

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



## CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES (CMK)

Revised AUGUST 2018



The Finnis Scott  
Foundation

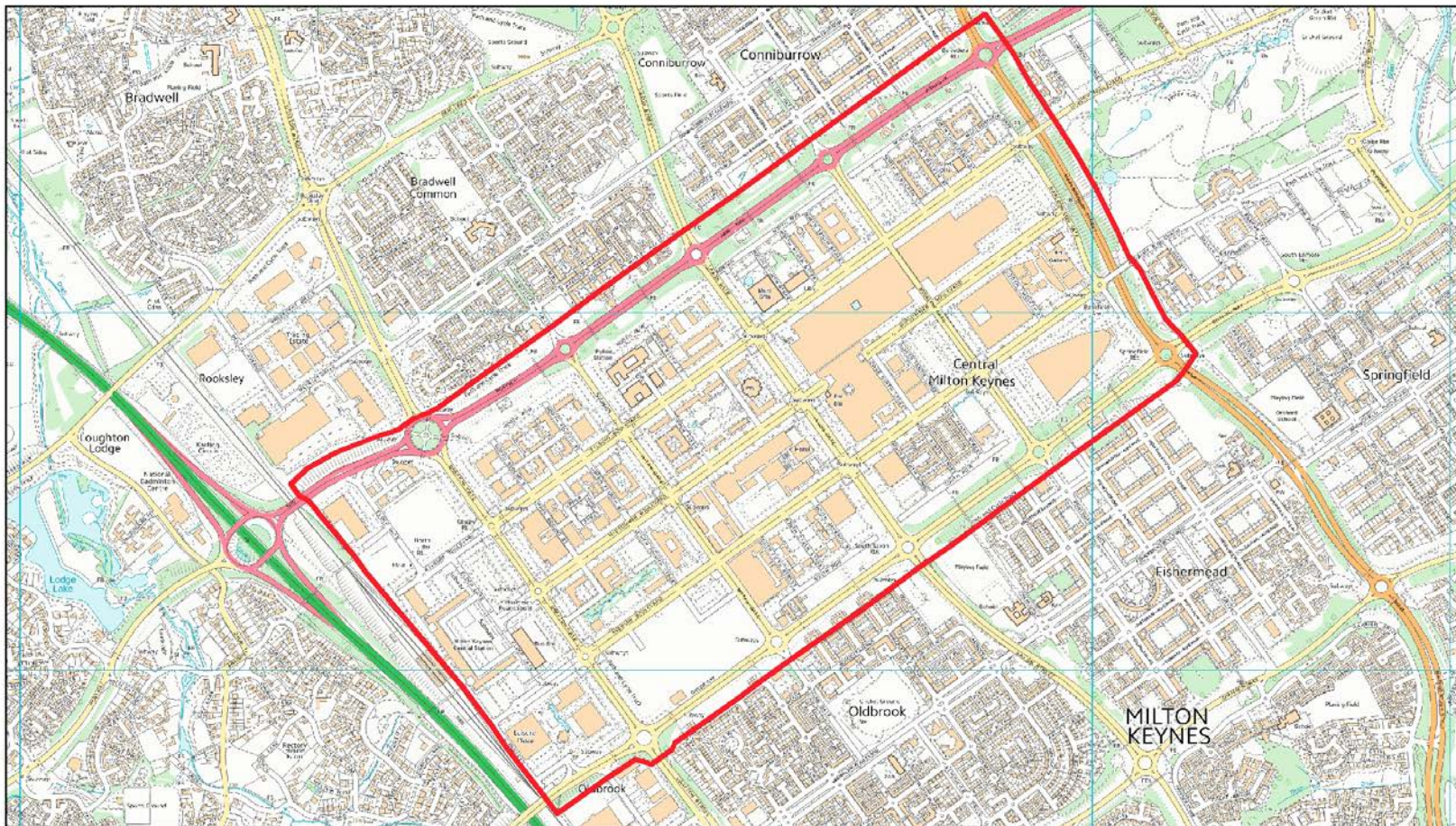


Bucks Gardens Trust



The Stanley Smith (UK)  
Horticultural Trust

# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



## Central Milton Keynes: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
March 2017



Scale: 1:14,431 at A4

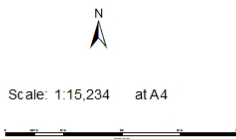


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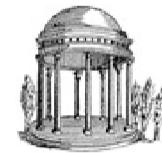




**Central Milton Keynes: 2006 aerial photograph**

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**Bucks Gardens Trust**



## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Project

This site dossier has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not definitive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

### Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained on behalf of BGT by experts in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage/Historic England on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage (now Historic England) *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.
- A map showing principal views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

### Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust and the Finnis Scott Foundation. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record was provided by Milton Keynes Council.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: [www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES (CMK)</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	MILTON KEYNES	
<b>PARISH:</b>	MILTON KEYNES	<b>MK HER: -</b>
<b>OS REF.:</b>	SP 852 388	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Overview:** A particularly fine, possibly the best, example of mid-late-C20 British town planning, designed as the focus of a new city, which survives intact. Milton Keynes is the most advanced and arguably successful of the British mid-late-C20 New Towns and continues to be regarded as a model for planners as far afield as China. As its civic, public and business heart CMK is surrounded by satellite residential and industrial areas, and linear parks, all linked by the innovative grid system of main roads. The layout is studiously formal, with the right-angle as an ordering principle, contrasting with the informal wider cityscape. That such geometrical rigour should be brought to the point of actual construction appears barely possible in an English context (Maxwell, Robert: *A.A. Quarterly* 6 Nos 3, 4). This difference is still embraced as a design principle as Milton Keynes celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary (21 January 2017) and is the UK's fastest-growing city. The original design framework and principles which impart much of its character survive very largely intact, and have been adhered to in the continuous development of the area, as does much of the characteristic landscaping and planting that was as carefully planned, overseen by Neil Higson and Tony Southard of MKDC, to complement the public planting in the rest of the city and is now maturing in its intended form and unity.

In an urban context what is striking about Milton Keynes (and what those who have never visited would not necessarily appreciate) is the extent of the landscaping within this civic centre and the degree to which it is integrated with the wider urban environment. This includes the extensive and deliberate planting schemes both externally and within key buildings. Although the extensive landscape framework, hard landscape detailing and planting are of integral significance, there are focal points of intensive landscaping (see Artistic interest below).

**Archaeological interest:** The archaeological evidence has been extensively studied during the development of the area and is well recorded. The most significant feature incorporated into the design is Secklow Mound (SM 1007940), a Saxon meeting place.

**Architectural interest:** All the buildings forming the city civic centre date from the 1970s onwards and have a variety of scales and functions. Those which are most significant include the Shopping Building (the focus of the site), the former bus station and the Library (D1), all listed at Grade II. While there is no unifying architectural style, some earlier buildings were inspired by Mies van der Rohe and the geometrical form and placing of buildings within the sectors, framed by the broad, open roads (Boulevards and Gates) provides a sense of spatial unity. The early buildings survive largely intact, although some have been altered internally. Atria and other internal landscaped spaces play a key role in several large buildings. The style and uniformity of the original high quality

street furniture in public spaces is a key aspect of the landscape design.

**Artistic interest:** The original landscape concept is of the highest significance for its vision in dealing with such a large-scale civic scheme uniting so many individual sites with hard and soft landscaping. The detailing of the execution including hard landscaping and planting is integral to the historic design and its success. It survives largely intact, including the associated palette of plants which is now maturing to its intended character, and harmonises with the public spaces in the wider city, although somewhat degraded by neglect and thinning of plants. The focal points of intensive landscaping which help to characterise the site include, externally, the three formal access Boulevards, and key public open spaces including Fred Roche (formerly City) Gardens, Grafton Park, Bouverie Square, Station Square and around the Library/Civic Offices; internally, the Shopping Building, and the CBX winter garden. However, the significance of these should not be taken in isolation as they are integral with the rest of CMK design. Modern sculpture formed a key part of the landscaped spaces, developing a collection in spaces public, private, internal and external, some by renowned artists such as Frink. Pevsner (1994) did not consider any of these to be of first rate quality but *Octo*, Sculpture and Reflecting Pool by Wendy Taylor, was listed Grade II in 2016. Some pieces are now deteriorating and require conservation. Although the design deliberately avoided wide-reaching views, localised views are enjoyed, including east from the station up towards the shopping centre, others along the boulevards framed by the avenue trees, one through Fred Roche Gardens east up to the Church, and another west down Grafton Park to The Jaipur.

**Historic interest:** CMK is of high interest as a highly successful example of urban planning, unique to the UK in the later C20. Its development is well documented which contributes to the understanding of its significance, and it has associations with renowned mid-C20 landscape designers such as Peter Youngman and Neil Higson and Tony Southard, and various sculptors of note.

## **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

New towns in the United Kingdom were planned under the New Towns Act 1946 and subsequent legislation to relocate populations in poor housing following World War II. The English tradition in planning new cities was nurtured in the Garden City image, with a markedly informal style.

Milton Keynes was one of the last generation of New Towns, begun in 1967. As such like Peterborough (1967) and Telford (1968) it was conceived as a regional complex and not as an addition to a small settlement as had been the case with the previous generation, such as Runcorn (1964). It was designated in 1967 at the end of several years of discussion about a new town in North Buckinghamshire. In 1964 Fred Pooley, the Buckinghamshire County Architect, proposed a new city of 250,000 between Bletchley and Wolverton linked by monorail. The government's *The South East Study* (1964) also featured a new city based on Bletchley. The final designated area stretched from Bletchley eight miles north to Wolverton and Stony Stratford.

Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) was established in 1967 and commissioned a master plan from Llewellyn-Davies, Weeks, Forestier-Walker and Bor. The notable landscape architect Peter Youngman was landscape consultant, softening the lines of the masterplan, and landscaping determines the aesthetic success of the city (Pevsner; Simms). This was published in March 1970 and accepted in 1971. The plan's wavy net of main roads obeyed the contours of the undramatic undulating landscape and divided it roughly into equal squares of about 1km by 1 km – a

loose arrangement intended to allow maximum flexibility in a town which was predicted to take 20 years to develop. Two grid squares were devoted to the city centre. What was envisaged was a very low density, widely spread car-dependent city, with a high degree of individual privacy and opportunities for leisure activities – a rural English version of the sort of American freeway-linked conurbation (Pevsner). However, according to one of the leading architects involved the inspiration was not principally American; it was historical and global (Mosscrop, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.25). Fred Roche was the influential General Manager in the 1970s.

Most of the land was agricultural and was acquired from individual farmers by negotiation. The land on which CMK was built was mainly wheat, barley or rape. Farmers thought it exposed: “what the bloody hell do you want to build CMK up here for? The last time anybody lived here was in the Iron Age” (Bucks farmer quoted by Henry Diamond in *The Original Story of CMK*, p.47).

The adopted plan for CMK as a regional and civic centre differed from the masterplan, being more rigorously formal (Simms) in order to give it a more distinctive character, with desire lines through the city being provided artistically by the landscape (Walker, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.29). The original architects and planners were mindful of scale and drew on international comparisons such as Haussman (Mosscrop, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.29). Landscaping received especial attention in Milton Keynes after 1977 when a team of landscape architects was formed under Neil Higson (Pevsner). The elements that make Milton Keynes admirable include its bold planning, extravagant landscaping (including CMK) and often exceptional architecture (Pevsner).

The city centre is the infrastructure and the buildings come and go, within an established framework of boulevards and gates, with individual gardens (Pevsner; David Lock, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.93). The multi disciplinary team responsible for the CMK public realm employed a dignified and limited palette of materials for the hard surfaces and infrastructure to impart a visual unity. The regular grid of east-west boulevards and north-south service roads is impressively spacious and logical, designed to accommodate the motor car. This framework is defined by a strong identifiable set of elements, which were planned and implemented by MKDC in the 1980s as a setting intended to provide a coherent background for subsequent development. All this infrastructure was expensively and thoughtfully done and is lasting well. It includes:

- A landscaped hierarchical grid of arterial gates (running north-south) and boulevards (running west-east) and internal access streets within the sectors, all to regulate the traffic flow.
- A parallel grid of slow streets, including North and South Rows, which provide areas for surface level parking and public use.
- Wide, day lit, underpasses with gentle gradients that connect main footpaths seamlessly under busy gates and boulevards.
- Canopies at the entrances to buildings and covered ways (Portes Cocheres) that nudge pedestrians to the safest boulevard crossing point.
- Linkages to neighbouring grid squares, either via wide underpasses or over bridges.
- Granite retaining walls marking the entry points to CMK from surrounding grid roads.

- A carefully selected suite of modern street furniture and the use of silver grey granite for the kerbs, planters, facings and retaining walls; silver grey stone chippings rolled onto asphalt road surfaces on gates and boulevards and silver grey blockwork for streets.

The naming of the Boulevards (Midsummer, Avebury and Silbury) crossing the area parallel from west to east focussed on English heritage, as opposed to any American influence (David Lock, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.103). They were called Boulevards because that's what cities had elsewhere (Ken Baker, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.103). They align on the midsummer sunrise point to the east.

From the start the planting for CMK in the public areas, always a key element, was to get away from a smaller scale horticultural approach to landscape and to move to the large scale of forestry (Andrew Mahaddie, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.99). When the Central Landscape Unit was established in 1977 the basic landscape plan and road structure for CMK were established, but only a small amount of planting had been carried out and this was not in good heart. The formal language of tree species, related to the hierarchy of boulevards and gates, was considered the essential frame for the nucleus of the city. This had to work quickly to establish the city's image, as at the time inevitably some of the office developments were not of the highest standard. Quality of plant material and its successful establishment were essential. In addition evergreen and colour planting were introduced to warm the winter scene and highlight the seasons. (pers. comm. Neil Higson 27/7/18)

In addition to the landscaping framework CMK benefits from some substantial areas of public open space, including Fred Roche (formerly City) Gardens (1980), Station Square (1982-92) and the adjoining Campbell Park (outside the historic site boundary). Smaller public gardens were included in some individual developments and were zoned green in the MKDC planning manual of 1992, including Grafton Park and Bouverie Square. A small public park, Lady Thompson Garden, was laid out as part of the plans for the Theatre and Gallery (1999).

