milton Keynes has the potential to achieve a world class reputation across the Digital, Technology, Smart City and Creative Industry sectors.

Our strength comes from how we encourage the mutual support and overlap between these sectors. Our aim will be to enable opportunities that can provide real benefits to our citizens, grow the economy, build talent and protect our environment.

We have set out a vision, with an initial set of projects to be delivered over the next five years, and a direction that shows how further projects and interventions will help achieve those aims.

The Strategy explains how partners across the city will work together to take a future-facing, pro-active approach to harness the benefits of these sectors and promote what makes Milton Keynes unique and different. We look forward to taking this journey together to build a better Milton Keynes for everyone.

Part 1
Milton Keynes as a Tech City

Milton Keynes as a Tech City… where we are today

Milton Keynes has a very strong city economy, generating £14bn[2] a year for the UK. The tech sector already makes up a significant part of Milton Keynes' economy, with reports showing that as many as one in three jobs in the city are in tech.[3] Residents in Milton Keynes are already benefitting from living in an economically successful city, and have good access to jobs in tech.

Our city is home to major tech employers and many businesses with significant data science and artificial intelligence (AI) interests and operations, including Red Bull Racing and Advanced Technologies, Santander, HMGCC, Milton Keynes University Hospital and the Open University. These stakeholders, together with entrepreneurs, investors, educators and the wider tech community came together in 2023 to provide input to the current opportunities and challenges for the Milton Keynes tech community.

The city also has a strong start up culture and so, the City Council has also partnered with the Milton Keynes Investor Group to provide local tech start-ups with seed funding to further develop their business ideas.

Case Study – Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem Project 2023

In 2022, Milton Keynes existing strengths as a tech city were identified in the Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem report. It is estimated Milton Keynes already generates over £3.4bn of tech GVA[4], placing the city above the likes of Cambridge, Oxford and Reading.

The report findings also concluded a number of areas could be strengthened to improve the tech ecosystem, including improving collaboration between existing organisations in the city, increasing the visibility of existing assets and the need for a 'tech strategy' for the city.

In 2023, through its Economic Recovery Plan, Milton Keynes City Council invested in a new partnership with Protospace, to design a virtual 'front door' to tech in Milton Keynes, and to pull together key tech stakeholders across the city.

Case Study… continued

Roundtable events were held with anchor tech employers, educators, entrepreneurs and investors which identified four main priority workstreams for tech;

- brand and marketing of Milton Keynes,

- talent and skills,

- entrepreneurship and innovation, and

- gateway and place.

In February 2024, the Protospace Digital hub was launched, providing the first virtual front door to all things tech in MK, making an early contribution to addressing the lack of a single point of access and information to the MK tech community.

Milton Keynes City Council is now turning its focus to supporting work to address the issues faced on each workstream, focussing first on branding and marketing.

Milton Keynes as a Tech City…our long-term vision

It is no coincidence that the first multi-national agreement on the future of Artificial Intelligence – the Bletchley Declaration – was signed in our city at Bletchley Park, a site of global significance for technological revolutions. We will build on this to firmly establish Milton Keynes' reputation as a leading UK tech city nationally and internationally, complementing the nearby knowledge centres of Oxford and Cambridge.

Our Tech sector already has identified strengths in Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Smart City technologies, robotics, and advanced communications, and we believe these will continue to be areas of focus for the city.

Through our work, Milton Keynes' tech community will work as one collaborative system, making it easy for investors, talent, potential customers, businesses and entrepreneurs to find, and work with each other to develop networks, innovate in a Smart City, and work with a digitally enabled city council and population. Tech start-ups and their founders will easily access the support they need for growth, with the city enabling space and supporting infrastructure for them to scale-up.

Finally, Central Milton Keynes will be home to a Smart City, Tech, design and Innovation quarter, providing a physical home for Tech to connect and grow; leading to more high quality job opportunities for the benefit of the Milton Keynes economy and the citizen.

