



Understanding Milton Keynes

Part 2

F: It's quite new.

M: New grid system.

F: New, yeah.

M: Lots of concrete.

F: It felt like Disneyland but not in a good way, like a pretend place in a real place.

M: Yeah, it does feel like a pretend place.

F: And I felt that because I had lived in London and Oxford that it was a complete cultural desert. And just found it a sort of soulless grid, just full of cars and I just didn't really find anything that I warmed to here.

INTERVIEWER: When you say stop the cultural cringe what do you mean by that?

THEO CHALMERS: Well that's just an expression that comes from Australia actually, they describe themselves as having a culture cringe back in the '70s, because, you know, they felt that the rest of the world saw them as the children of convicts and so on, and culturally they were just beer drinking, vomiting in the corner-type of people, you know – which of course they're not. And in the same way Milton Keynes has had that sort of cultural cringe in the past because of the way that people outside Milton Keynes view it, as I said before, concrete cows, roundabouts, that's all anyone ever knows.

KATY LOCK: Milton Keynes has realised the benefit of shouting more loudly about what its cultural offer is and has done lots of work with Arts Council England and others to promote its cultural offer, and things like the International Festival and having the gallery and the theatre are fantastic opportunities to bring people together in Milton Keynes and celebrates its really diverse cultural offer.

JON BOYLE: When people think of Milton Keynes they often just think of the new parts, the shopping centre and they think of it as a city of the future but let's not forget it's a city of the past as well. We've got Wolverton which is an historic town in its own right. We've obviously got Bletchley where we had the code breakers who helped us during World War II. We've obviously got, over in Stony Stratford everyone's heard the term 'cock and bull story' because there's the two pubs next to each other, the Cock and the Bull which people used to travel through from London. All those places are part of Milton Keynes and they need to be thought of as such. You don't have different parts of London where it's kind of old London and new London, and Milton Keynes should be thought of the same. It's all under one umbrella.

DAVID LOCK: Theatre's been strong, music has been strong, drama generally has been strong, religion has been strong, painting, plastic arts are strong, you know. I'm missing something obviously if there's some other dimension that I ought to be aware of. I can't think of one.

IAN REVELL: We have an arts bursary and that's a national award that's given out to an artist, and the piece of art behind me is actually one of our winners who wasn't asked to do that, just turned up in the office with something that they'd made for us as a kind of response to be getting the bursary which is fantastic.

DAVID LOCK: Any aspect of the arts or culture, I can't think of a deficiency and in fact I'm aware of an abundance in many respects.

TIM SKELTON: When I first proposed that the shopping building should be listed in the 1990s people greeted that with derision. I remember a particular councillor in a Council meeting where I proposed it saying it was ridiculous. Because I said that I felt the shopping building was as important to Milton Keynes as the Royal Crescent is to Bath. He was thinking I was saying, well it was a good building, I mean you can argue about that until the cows come home. Well, we can argue about that until the concrete cows come home. But the thing is the shopping building is an important building to Milton Keynes and our built heritage is important. I mean we now have I think, one, two, three, four, four listed buildings of modern, four listed buildings and two sculptures that are now listed and are recognised as being important.

KATY LOCK: There's also another aspect of culture in Milton Keynes which has only really been recognised recently and this applies with, to all of the new towns actually and that's about their cultural heritage as new towns themselves. All of the new towns were part of a unique and ambitious experiment in how people might want to live. And the ambitious and innovative architecture and work of the town artists and town architects quite often derided but these things go in and out of fashion. That the role of that cultural heritage in the renewal of the new towns is absolutely key and Milton Keynes has a lot to offer on that front and I

think that's going to provide a real opportunity for the renewal of those parts of Milton Keynes that need it.

IAN REVELL: You know I know that we're looking at developing a bid for a European Capital of Culture and I sat in a lecture recently where we were being told that, no don't try to copy anybody else, you are unique and that is special and that's what we need to celebrate.

STUART TURNER: So the culture itself and the nature and the character of the culture that we have here is built round that very fact that we are a young city, we don't have necessarily the heritage of a lot of other cities would have that can go back to medieval times and all of those, all of those cultural threads. So what we're doing here is building on the culture that we have, which is the fact what we've actually created over the last 50 years. So that is the culture and I can assure you there's an awful lot to build on there.

GILL PERRY: When we talk about the city of Milton Keynes we often think of grid systems, boulevards, modernist housing projects but one of the most important aspects of the legacy, history of Milton Keynes is its engagement with public art, with public sculpture, with commissions, with the whole idea of public urban space.

KATY LOCK: There's not many places which have fantastic murals in their library or fantastic pieces of public art in their public spaces which has actually been specifically designed for that space and relates to the place it's been created.

GILL PERRY: In fact, if you look at a map produced by the local Council of Milton Keynes today, you can see that there is a huge number of sculptural commissions and public art projects dotted all around the borough of Milton Keynes.

F: I know there are those cows, like stone cows somewhere but I haven't actually seen them, mainly because I'm looking for the next roundabout when I'm driving around.

M: I have never failed to enjoy the two people who sit outside of the public library. Whispers is just one of those parts of Milton Keynes that immediately struck me when I arrived and which always gives me pleasure whenever I walk past it.

