

JENNIE LEE

PUBLIC ART COMMISSION



PREFACE

Milton Keynes City Council and partners are planning to commission a new statue to honour Open University pioneer Jennie Lee. We are looking to appoint an artist, creative practitioner or collaborative creative practice who have significant and demonstrable experience of developing and delivering exceptional, ambitious and impactful public art commissions.

This first stage brief is for an initial research stage which **develops a concept design and location options** for a new permanent public art commission to celebrate the achievements and life of Jennie Lee.

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Cover: Jennie Lee sitting as chairman on the platform at the Labour Party annual conference in Blackpool, England in October 1968

(Photo by Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images)

1 SUMMARY AND CONTEXT

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) and partners are embarking on an exciting project to commission an artwork in recognition of the life and work of Jennie Lee and to celebrate her significant achievements at national and local level.

Jennie Lee

Jennie (Janet) Lee was born in Lochgelly, Fife, on 3rd November 1904. Her grandfather and father were deeply involved in local politics, which saw the young Jennie attend meetings and become deeply interested in the Socialist movement, to which she dedicated the rest of her life. In 1929 she was nominated by the Labour Movement for North Lanark and was successfully elected. At 24, she was to be the youngest member of the House of Commons.

Defeated in the 1931 election, Jennie spent 1931–45 supporting husband Aneurin Bevan in his political career. Jennie joined the National Executive Committee from 1958-1970 and was its chairman from 1967–1968. In 1964 Harold Wilson became Prime Minister and offered Jennie the new position of **Minister for the Arts**. As Minister Jennie spent much time and energy **establishing The Arts Council and The Open University** at the same time as Milton Keynes was being designated a New City. In 1969 the Open University was set up in Milton Keynes bringing together two of her significant achievements.

Losing her seat in the 1970 election, she was created a Life Peer and took as her title Baroness Lee of Asheridge, after her farm. She continued to attend the House of Lords until the mid-1980s. Her book 'My Life With Nye' was published in 1980 to critical acclaim. Jennie Lee died on 16th November 1988, aged 84.

A full biography of Jennie can be found in the accompanying Appendix.

Milton Keynes

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 new city is the largest and arguably most successful of the UK post-war new towns and internationally recognised for its design.

Looking forward, and with new ambitions set by the MK Futures 2050 Strategy, 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.

The New City is internationally famous for its 'grid and green' framework of roads surrounding a series of grid squares in which low density housing and all the infrastructure of a city is located, including over 200 miles of connected cycling and pedestrian routes known as Redways. Of particular importance are the green and blue spaces of local parks, linear river parks, lakes, canals, meadow and ancient woodland which cover over one-quarter of the city's land use. This green grid enveloped and protected four historic market towns and thirteen ancient villages within the city area, including the smallest, Milton Keynes Village, which gave the New City its name.

In 2022 Milton Keynes was granted City Status by Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as part of her Platinum Jubilee celebrations. King Charles III visited the city in 2023 as part of this honour. This has given the City a new found impetus in its next stage of development and currently thoughts are on developing the city's 60th birthday programme year in 2027.

Milton Keynes has one of the fastest growing economies in the UK, and an economy second only in the Southeast to London, with an exceptionally high number of business start-ups, particularly within the digital and high-tech arenas. The city is a major centre of the UK's high-tech manufacturing and research industries. Other major industries include agriculture, tourism, construction, entertainment, education, retail and finance.

Milton Keynes' has a vibrant, innovative and pioneering cultural offer where public art plays an important role. Public art was an important part of the city's formation and origins, where communities were given the opportunity to work together with artists, creating artworks that would define MK's identity and sense of place. The city now boasts over 250 artworks within the public realm and is committed to an ongoing programme of new commissions, where artists and creative practitioners are invited to respond to people, place and context. This is a high-profile commission for Central Milton Keynes (CMK).

The Open University

In 1969 one ambition changed the world, giving anyone, anywhere the power to learn. Established by the Royal Charter (pdf 235kb) and globally recognised, The Open University has pioneered distance learning for over 50 years, delivering exceptional teaching and outstanding support to students across the UK and the world. To date over 2 million students have been helped to realise their ambitions.

Jennie Lee was fundamental to the origins of The Open University or the OU as it has become and establishing its first home in the New City of Milton Keynes. The OU arrived in 1969, in the historic village of Walton (now the grid square of Kent's Hill), in the south east of the new city, and away from the 'city centre' of CMK.

Some of the earliest housing in the new city was built nearby for professors and teachers to make their home here and as well as its global role, the OU, through its New Town Unit, delivered a significant intellectual contribution to the development of Milton Keynes. Today the OU Archives are testament to that work.

The Arts Council of England

Appointed the first ever Minister for the Arts in 1964 by Harold Wilson, Jennie was instrumental in establishing the Arts Council. Her seminal White

Paper in 1965–66 ‘A Policy for the Arts - The First Steps’ was pioneering in its recognition of the social and educational value of the arts, emphasising both accessibility and excellence.

In an era of national government financial constraints, it was brave in setting forth a vision of better funding, greater engagement and stronger arts infrastructure across the country. By 1970, Jenni had trebled funding for the Arts, but more importantly set the path for showing the public good that arts could do. Establishing national organisations like the National Theatre and British Film Institute soon followed. Her Legacy has been recognised by successive governments from all political parties and was referenced at the inaugural Jennie Lee Lecture from Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy in February 2025, as she announced £270M to an ‘Arts Everywhere Fund’ to transform lives.

2 THE COMMISSION

The City Council and partners are looking to appoint an experienced artist, creative practitioner or collaborative practice to an initial stage which **develops a concept design and location options** for a new public art commission to celebrate the life and achievements of Jennie Lee.