Milton Keynes as a Tech City… the next five years

- Continue to develop the Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem project by providing more support to our existing tech ecosystem. MKCC's work and support will focus primarily on the four workstreams already identified by our tech community; Brand and Marketing, Talent and Skills, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Gateway and Place. This will include an immediate focus in 2024 on the branding and marketing of the city.

- In February 2024, the City Council will open a grant funding competition as part of our Economic Recovery Plan to secure a partner to help deliver our aims for the Tech Ecosystem and expand the capabilities of our Digital hub.

- We will encourage joint working, investment, and collaboration from the private sector on the issues facing the city. We will highlight opportunities for environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) investment and where the tech being developed in the city can make a real difference to its citizens.

- As a first step on the talent and skills agenda, we will support an emerging tech HR leads group with talent development and retention work. Work will continue with the educators in the city to ensure that Milton Keynes is a city rich with the talent that our tech employers need.

- We will continue our joint work with the Open University on their potential relocation to Central Milton Keynes through their Campus 2030 project. The City Council will continue to support the ambition for a higher education institution in the city centre to address current gaps in the skills offer.

Milton Keynes as a Tech City… the next five years continued

- We will promote our ambition for a Central Milton Keynes Smart City, tech, design and innovation quarter. This will give a physical home for all things tech. The City Council will take this ambition forward through the development of its next local plan, the New City Plan.

- Working jointly with the Milton Keynes Investor group throughout 2024, deliver the MK [Tech fund](#) project to support start-up tech businesses. Our Tech ecosystem work will also support founders through the growth process and journey.

- Support for 2024's inaugural Milton Keynes Tech Week, showcasing tech in the city to a national audience. Where proposals meet the aims of the tech ecosystem project and funding is available, we will seek to support further tech events within Milton Keynes.

- With the UK government focussed on the UK as a potential centre for global AI regulation and standards, we will make the case for Milton Keynes to be the physical home of a UK hub for AI regulation.

Part 2
Milton Keynes as
a Smart City

Milton Keynes as a Smart City… where we are today

We define a Smart City as the "*use of digital technologies and data to improve places by providing citizens with social, economic, and environmental benefits.*"[1]

Milton Keynes was an early adopter of the Smart City movement. MK:Smart was a flagship UK Smart City programme led by the Open University, with a range of partners including Milton Keynes City Council, BT, Community Action:MK, and Anglian Water. MK:Smart explored how data and technologies could improve the lives of the citizens of Milton Keynes and help tackle the wider problems faced by society and the city – including water scarcity and sustainable transport. Today, Milton Keynes has earned its reputation as a leading UK Smart City.

As of January 2024, we have three active Smart City projects, exploring the future of connected and autonomous vehicles, urban drone deliveries, and advanced radio communications. The City Council owns the city's Smart City Infrastructure including a 5G network used exclusively for research and development trials. We also operate a 5G data exchange where we encourage MKCC suppliers to provide anonymised data feeds. We are developing control room capabilities and are exploring plans to deliver a 'Smart City experience centre' to showcase to citizens the tech on trial in their city.

We have developed a 'City as a Test Bed' approach for Milton Keynes, where businesses use the unique urban design of our city to trial and commercialise their future facing services and products in a real-world environment. This benefits both our local economy, helping businesses to gain essential insight to potential markets and to test solutions, and for our citizens who benefit from improvements to services and their environment. An open Test Bed with accessible data, is an important attractor in developing MK as a Tech City.