F: Sometimes you'll turn a corner and there will be something really interesting, really well thought through and interesting to the eye.

F: I love the public works of art. I love that one outside the library. And the one that's now in Queen's Court that used to be outside somewhere else, with the family with the pushchair, they're absolutely gorgeous.

F: As a kid I remember opening a book and seeing the figure 8 piece of artwork and when I first saw it I was like, wow this is actually it. So that was quite amazing.

GILL PERRY: But throughout the history of Milton Keynes art in public spaces has been integrated into the kind of planning ideals of the town.

In the original plans and conceptions, idealistic conceptions one might argue, both Walker and Jacoby included plans for quite large spaces of public entertainment including swimming pools, parks, discos and an international sculpture park. And in the 1970s a project was devised which was called City Club. It was an area that was supposedly devoted to public entertainment. A genuinely kind of public space informed by modern design. And a local artist and historian of Milton Keynes, someone called Gareth Jones, has put together a rather nice video in which he actually traces the history of this City Club through a cycling trip around Milton Keynes.

GARETH JONES: Milton Keynes remains the most ambitious social project of its kind in the UK, the last of the post war new towns and the only one that had the chutzpah to call itself a city. The original plan was to create nothing less than an ideal living environment for 250,000 people, a place where cars could drive and people could walk and the state would rent you an airy modern home if you needed one. In the early years of the Milton Keynes development corporation under the influence of Derek Walker, the city's chief architect and planner, only the best would do. And when it came to making drawings to show how the future would look I think the best was Helmut Jacoby. Jacoby was a German architectural renderer active from the 1960s through to the start of the 21st Century. He could take the bare outlines of a plan and envisage it as a fully realised cityscape always in fine and detailed ink drawings.

Many of the projects that Jacoby drew for Milton Keynes were never actually built and today I'm going to go in search for a number of these sites. In the gardens behind the church are some archaeological fragments of the original modern's vision that informed the new city. Three wonderful sculptures by Bernard Schottlander from the late '60s are exercises in pure form. Nearby some characteristically orthogonal architecture creates a hall of mirrors and Porte Cochere lead the pedestrian across the spacious boulevards. However it should have been so much more for this was earmarked to be the site of the City Club. The plan was for a vast entertainment and leisure facility that went through many permutations. It finally fell victim to the change in political climate of the last 1970s. Jacoby shows us a fabulous wave pool where a gentleman can smoke his pipe with impunity and lush vegetation curls incongruously around high tech girders. Meanwhile in a nearby arcade Hendrix and the moon landings are still contemporary and people dance, shop or eat according to preference.

GILL PERRY: The gallery was finally built in 1999 and has done an enormous amount to bring together the community and the larger art world. It's brought international artists to Milton Keynes but it's also provided a space where local artists can be exhibited. This year work is going on to develop the gallery space, it's going to be twice its original space, it's one of the big programmes of the 50-year celebrations. And it will be reopening as a space that includes a cinema, an educational section, increased gallery space and it's going to make an increasingly important contribution to the role of art within the local community. The first director was Stephen Snoddy. He had an enormous project on his hands and that was to bring art to a community or bring an art institution to a community that had no previous experience of a public space for the display of contemporary art. But he has reported that he feels that this was one of the most constructive and happiest times of his life.

STEPHEN SNODDY: Yes the great thing about Milton Keynes is a very young population and I think it's easier to bring people on that journey if they're young and have got open ideas. And certainly in Milton Keynes the whole raison d'être was moving forward all the time. And of course there was a programme of contemporary art at a gallery and the library and really with the establishment of a brand new gallery, give it was the first brand new gallery in England for 20 years, then this was a real landmark to put Milton Keynes on the map. And I could see all these things in my head as I was applying for the job. But also Milton Keynes is a modern city and just because it's not quaint and got the little twists and turns of a village town or a country town or a market town, it doesn't mean to say that it doesn't have its own qualities.

KATIE RAZZALL: There are some stories that come round and round and round again and just like the roundabouts for which it's famous it's not the first time we've heard about the success of Milton Keynes. But today came the news that in the last decade the town, built on a grid road system, which still isn't deemed a city however much they want it to be, had the best jobs growth of any in Britain.

A new town there is going to be in the rural heart of North Bucks...

KATIE RAZZALL: Initially a village of 160 people, in 1967 under the utopian direction of the urban planners this post-war new town was born. Expansion was rapid, more than a quarter of a million now live here. According to a study by the Centre for City's Research Group not only has the population of the town of the concrete cows increased by more than 16% in 10 years, making it the fastest growing in the UK, it's also seen a jobs boom of more than 18%.

ALLAN COCHRANE: Well I think Milton Keynes, the main reason for Milton Keynes' economic success is actually its location. I think it's a Goldilocks location. It's very well positioned.

TIM SKELTON: And we would have been idiots not to be able to make it work at one level.

ROGER KITCHEN: It's been economic, you know, more and more people measure things by economics, but economically Milton Keynes obviously has been an incredible success.

STUART TURNER: If you look back in terms of the way that the corporation addressed the whole question of economic development, in getting industries here, getting industries and businesses here, there were the very, very focused programme about that.