Through this concept stage, it is essential that the appointed practitioner explores, reveals and spotlights the various aspects of Jennie Lee’s story; creatively and innovatively responding with sensitivity, integrity and empathy, to consider a wide variety of audiences. The expectation is that the final form of the commission is a figurative sculptural portrait.

Through this commissioning process, the City Council are keen to demonstrate the value that artists and creative practitioners can bring to public spaces, and evidence how creative interventions can enhance a place and its people with local and national stories.

Aims for this initial stage commission can be summarised as:

- To undertake an initial research and development stage to act as a clear foundation from which to develop and deliver (in the next stage) a figurative sculptural portrait of Jennie Lee.
- To work closely with The City Council, the OU and other commissioning partners in the development of concept ideas.
- To undertake a range of partner and stakeholder consultation to evidence what Jennie Lee and her achievements mean to people and to develop and build relationships with project partners across Milton Keynes.
- Respond to the ideas, themes, suggestions and aspirations from this first stage of partner and stakeholder consultation, embedding these into the concept designs.
- Through consultation identify one or more location options in City Centre Central Milton Keynes (CMK) for the final statue commission, outlining any benefits and drawbacks, and a preferred option.
- Address the environmental impact of the commission and Milton Keynes City Council's ambitions to become a Net Zero organisation by 2030.

3 CONSIDERATIONS

- The appointed applicant will be expected to work closely with the Culture Team and in particular the Cultural Development Officer who will oversee all aspects of production and delivery.
- Sufficient time and resource should be allocated to community engagement from the outset and consideration should also be given to marketing and publicity throughout concept development.
- Consideration must be given to health and safety implications of the concept.
- The concept should also consider any future care and maintenance needs – particularly if the proposal includes or involves digital media.
- Evaluation mechanisms must be considered from the outset and fed into the overarching evaluation strategy.

4 STAKEHOLDER AND LOCAL PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

The OU is a major partner in commissioning process. The OU Archive holds the extensive Jennie Lee Archive, which covers the entirety of her life, her political career, her personal life including marriage to Aneurin Bevan. In partnership with the OU, an **Appendix** has been produced which outlines the content of this Archive and how it can be accessed.

Jennie Lee in her position as Minister for Arts saw the foundation of Arts Council England. A national body, reporting to DCMS, Arts Council England will also have representation on the Commission Panel, bringing a national and cultural overview to the process.

There are also creative practitioners, programmers, makers and fabricators in Milton Keynes, as well as a rich variety of cultural organisations. It is important that applicants are aware and if possible, make use of these resources, if appropriate. The cultural sector membership body the **Arts and Heritage Alliance Milton Keynes** (AHA-MK) will be an important contact and facilitator for any engagement with this sector.

PLEASE NOTE consultation and engagement with communities and our strong tradition of clubs, groups and societies is not part of this stage, but of the next stage.

5 BUDGET

A fully inclusive fee of £8,000 to include all costs, travel and materials, is available to the successful applicant to deliver this initial stage commission brief.

6 SELECTION PROCESS AND EXCLUSIONS

Artists/creative practices should understand the context and aspirations of the commission and then submit a first stage outline proposal via culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk.

The successful applicant will be decided upon by a panel made up of selected The City Council, OU, stakeholder and sector representatives.

To make a submission please submit the information outlined below under **How to Apply**.

We will not accept proposals that do not meet the timescales/budget or approaches that do not respond to the requirements of the brief as outlined below.

7 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The appointed creative practitioner/practice will be required to work with Milton Keynes City Council Marketing and Communications teams to co-ordinate the delivery of a marketing and communications campaign. Additionally, a Cultural PR specialist will support the delivery of a wider communications campaign.

8 EVALUATION

The successful applicant is required to show qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodologies throughout their concept commission and that feedback and data is captured from the outset.

9 ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

A dedicated Project Manager (The City Council) will be assigned to support delivery.

10 HOW TO APPLY

If you are interested in this opportunity please submit the following information:

- An outline of your approach to this Concept commission brief – max **2 sides of A4**.
- Provide up to 3 examples of previous relevant commissions (pdf or jpg file types only) with information about each project – in total, max **4 sides of A4**. Please include indicative budget spend for each example *and* images.
- An indicative budget breakdown and timeline of activity.
- Current Curriculum Vitae or practice profile.
- Letter confirming your availability and contact details for 2 referees (email and telephone) – note: preferably from recent commissioners.
- Evidence of insurance cover at required levels.
- Please do not exceed 6MB in file size.
- All applications must be emailed to culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk by the deadline specified.

All enquiries should be addressed FAO Shane Downer, Cultural Development and emailed to culture@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Submissions will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- **Approach – An outline Concept** which responds to identified themes, aims and objectives, with the ability to research and respond creatively to the Brief.
- **Quality of previous projects** – A proven track record of high-quality delivery, working in collaboration with communities and partners to develop and deliver exceptional, innovative, and engaging artworks within the public realm.
- **Experience** – successful delivery of projects of similar scale and budget, demonstrable experience of working collaboratively with diverse communities, partners and stakeholders, excellent communication skills with the ability to articulate ideas and processes.
- **Cost** – a fully detailed budget to include individual day rate(s) all fees and materials.

11 DEADLINE

The deadline for applications is Friday 25 July at 5pm.

12 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

Links throughout this document have been included to highlight where additional information exists that the potential applicant might find useful.

An Additional Appendix outlining the life and work of Jennie Lee through her Archive and including interpretation and aids created by the OU Archives is also part of this Brief.

The City Council wishes to thank Ruth Cammies, OU Archivist in the use and reproduction of this material.



Jennie Lee speaking at the Busmen's Meeting, 1937
(Photo by Daily Herald Archive/SSPL/Getty Images)