Our unique urban design has helped create a city that allows testing of different concepts across a range of different environments. This fits with Milton Keynes' ethos of being open to innovation and doing things differently. This is just one of the ways in which Milton Keynes is being 'Better by Design'.
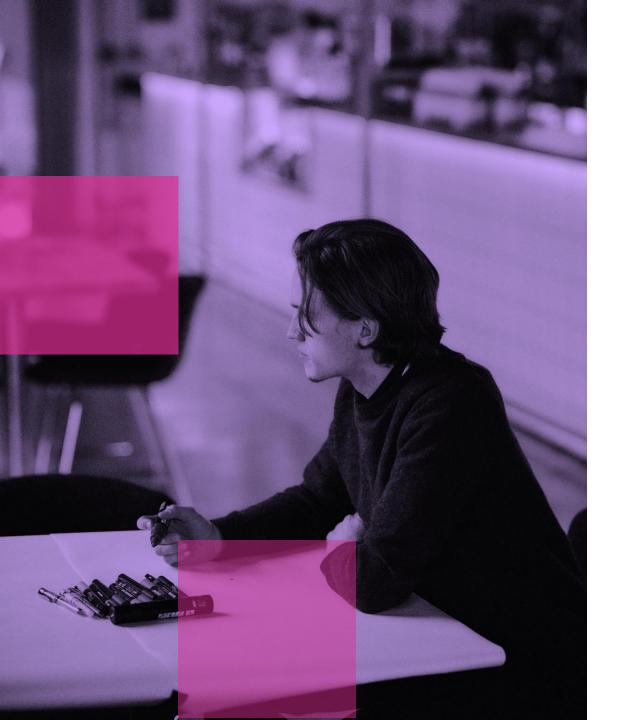
Case Study – Smart City Test Bed for Starship Robots

Did you know that the City of Milton Keynes is already home to the world's largest fleet of autonomous robots?

Starship Robots partnered with Milton Keynes City Council in 2018 to start testing their autonomous delivery robots in a real-world environment. The robots use the city's extensive 'Redway' cycle path network to deliver groceries and takeaways directly to Milton Keynes residents.

Since 2020, Milton Keynes has been home to over 100 robot residents, who have made over 800,000 deliveries, and delivered a reduction of 230,000kg of reduction in carbon emissions. The service is fully commercial and since its success in Milton Keynes, has expanded to other UK cities including Manchester, Cambridge and Leeds, as well as internationally.

Smart City… our long-term vision

Milton Keynes will be known on the global stage for being a leading UK Smart City, which promotes its successes and its city-led approach to innovation. To advance our position, we will renew the focus on our 'City as a Test Bed' approach.

The city will be known by businesses as a place that welcomes innovation and, where businesses are supported to run trials in real world environments that assist their commercialisation plans. Our anchor employers will provide input and guidance to the Smart City agenda which helps develop Milton Keynes further.

We will work with our citizens and businesses to ensure the projects we support offer solutions to problems the city is facing, so our residents will experience the tangible benefits of living in a Smart City. Trials taking place in the city will work with and understand the challenges and opportunities facing our city and its people.

Smart City… the next five years

- In 2024, we will focus on the communication and promotion of Milton Keynes' Smart City work. Working in partnership with the Open University, we will relaunch the MK:Smart brand to provide a frontpage for the Smart City projects underway in Milton Keynes.

- We will explore digital twin and sandboxing projects for Milton Keynes, focusing on planning, transport, and the future growth of the city.

- In 2024 and 2025, we will fully deliver our current programme of Smart City projects and promote the learning from these trials for the city, and consider how the outcomes can be used to influence how services are provided in the future.

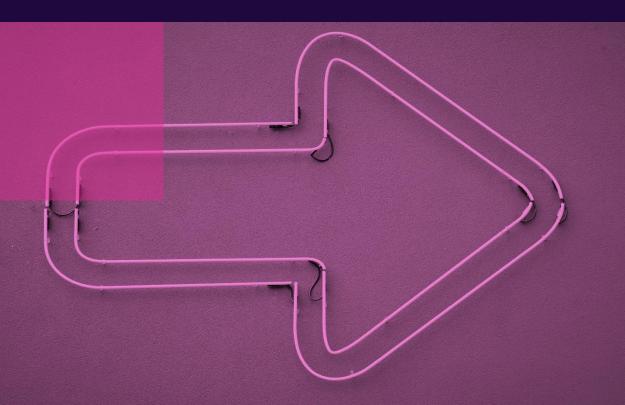# The next five years… continued

- Our current Smart City projects include::

o   Milton Keynes StreetCAV project – trialling state of the art self-driving shuttles in the city, with trials starting in Central Milton Keynes in Autumn 2024.