TIM SKELTON: The spirit of the development corporation has made it I think better than it would have been or could have been or that has certainly made a difference.

ROGER KITCHEN: My mum, you know, and dad they lived in Southampton and they had coaches from Southampton to come to the shopping centre. You know that kind of boldness of vision has paid dividends.

LIZ MCFALL: The centre at Milton Keynes is pretty corporate, you're going to find all the big brands here and if I have a moan about the place it's like, it's quite hard to find a restaurant that's not part of a chain, you know, there's a few ethnic restaurants, but beyond that, mainly Indian restaurants actually and they're nearly all in Stony Stratford.

F: There's no independent shops, you go to a massive shopping centre, it's every shop you've always heard of, there's nothing very independent or original about going shopping here. You might need to get to John Lewis for something but on the whole it's just really chain restaurants.

ANNA ROSE: I think we've done really well to get the corporates that we have here, because many places outside of London have really struggled to get the corporates to view their area as a headquarters location for their businesses. So in terms of Milton Keynes we've done really well to get them. In terms of how we get some of that more organic feel which is about the independent businesses and some of the independent food and beverage, I think that's more to do with the type of populations that we have that live in areas of our city. And so I think in the centre of Milton Keynes it is absolutely crucial for us to have a critical mass living within the centre of Milton Keynes that creates the demand all the time for those independent retailers or businesses. At the moment I can see why we don't have them, because we don't have the size of units, but we also don't have the amount of people that would be required to sustain not only the nationals but also I suppose the knock-on effect of a really vibrant nationals retail centre is that then you would automatically get a really vibrant independent sector. We don't have the critical mass to support both of them. And the visiting shoppers that we get aren't the type of shoppers that would go for an independent offer. So we need our

own resident population because they're the people who drive forwards the independent offer. Once it's there then people will visit it, but they don't drive a demand for it.

ALLAN COCHRANE: It's also increasingly well positioned as a place for back offices from financial services and so on. It's got a good base, good positioning, good location for retail and commercial activity at the moment. I mean those are the, now these aren't things that will necessarily continue.

THEO CHALMERS: The nature of shopping is changing fundamentally as well because what used to be say a Saturday afternoon custom of going to the shops, trying on clothes, buying the clothes, going home, oh no that doesn't happen anymore. What happens now is people go to the shops, audition the clothes, strike the barcode on their smart phone, see where else it's available and at what price and standing in the shop where they've just tried it on they can buy it cheaper and then either go and pick it up or have it delivered to their home. That is why the nature of shopping is changing, shops are becoming showrooms. And until they realise that and stop thinking it's the old way they are doomed. And it is entirely possible that our entire centre of our city will need to be redeveloped in years to come.

ALLAN COCHRANE: The other thing I would say in terms of whether the economic growth is evenly spread, I think it's interesting that there is I think still a division within the workforce in Milton Keynes, more than one actually, but I mean one that's quite important is between those who work in so called elementary occupations, the jobs which are unskilled, low skilled which are to be found in logistics and warehousing, but also in some of the low grade retail employment. That's at one end and that's not well paid, that's not always secure. And on the other hand you do find people in reasonably well paid jobs working in, well the Open University but also at Santander and a number of other financial services companies.

So there is actually an interesting division I think in the labour force. There's also an interesting division between some of the things in the labour force and the, if you like, the people who commute out, there's still a significant proportion of the white collar population commute out, London is a place where people go. Although we're beginning to see people coming back from London as well, commuting in from London to work in Milton Keynes in some of the financial services and other companies which are located around the station.

INTERVIEWER: This will be the first new town with a university won't it?

LORD JOCK CAMPBELL: Yes it will. Yes it will. It's really very surprising when you think there's been all the new towns and all the new universities that never before the twain have met. And may I say that we're extremely proud of having the Open University in Milton Keynes, it's very, very exciting indeed.

INTERVIEWER: There's always been a tradition in university cities between town and gown, sometimes they've got on together, sometimes they've fought, as in the old university town of Oxford and the Duchess of London with the blood of students against citizens. How do you envisage relationships of town and gown in Milton Keynes in the Open University?

LORD JOCK CAMPBELL: Well of course it won't be the usual relationship anyway to begin with because won't be any undergraduates; there are only staff. From our point of view, it's a great advantage to Milton Keynes to have these thousand members of the Open University staff forming with our own 800 staff at Milton Keynes a professional and, if I may say so, cultured nucleus which many new towns have lacked when they've started. I think some of the more reactionary members locally would say, thank heaven we're getting a university without any students but I can assure you that the staff at the Open University are already proving their intellectual vigour in their criticisms of the way we're planning the new city and this is very healthy I think for both of us.

LUCY MORRIS: Well so my dad worked here first of all and I just always thought it was really embarrassing that we both, he worked for the OU and we lived at Milton Keynes because no one knew what either of those things were, so. And it was so different to what everyone else did. So I was just always embarrassed and I was determined that I wasn't going to work here. But when I was at university my sister came to work here and when I used to come home in the holidays I'd come and have lunch there sometimes and it was just this amazing creative buzz and a lot of our friends had come to work here after school. I went on a, I was employed on a residential school and it was just amazing seeing the students and how their lives were transformed by the OU and I was just completely blown away by the students and the academics and I was determined then that I was going to stay here and work here. And I'd been doing a masters at the time and I kind of put that on hold to try and get a job in a faculty and so that's what I ended up doing and I do feel very lucky now to be able to work here and live here because it is such a unique place.