o   MK Drone Port project – to plan and trial drone operations in a city environment including exploring highways inspections and medical deliveries.

o   Advanced radio in Milton Keynes (MarK) – testing and evaluating 5G operations in areas of high demand in the city.

o   the Mobilieo Travel app project – Allowing people to plan, book, and pay all in one place using live data sources to improve convenience and accuracy of public transport journey information for our citizens, using our 5G data exchange.

The next five years… continued

- By October 2024, we will publish a Smart City Action Plan, outlining in more detail our future plans for building Milton Keynes' profile as a Test Bed city, expanding our current programme of activity, including;

  o How we will add to Milton Keynes' current focus on transport innovation, to develop our innovation agenda in line with the big issues facing the city and its people including, the climate emergency, health, wellbeing, inequality and deprivation, and delivery of social care. We will continue to seek funding opportunities to bring the latest innovations to Milton Keynes based around these priorities.

  o We will also further the city's culture of innovation, exploring trials that have the potential to improve the public services that Milton Keynes City Council delivers, including where they can reduce the running costs of City Council services.

  o We will explore how our Smart City and innovation work can be more sustainable over the long term, including how to minimise the cost to the public sector, and allowing us to plan for maintaining and improving our Smart City infrastructure.

  o We will develop our use of Smart City data alongside internal MKCC data sets to bring extra value to the citizen and bolster our 'Tech City' ambitions for AI and data science.

  o Establishing a Steering Group for our Smart City work where our key delivery partners and anchor organisations in Milton Keynes help achieve wider buy-in for the Smart City agenda from the private sector.

  o Work to achieve 'Security by Design' in our Smart City network, working with national bodies to ensure security and privacy of data are at the heart of our Smart City approach.
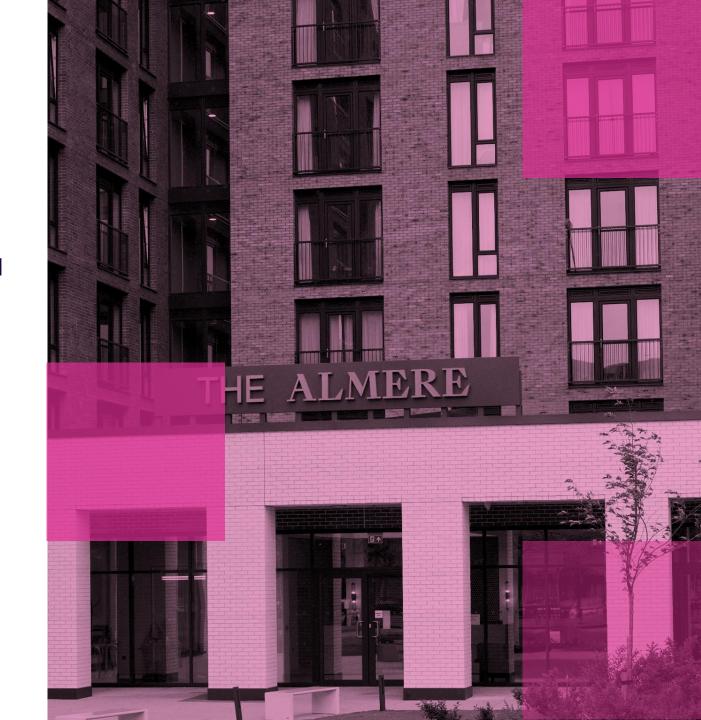
Part 3
Milton Keynes as a Digital City

Milton Keynes as a Digital City… where we are today

We define Digital as "*applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of today to respond to people's raised expectations*".

In 2018, we published the City Council's first Digital Strategy, outlining our vision to be a world leading, smart, digital city that promotes innovation, quality jobs and seamless connectivity.

Since 2018, we have made great progress in delivering our Digital Strategy.

- In line with the aim in our 2018 strategy, the City of Milton Keynes has reached 99.4% superfast and fibre connectivity, providing better digital infrastructure and connection to all residents and businesses.

- We have developed new ways of delivering City Council services and Milton Keynes citizens have responded to these. Already, Milton Keynes citizens are finding digital Council services more convenient, with around 90% of booking slots at our household waste and recycling centres being made online, and 80% of missed bin collections reported online.

- New ways of working have been brought in for MKCC staff, particularly as part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We've rolled out Teams and Office 365 so that all MKCC staff are now fully mobile and able to work from wherever makes most sense, in a secure way.

- We have made real progress on cyber and security as a City Council – moving into information storage to scalable cloud-based hosting through Azure, bringing greater resilience and security to our infrastructure and data.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic we supported initiatives that helped provide access to those who were digitally excluded, from children and young people accessing laptops for school work, to support for job seekers without online access.

Case Study – City Council Digital Services

Since the publication of the last Milton Keynes digital strategy, the City Council has made significant progress in delivering digital services. The City Council provides more than 200 services to its citizens, and there are already 180 online processes enabling Milton Keynes residents to self-serve. This covers everything from school admissions to reporting a pothole, so that residents can access services at any time.

We already have 95 integrations meaning information and requests from customers can be automated and directed to the relevant services, reducing processing and administration time. Not only have we been able to improve the customer experience via our digital offer, we have also been able to make savings for the taxpayer. For example, £150k has been saved annually through the use of advance bookings and number plate recognition to access our household waste and recycling centres.

Case Study – Partnership working with Thames Valley Police

Working in partnership with Thames Valley Police, we've developed a data sharing pilot that aims to reduce crime and violence, and improve outcomes for those exposed to violent crime, victims and perpetrators.

We are also working on an innovative trial that will integrate our social care case management systems and police data using cutting edge data management technology to drive a whole-system approach to reduce violent crime using accurate and timely data. This will empower decision makers and protect the public.

Milton Keynes as a Digital City…
our long-term vision

We will continue to improve the digital connectivity of Milton Keynes, encouraging the roll out of further superfast connectivity, as well as improving 5G and next generation connectivity. Working with partners, we will tackle the digital divide to ensure all residents benefit from living in a truly digital city.

At MK City Council, we will continue to plan for the future of our services and investigate where they can be better delivered by new technologies.

We will explore digital solutions that can help deliver services that provide a better service to our citizens and service users, without a significant cost to the taxpayer.

We will ensure that the learning from our Smart City work and innovation activity in the city helps us to improve the city council's services, and recognise where data and information sharing about the city more widely can address challenges the city faces.

Milton Keynes as a Digital City… the next five years

- We will continue to explore how tools and applications can both allow City Council colleagues to make the most efficient use of their time and focus on delivering the services residents need, and provide a better service experience for the people of Milton Keynes.

- Recognising the important role that data will play in MKCC ensuring its services are fit for the future, we will deliver Milton Keynes City Council's 'Data to Insight' Action Plan 2023-2025 in full.

- We are ambitious about moving the City Council from a position of holding data to one where we capture insight that helps us make better decisions for the city and to deliver more effective public services to the residents of Milton Keynes.