F: Well I'm very um, what's the word? It's, the campus that I work on is really lovely and it is a lovely environment to come to work and I think the Open University is exceptional in that we have this lovely campus inside a city. So I feel really lucky to be able to walk out and it's a very green space. I don't feel as if I'm in a city particularly because of the campus. But that's a very closed view of my working life really because I come to work in Milton Keynes and then I just leave again.

LIZ MCFALL: But I find my colleagues don't know anything about what they could find off the grid, the diversity that's off the grid that we, the different communities have sort of evolved and shaped their space.

In a social science age you've got two very, very well known social scientists who spent a great deal of their time here: Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey. And those are two names that are really deeply associated with thinking about culture and thinking about space, thinking about identity and thinking about, well, how do we do this in a more just and fairer way? How do we plan for a multicultural society that works? How do we use space in a way that's more just, more fair? And yet neither Stuart nor Doreen ever lived here, they were both London based. And I think both of them worked for the Open University, in a large part they spent so much of their careers with the Open University because of its egalitarian social democratic ideas, because of its commitment to social justice and education for everyone regardless of where they started that would be a rival to the most quality educations you could get elsewhere. That was deeply part of their commitment to the institution. But I don't think an awful lot of that ever turned to looking at Milton Keynes as a parallel experiment in how you provide a space where people with a lot of income versus people with a little income could survive and flourish. And all of the grid squares are spacious, there's green in all of them.

So there was a real attempt to try and, you know, build something that would meet the ideals and the aspirations of the post-war settlement, that this would be a place in which everyone would have an equal chance of doing all right. And I think it's very peculiar that the social scientists at the Open University hadn't actually spent much time looking at the cases right on their doorstep.

ALLAN COCHRANE: I find myself, when I have discussions with people, in a minority. I say I think Milton Keynes is great, I'm excited by the fact that it's always changing, I love the fact that it is a planned settlement, I love the fact that people are engaged in thinking about what might happen next. I love all those things. I talk to people of my type, other academics, whatever, that's not how they see it at all. They see it as somewhere that is divorced from a serious intellectual endeavour. They see it as outside the cultural mainstream. They see all those, well maybe not the cultural mainstream, maybe that's what they see the problem as being, it's too close to the cultural mainstream and not challenging enough.

GILES MOHAN: And there is a real bias in a lot of social science work to certain types of cities, you know, New York, London, San Francisco, nice places to visit, places where they could probably live, you know, and you get to view the world through a set of cities which are not actually emblematic of where most people live. So I think there's something really useful in moving away from that kind of stereotype view of how the world is because you get a view of the world in a particular way, which I don't think is the way it actually is.

LIZ MCFALL: So from my colleagues' perspective, they look at it and see it's flat, it's monotone, there's nothing going on here, there's nothing to see, it's just a few big brands that

you can get anywhere else and that does miss just the level of variety of different sorts of bits in the place.

ALLAN COCHRANE: And I think that that is to miss the point about the place. I think the place is both somewhere that it's easy to feel at ease in but also it is constantly having to rethink itself and people are having to think about what they're doing next, and I find the excitement of thinking about how to develop a different sort of cultural identity, which is what it's doing at the moment, is always an interesting challenge. So I'm, yes, so the question is difficult to answer except from one's own experience. And except on the basis that one begins to get seen as an eccentric for saying how good it is or how interesting it is, you know, how there are real possibilities here.

LIZ MCFALL: Plus another side of the Open University is, it's not just its academic staff, it's got, for a long time I think it was the biggest employer here. So there's lots of staff of different categories who did build lives around Milton Keynes and the Open University at the same time and they were the ones trying to figure out, well where do I shop? How do I get a bus to work? Could I get a bus to work from this place to the university campus? How do we make this place work?

LUCY MORRIS: It was very weird and we lived in Bletchley in a street that had been earmarked for demolition but then the plans changed, so there were lots of OU people in our street, but Bletchley's quite a traditional small town, so it was a kind of oasis of strangeness in a traditional small town. So in my mind both Milton Keynes and the OU are completely intertwined. I mean my parents' generation, obviously they came here to work, a lot of their friends worked for the development corporation and just, their footprint is all over Milton Keynes. You know, my dad was a Labour Party Councillor. Everywhere I go now, the School Governing Bodies, doctors surgeries, the hospital, the political parties, everyone, every voluntary organisation you can think of in Milton Keynes has someone from the OU who's either worked here or is working here and they just carry the principles of the OU throughout Milton Keynes and I think that's amazing. And I really wish the OU made more of that, made more of the connection between OU and Milton Keynes.

STEPHEN POTTER: If we go back to the late 1960s early '70s if you're thinking about designing a new town for the future you look to places like Southern California where you've got a high level prosperity and very high levels of car use.

ALLAN COCHRANE: So the future was going to be car based, if you look at the way Milton Keynes is constructed, it's really constructed around mobility, it's constructed around mobility of the car. So there's no doubt about that.

STEPHEN POTTER: And Richard Llewelyn-Davies who headed up the team designing Milton Keynes referred to the plan for Milton Keynes as a modified Los Angeles system, it was essentially a tidied up version of suburban sprawl. So you actually got these dual carriageway grid roads a kilometre apart, designed for high capacity roads, the odd urban motorway thrown in and 20,000 car parking spaces in Central Milton Keynes. The land uses were very much spread out, low density, very suburban.

ROGER KITCHEN: The roads are great but interestingly enough there's greater and greater concern now over the fact that this city was designed for 250,000 people, and I think also when they designed it, this was before the oil crisis, I sincerely, well, it is a fact that they believed that the ease of access for the car went hand-in-hand with a good public transport system. And we know what happened to the public transport system.

STEPHEN POTTER: The downside of it is you could, it'd have been extremely difficult to design a town that's more hostile for the operations of public transport. The operational needs of the private car are really to disperse travel flows, for public transport you want very clearly defined corridors. And you just haven't really got them in Milton Keynes.

M: How do you feel about public transport?

F: Oh God. Not good.

F: Having come from London where you've got the tube and really regular buses, I have to say that Milton Keynes felt a little bit behind.

F: I do wish that I could get a bus through Tattenhoe after half past six.

M: But why it wasn't built on a more of a public transport nature so every single village has public transport and really integrated is beyond me. It just means that there's a lot of cars around.

F: I think the public transport is shocking actually.

F: I think the actual public transport isn't bad; it's just the price of the public transport that's just like...

F: Maybe a little bit expensive actually.

F: Buses, they don't just go to A to B, they have to go A to F to wherever before you get to one place.

THEO CHALMERS: OK we do have some issues with things like public transport, that is a problem but if they'd stuck to the original plan and had the buses on the grid roads they would be fast and cheap, but they're not.

DAVID LOCK: If you read the plan of Milton Keynes, the grid road corridors were designed to take high quality public transport, bus transit, whatever you want to call it, the fashionable phrase of the day. Because the grid they chose after experimentation, and they tried other grids earlier up at Washington Newtown in Newcastle, the grid they chose was such that no building would be more than about 400 metres from a grid road, which is a four or five minute walk max, OK. And so in the original master plan the idea was for all the bus stops to be on the grid road corridor, you could walk to it, ideally you'd put them, particularly important ones would be where the local centre, the village, the neighbourhood centre would be, beyond the grid road shared between two neighbourhoods, the point of connection between the super grid and the local grid, yeah.

And so they'd be very high quality buses or mass transit over time zipping up and down and the grid road corridors were designed as you've heard wide enough, not only for dual carriageway roads to be built, but also for some kind of public transport as presently un-invented, trams, monorails, God knows what, but there's a space for it. That was indeed the strategy and a very wise one too and in the early, well up until 1978 I think it was, because I was here then, when the wheels fell off all that, '79-'80, that was the plan. Bus stops were all built out there, you could see the perfect representation of the diagram, I'm talking about at Neath Hill for example, comes immediately to mind, but there are others, local centre, grid road through the middle, local centre, bus stops there, locals routes, meet city route, you know. And in 1979 or thereabouts, it must have been Thatcher I guess, the bus companies were privatised, they were sold off and at that point the planning of public transport became impossible for the development corporation and for local government, they can only do buses where people want to drive them commercially.

With the privatisation of buses it then became competitive and of course people could drive any buses anywhere they wanted at any time and not understanding how Milton Keynes is different, just to finish the point, how it's different to ordinary towns, they've always tried to run their buses along those local routes, that second grid, yeah, twiddling away down over sleeping policemen and of course the buses take ages and ages and everybody's getting shaken up; whereas it was designed for these buses to go screaming along...

ROGER KITCHEN: And also we're expanding the city. The idea of gridlock, which seems crazy when you think about it 50 years ago with all these flipping roads is now a real issue.

DAVID LOCK: How do you make a city of 270,000 work in a modern age when you're not a transport for London and, you know, and it's all privatised. It's just not being addressed, it's an unfinished argument. And I would say public transport in the modern age for modern cities is a discussion that is not taking place.

STEPHEN POTTER: But that is where smart comes into the agenda because things are changing rapidly. Certainly the technologies are now becoming available where you could actually build a public transport system, not around trains, buses or even minibuses but around highly automated, cleverly designed small vehicle systems.

KATIE RAZZALL: At the Open University we found few students of course, the place that pioneered distance learning for all has grown up with Milton Keynes, arriving here in the late '60s. The Vice Chancellor told us innovation is now part of the growth story.

TIM BLACKMAN: Milton Keynes has really been trail blazing around the use of smart city technologies in order to show how a modern city can deploy all kinds of technologies to improve the environment for business and local residents. So for instance you'll soon be able to download an app onto your phone that enables you to find a parking space in real time, or to book that parking space when you're searching for somewhere to park.

DAVID LOCK: Milton Keynes, you know, it looks another 50 years can become a transport authority. We need transport for Milton Keynes, like you have transport for London, yeah, TFMK, get a grip on this, they can set up a cooperative bus and/or taxi company, you know, owned by its own workers or owned by the people, and it could acknowledge that Milton Keynes is designed in a special way and its transport solution can be and inevitably will be different to ordinary towns because it's just made differently.