The next five years… continued

- Throughout 2024, we'll be completing projects to embed a Digital services approach within Milton Keynes City Council;

  o   In 2024, we'll complete initial trials to explore how the use of AI can assist with administrative tasks within the City Council. MKCC social care staff are currently trialling AI to automate administrative tasks, to allow them to spend more of their time delivering for the residents of Milton Keynes.

  o   In 2024, we are planning a pilot project on Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information requests to explore how AI could improve service delivery. This will build in 'security by design' and compliance so that citizens can trust the process, as well as achieving efficiency.

  o   Throughout 2024 and 2025, we will improve our digital offer empowering our residents to self-serve via our contact channels. We will remove unnecessary duplication, ensuring that customer information is shared with services to improve timely decision-making and delivery.

  o   We will continue to engage with citizens on the future plans for the city, using digital tools to engage our residents where possible.

The next five years… continued

- Over the medium term, we will look at where our City's approach to innovation through the Smart City programme can be applied internally to the City Council's innovation agenda. This will include;

  o   We will use the learning from our Smart City innovation work to help develop a wider 'MKCC innovation mindset' for future public service development, exploring new pilots and building on learning. As an example recognising that the City of Milton Keynes has significant existing expertise and potential to be a leading UK city for AI application, as an anchor employer in the city, we will explore ways that MKCC can use Artificial Intelligence to improve services, deliver efficiencies and explore how we can provide citizens with more information about what is ongoing in their local area.

  o   In line with the aims of our Smart City work, we will continue to explore innovative city trials and explore where the use of new technologies or applications can improve the provision of our social care and health services.

  o   Explore the wider benefits the 5G data exchange can bring to the City Council's services, including current opportunities around transport, and planning

Part 4
Our Creative Industries

Milton Keynes' Creative Industries… where we are today

The Creative Industries are widely recognised as a real strength of the British economy, producing both cultural impact and driving the growth of the UK economy.

Creative industries are defined as those "*which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent*" including industries involving design, advertising and marketing, architecture, media, and IT and computer services.

Milton Keynes already has a thriving creative industries scene, with strong specialisms in film, media and design. There are already approximately 1,800 ICT, media and creative businesses in the city, and the sector has experienced strong growth in the past ten years. The digital and tech sectors are currently seeing the strongest growth, alongside growth in the screen industries.

The Milton Keynes Cultural scene is diverse in nature, a real existing strength in our creative scene.

Creative Industries are not just valuable for the immediate employment they provide; design, ingenuity and creativity are essential skills for any city with ambitions around tech. Our vision for the development of Milton Keynes as a leading tech city recognises that creative thinking, curiosity, design and innovation are all essential components in building a thriving tech sector. This curiosity and thinking innovatively fits with our 'Better by Design' ethos.

In 2024, we refreshed our Creative and Cultural Strategy and included an aim that our Cultural sector "embrace advances in technology as part of city's cultural landscape." This has already started to take root in our cultural sector, with events like the City of Codes and Light regularly drawing thousands of attendees from within and outside the city.

Case Study – Creativity in our Culture Activities

In 2024, Central Milton Keynes will host a new commission by Skymagic – the world's leading drone light show company – who have worked with a cohort of local young people to develop a spectacular new performance exploring the future of the city.

Planned for December, the performance will be complemented by a free concert, street food pop-ups and other entertainment designed to encourage increased city centre footfall and vibrancy.

This event aims to bring together creativity and new technologies to deliver an experience that showcases the forward-thinking nature of our City.
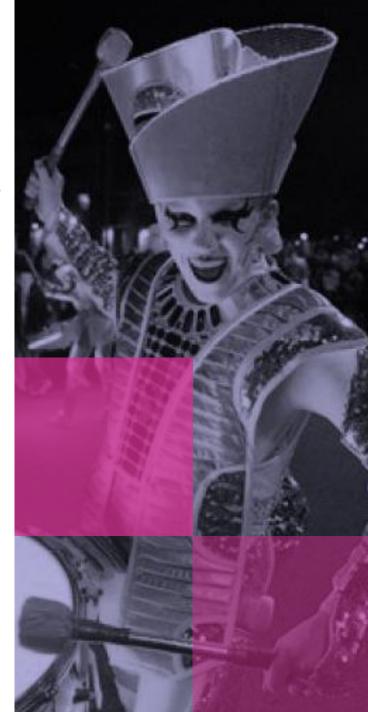
Milton Keynes' Creative Industries… our long-term vision

As we develop Milton Keynes into a leading UK tech city, we will embed creativity throughout our plans, recognising that the development of the creative industries is essential to the development of a successful tech ecosystem.

We will deliver on our Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy to embed new technology in our cultural sector, including new ways of working, research and development, and reaching new audiences.

We will also help to widen access to our tech sector more broadly, using our growing cultural sector and events calendar to create opportunities for people to get involved in activities that help to create routes into careers in the creative industries.

We will work to develop talent from all backgrounds and support creative businesses, including exploring how we can use existing and future city assets to help our creative industries thrive. This could be through enhancing and encouraging partnerships between sectors, including higher education, or creating flexible spaces that can be used for collaboration, production and innovation..
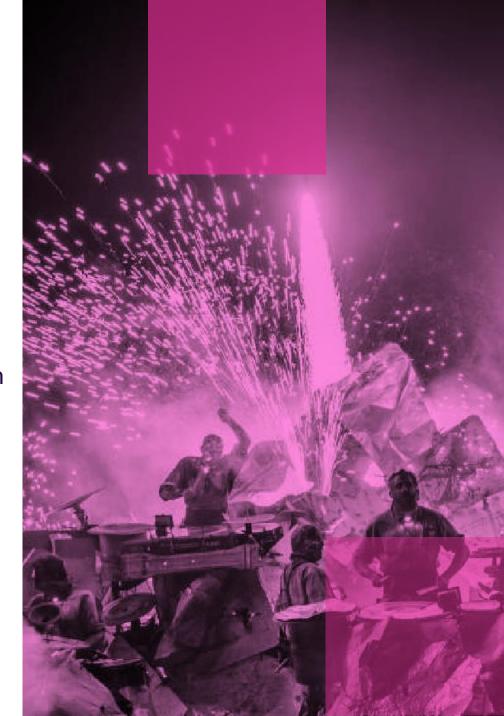
Milton Keynes' Creative Industries… the next five years

- In 2024, the City Council will continue to support <u>All Flows</u> – a Creative, Digital and Tech conference with a global reach – to support the creative industries sector within Milton Keynes. All Flows brings together an inspiring line-up of influential speakers, highlights the exemplary creative industries who are based in MK, raising their profile and reach, and provides networking opportunities for the whole of the creative industries sector.

- We will finalise and adopt our Cultural Infrastructure Plan to identify priority projects which will support the growth of the creative industries in MK. This includes dedicated fit-for-purpose workspace and production space which allows for collaboration and cross-disciplinary working.

The next five years… continued

- We will continue to work collaboratively across City Council teams, including Economic Development and Culture, to align our support for the creative industries sector. We will do this through:

  o   investigating where we can support or provide funding opportunities to support the creative industries

  o   brokering partnerships and collaborations between creators, funders and other organisations

  o   identify gaps within our current creative industries ecosystem and work to fill these

  o   take on advocacy and ambassadorial role to celebrate and promote Milton Keynes' creative industries nationally and internationally.

- Move forward with developing plans for a multi-use events venue for CMK which will include flexible spaces and facilities that are suitable for a range of activities as part of the creative and cultural sector for the city.

References

[1] Smart Cities - POST (parliament.uk)

[2] Centre for Cities Milton Keynes City factsheet, Milton Keynes | Centre for Cities, based on GVA figures for 2020

[3] Whitecap 2022, Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem report, Milton Keynes_Tech_Report_220922.pdf (milton-keynes.gov.uk)

[4] Whitecap 2022, Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem report, Milton Keynes_Tech_Report_220922.pdf (milton-keynes.gov.uk)

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www.milton-keynes.gov.uk

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MK Milton Keynes City Council

Milton Keynes. Better by design