STEPHEN POTTER: If you then throw into the mix the other thing that's being explored in Milton Keynes, which are autonomous self-driving cars. You have potentially got an absolute game changer coming up. Places like Milton Keynes are starting to put together the pieces of that jigsaw, so with the big data systems with MK Smart that provides the sort of IT backup for it. The experiments with new types of cab systems, manually driven at the moment but setting up a system that could actually work and then thirdly experimenting with the autonomous vehicles, then we may have very soon a real revolution, so rather than being an absolutely awful place for conventional public transport, which Milton Keynes is. In future it may actually prove to have been the test bed for what will be the future of public transport.

F: Regardless of who we are and what we believe in we have this unique ability to come together to celebrate the things that we have in common. We have all come from somewhere ...[unclear] home. It's a city which has allowed me to be itself. I'm Muslim, I'm British and I'm

a Muslim British woman who misses waking up to a cup of English breakfast tea when I'm away from home. Whenever I go on holiday I can't do without my English cup of tea.

GILES MOHAN: We're seeing a much greater diversity of multi-cultural and diversity within British towns and cities and even in the countrysides now. So that means, you know, how do we understand that, this is in the old kind of lens of big cities. So what we did in our project was to try and say, well can we look at different examples and different types of places? Milton Keynes is a new town, it didn't exist as we know 50 years ago, there was a couple of villages and a load of fields, you have a city, so in a sense everybody is from somewhere else.

M: If we are to grow into kind of elderly people in Milton Keynes, which I think we are, then it might be because so many of us are immigrants. I mean I think all of the people you've heard speak before me have come to MK from somewhere else. I have, I've come from London and maybe it's something about ...[unclear] many of us being immigrants that leads us to be tolerant and welcoming.

ALLAN COCHRANE: Historically, you know, most people who lived here, you know, most of the people who live here didn't live here 40 years ago. I mean the families of most people who live here didn't live here 40 years ago, I mean that's at its simplest. And increasingly we've also seen a shift away from the sort of migration that came to Milton Keynes which was basically, certainly in the periods, the initial periods was basically skilled white working class people moving out. And that's shifted, that's changed, I mean we've now got, Milton Keynes is now beginning to be a much more vibrant and open place for a more diverse population.

GILES MOHAN: So the history of kind of migration and integration policy in the UK was decided that you could have, you had to integrate with a kind of majority English culture but at the same time maintain your own culture, but not too much. Now the debate 10 to 15 years ago following a number of kind of riots and disturbances in certain parts of Britain was, actually that process has gone too far was the perception that, you now have segregated communities. So very famously Trevor Phillips talked about people leading parallel lives. He talked about sleepwalking towards segregation that there was now residential areas in the UK that were almost mono-cultural whether that was sort of, people of Bangladeshi origin or Pakistani origin or, you know, whatever. And this was seen to be a problem.

ROGER KITCHEN: When you met people as, you know, when I was a community worker, met some of those people coming in from London, you know, coming out of London into the rental housing at Galley Hill in those early days, I was frankly a little bit horrified at the amount of people who, it was basically white flight, you know, that was why they were here, you know. They were coming to escape all these black people that were taking over their

neighbourhood. You've now got a, at Milton Keynes, you know, 40-odd years later has got this incredible ethnic mix, well over 30% of people from, you know, non-white, British or whatever, just amazing. And it has made, it has transformed the place and to me in the most wonderful way.

GILES MOHAN: And it was largely a kind of more white British population, but now if you look at the statistics, about 26% of Milton Keynes' population is classed as black and minority ethnic, that was in the 2011 census. Ten years before that it was 13%, so it's doubled in that period. So it's a massive shift and so at 26% of the population, it's above the national average for black and minority ethnic. If you look at some schools, the other thing about Milton Keynes is it's a very young population relative to the national average. So if you look at the school levels, 37% of kids in schools are from a minority heritage background. So, you know, in terms of what the future of Milton Keynes looks like, it's going to be even more ethnically diverse than it is now. The question of why that's happening I think is interesting and I think for people who like Milton Keynes, they like it. It's an interesting, you know, we talked to some residents here and they said, it's clean, it's organised, it's orderly, it's cheaper than London, I can still get to London.

So I think it's a whole set of, you know, it's a nice environment to live in, it's the fastest growing city I think alongside Cambridge in the country, you know, it's a nice place to live. So we're seeing not just migrants from, say from London, which was traditionally where people came from, from Milton Keynes, but people are coming, we talked to people, they'd come from Germany to settle into Milton Keynes, so it's become a destination in its own right as opposed to a kind of stepping stone to somewhere else. Which does create its own issues about how you then manage diverse populations because it's quite a mobile population, people come and go, which makes it quite difficult compared to a very stable population that you might get in some old mill town in the middle of the Pennines for example where people have been there for a number of generations. It's quite different in Milton Keynes, it's a very fluid, mobile population which makes managing multi-culture quite challenging.

LIZ MCFALL: It's like I've had colleagues tell me, oh but it's so white here. And I think, I don't know where you've been because this is not, this is a very diverse place, I mean really diverse and getting more diverse all the time.

ALLAN COCHRANE: There's been a big, that's been a big change and it's a change which I think is partly challenging existing populations that don't quite know what's happened, but it's also something that's been accepted to a large extent, precisely because the populations recognise that everybody's new, you know, we're all new here sort of thing. That's still there I think which is quite important, that's a strength, that's a real strength I think of Milton Keynes.

GILES MOHAN: I mean Milton Keynes is an interesting city for a whole set of reasons, I mean you have these distinct grid squares which create their own neighbourhoods in effect. But if you look at the data there are some concentrations in some of these grid square neighbourhoods. They actually look across all of Milton Keynes, they're actually quite mixed neighbourhoods and I think also mapping onto that isn't just, we get kind of fixated on ethnicity, Milton Keynes is quite a diverse city economically, so if you look at the social class background, so some of those neighbourhoods are more middle class, some more working class and you get black and white working class, you get black and white middle class. And so for example we talked to a number of Ghanaian professionals and, you know, they're fairly spread around the city and live in the same places that other people of their kind of social standing in terms of employment live. So, you know, where they're an accountant there's, you know, a big detached house, they live near other accountants and doctors, you know. And so there's not, so because of that mixed little class basis of the city you do get a more I think mixed residential kind of make up to the city.

IAN REVELL: Community Foundation as part of its endowment of property and land had a whole series of community land sites and the point of that was that they were given to the community via the Community Foundation with the intention that they'd be developed at some point for community uses. So if you go round the city there are plots of land with their logo on saying this is a community land site. Now a number of those have been developed, now in the early days that would have been things like community halls and those sort of things. Interesting the last group of developments have been the Islamic Community Association. They built sort of a, a bit of a Temple and a Community Centre, there's a Synagogue on one.

ROGER KITCHEN: And that fact that you are living in a street in a very diverse community means that these people, you know, people who are your neighbours are of a different culture and everything else and it has meant that, and let's touch wood forever on this thing, Milton Keynes has had the most amazing kind of non-racial tension kind of, it's been that kind of place, it's been a really integrated place. It's added, I just think that, you know, what it started out as, as this very kind of white, you know, yeah very white kind of place is no longer that. And, you know, when you do go to other places that are very mono-cultural or, you know, mono-ethnic or whatever, aren't they bloody boring?

M: It's ringing.

F: Hello.

F: Mum, dad, I've renounced all my possessions and I'm moving to Milton Keynes with my spirit guru and lover/father figure. Keith.

All: Keith.

ROGER KITCHEN: How fair has the media been? Oh well, I...

ANNA ROSE: So much is to do with the power of media because people who have not actually visited will take on another person's view just because of social media and so we're known for our roundabouts, concrete cows and because, you know, of a general view that it's soulless.

DAVID LOCK: It's just the media, it's odd isn't it? I was taught, advised some time ago that, actually you think about this sort of positively. If this persistent snidey, sneering, sarky, destructive attitude from strangers persists it is because they are feeling threatened in some way. They don't get it, they don't understand it, so it's the other, that's one problem for them.

KATY LOCK: At Milton Keynes and the new town's programme as a whole receives a lot of flack in the media. People criticise them for being all concrete, for just being full of roundabouts and being too car-dominated. And those are really lazy arguments, quite often made by people that have never visited a new town, let alone ever lived or worked in one. And if you talk to people that actually live in Milton Keynes or live in the new towns, actually they find quite often they're fantastic places to live, to bring up families and have provided them with a fantastic quality of life.

ALLAN COCHRANE: For those who live here it delivers what it delivers and it delivers what it says on the tin. I mean it delivers the housing, the green space. It delivers the access to high end shopping. It's beginning even to deliver on some of the sort of other cultural aspects. You have access to all sorts of different possibilities in Milton Keynes. It feels good. People feel good about it.

IAN REVELL: Well it is funny, again when you've lived here for a few years you can't help but defend ignorant views of the city, you know. Although it's quite nice sitting there thinking, you don't know what you're talking about.

ALLAN COCHRANE: It is a suburban experience which is better than the suburban experience because it also has the facilities that most suburbs don't have. So it combines those things. I mean that's one of the dangers of course if it's growing too fast and you begin to be a suburb of a suburb that may have a problem. But at the moment there's no doubt in my mind that the, you know, there's high levels of employment, there's easy access to commercial and retail activities of a pretty high standard, there's a green space, the housing's pretty much OK although there are signs in some areas of its deterioration which needs to be thought about. It's got a reasonably good education system. What it hasn't got is the

possibility, the proportion of young people who go onto higher education is lower than in some other cities for a number of reasons. So it's a, you can see why people feel OK about it.

LIZ MCFALL: It is interesting that this is a place that people talk about from outside but they talk about it from outside in a completely different way than people who are inside that talk about it.

ANNA ROSE: It's very easy to look at places that you don't understand and immediately think that you don't like them.

STUART TURNER: I think it's almost human nature, something new, something different, something unfamiliar, it then can become a little bit of an easy target. So whether it's an object or it's a person and you probably see it in your own, you know, it's human interaction really, it's a characteristic that if something is possibly slightly vulnerable then it will be that object of that play.

ALLAN COCHRANE: From the outside that has all the downsides that what I've just said sounds like it might have downsides, it's boring. Everybody just feels, isn't challenged by anything. There's no serious attempt to do anything interesting, you all just sink into obscurity, you can't find anything in Milton Keynes without roundabouts and dual carriageways. It's just obsessed with shopping and, who knows what else people do here, nothing much else to do really. So that's why if you come from elsewhere you might see it in that way.

DAVID LOCK: Well more politious, they're jealous of the opportunities for its growth rate and success story and the positive attitude of the people that live here and it's kind of everything that they, deep down inside they'd like some of that, what have they got, you know. So it's either because it's the other and/or it's because there's a jealousy in there but the chattering classes, you know, sitting over there scrubbed pine tables in Witney or in Islington, they don't get it. They've never been here, it's not for them anyway, we don't want them up here.

THEO CHALMERS: Been two surveys a few years ago, ICM surveys where the people of Milton Keynes overwhelmingly were in favour of the grid system. In the high 80s percentage and that's unusual that they love the place so much, you know, it's a joke isn't it? Outside Milton Keynes people laugh at our concrete cows and our roundabouts. People who live her love it because it is the ultimate user friendly city.

DAVID LOCK: If you move here and I know if you were born and raised here your whole life is people asking you really aggressive questions about how awful Milton Keynes is. And therefore there is a sort of, a tribal defence mechanism and I've had this in several discussion groups where people say, one of the things that binds us together to this place is this sense

that people don't understand us and people are always so damn rude about us even though they've never been here. Now that is a binding thing, yeah.

STUART TURNER: And what I've seen over the years is going to different talks and lectures and meetings is that there are groups of people that I don't know, younger people that are actually passionate about defending Milton Keynes and when the people criticise it. And it's that I find quite reassuring.

JON BOYLE: So I was at work on day, just cracking on with the magazine when I received the call from the BBC, and I thought, OK, what's this all about? And they said Jon, we'd like you as editor of Celebrate MK to come into the studio, defend Milton Keynes, because they said they're interviewing the editor of crap towns and he's been slating Milton Keynes in his book. So that really surprised me, as someone who's grown up in Milton Keynes, I love the place, everyone I know loves the place, no one really wants to move away, yet I'm being called onto our local radio station to defend the place. And even the presenters were having a go at me, you know, they're from places like Bedford, St Albans, saying how wonderful their culture is and I'm sat there all on my own with all of them ganging up on me and attacking me.

THEO CHALMERS: No, I don't think they're defensive enough, you know, I think perhaps we should say more about how great this place is. But people are getting the message because otherwise why are thousands, tens of thousands coming here every year?

DAVID LOCK: But I've contributed I hope this thought that a community under constant snidey and sarcastic criticism, particularly from ignorant people who've never been here, has a particularly bond.

M: Yes, I mean don't advertise it too much otherwise too many people will want to come here and we have to look after the development. I think it's important to say that people are welcome here and it is a welcoming place but we should take none of that for granted. It is diverse and that is a good thing, but we're only at the beginning. We must take care of what progress has been made in that regard.

ANNA ROSE: I suppose the one thing that I've really picked up since I've been working here, and I've only been here two and a half years, is just how strongly people feel about the place. And so I haven't met really anybody who doesn't like it which is different. That, you know, usually in any place there are people who live here who really don't want to be here. I haven't met any of them. Everybody's very drawn to Milton Keynes, to its history and to its future development.

F: When I moved to Milton Keynes I felt really excited actually. I went out for a walk and I walked up above Willen Lakes and, you know, the daffodils were blowing and it was just, I thought this is wonderful.

F: I have a few friends that used to live in Milton Keynes, they moved to London for work reasons and now they really miss living in Milton Keynes. They call it MK paradise and they created a WhatsApp group with all of our friends and when they're stuck in the tube we just remind them that we are five minutes away from home. If you live and work in Milton Keynes it's really a good place to have quality of life.

F: So like I've got family in Aylesbury as well and I've also got family up in Scotland, so when I've had to see them and it's different, but it's a good sort of different, like, but when you see a roundabout and you're like yes I'm home finally.

F: Well having lived in the countryside, in the village, people who knew we were moving to Milton Keynes, they, and have never been here, they rather think it's a kind of concrete jungle and they can't believe that I moved from the country, but when actually in truth I find it easier to walk and get around here than I did living in a village with no footpaths.

ANNA ROSE: And so when we talk about developing a place we, as a council, are seen to have a greater weight of responsibility with us than we would in any other area in terms of that legacy that we are holding. And you do feel that your, when you're creating Milton Keynes for the next generation that you have a real responsibility to make it somewhere near as good as that previous set of planners did. And I think it makes you try that much harder. And that's really thanks to the people that we meet when we're out and about. I think they really push us as individuals, as teams here to try that bit harder to get it right and that's something Milton Keynes should be really proud of, you don't get that in many places.

KATIE RAZZALL: Purpose built down to the very last detail, even lakes like this one, dug out to improve people's quality of life. When they designed Milton Keynes they were also creating a blueprint for growth, could they have been any more successful?

END OF RECORDING