A distinctive feature of the historic Bradwell Common upon which CMK is built was Common Lane, a rural route that in part is believed to have followed the ancient track Portway. Common Lane ran across the Common from Loughton to Secklow Mound (behind Milton Keynes Library on Silbury Boulevard) and from there east to Willen and beyond (*CMK Neighbourhood Business Plan*, 2015). Behind the Library excavations discovered a ditch surrounding a mound on which a Saxon Meeting Place, or Hundred may have stood, Secklow Mound (SM). It was first excavated in 1977/78 and care was taken in the subsequent reconstruction not to disturb the remainder of the mound. It is one of the few examples of its type to be studied through excavation and was incorporated as a feature in the CMK landscape.

Commitment and investment in public art was an explicit part of the development of CMK. Milton Keynes has a large collection of public sculpture, much of which was purchased or commissioned when the city was being built in the 1970s and 1980s (see <http://publicartstrust.org/>). Some of the most influential sculptors of the past 50 years are featured in the city centre, including Dame Elisabeth Frink, Michael Sandle, Bill Woodrow, Dhruva Mistry and Peter Freeman (Milton Keynes Council, *Arts Guide*).

The development of CMK has largely followed the original grid structure and which provides a strong



unifying framework. The main exception is the Midsummer Place shopping development (2000) on the corner of Saxon Gate and Avebury Boulevard. By cutting through Midsummer Boulevard this has interrupted the grid and has caused the greatest loss of legibility (Sarah Whittaker, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.139).

The Development Corporation was wound up in March 1992 and left an approved planning guide for further development. By then the population was 183,000 (Bendixson). Its powers were taken over by the Commission for New Towns (CNT) and by Milton Keynes Borough Council, then a District Council. In 1997 Milton Keynes Council became a unitary authority. CNT became part of English Partnerships (EP) in 1999. In 2004 the government announced that the population of Milton Keynes should double over the next 20 years and the Council's planning powers were given to EP who established a subsidiary body, Milton Keynes Partnership to manage the programme locally. In 2008 EP was absorbed by a new body, the Homes and Communities Agency, which transferred the land to a further new body – the Milton Keynes Development Partnership. This was established in January 2013 as an independent legal entity owned by Milton Keynes Council.

The site is in divided ownership, including Milton Keynes Development Partnership, Milton Keynes Council and a variety of private owners and developers.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING**

The city of Milton Keynes is 50 miles north of London, 20 miles north of Aylesbury and 18 miles west of Bedford, towards the north tip of historic Buckinghamshire. The M1 motorway, the A5 and the west coast main line railway run through the city from north to south, roughly parallel, with the M1 framing the eastern edge. CMK is 5 miles west of the M1, four miles south of Wolverton and five miles north of Bletchley. The railway marks the western boundary of CMK. The city area is c.8,870ha. of which. CMK occupies 250 ha, being c.2.5 km long, west to east and 1 km wide, north to south.

CMK is bounded by three of the main city access roads which form part of the main grid on three sides – Marlborough Street to the west, Portway (H5) to the north and Childs Way (H6) to the south. On the west is the railway and Milton Keynes station. The landscaped corridor around CMK flanking the grid roads is called the Green Frame. It encloses CMK and frames the gateways into CMK as a green setting with planting that reflects the rest of the main city grid roads. Part has been removed along Childs Way to the south, damaging the unity of character. A small war memorial, designed by Tony southward, has been inserted in the Green Frame between Portway, on the north side of CMK, and the Library. The war memorial is in the name of the Memorable Order of Tin Hats, founded in 1927 to help comrades in need. It was unveiled by Lady Pamela Hicks, daughter of Lord Mountbatten in 1982.

Existing and natural features of the Milton Keynes landscape include the valleys of the River Ouze and Ouzel, the Grand Union Canal and the clay plateau which enters the city from the south west and culminates on Bradwell Common at the city centre, which was selected by MKDC as the focal point for CMK. Clay and water are dominant elements and flooding has always been a problem in the city. Within the gentle topography (height difference 60m) land drains to the north along the

Loughton and Ouzel Valleys. There were ancient woodlands at Linford, Shenley and Tattenhoe with scattered trees of significance on the CMK plateau.

The most important alignment within CMK is east from the railway station, across Station Square, up the hill to the Shopping Building. The boulevards were designed so that the undulations prevent views along them in their entirety, e.g. from Campbell Park in the east to the railway station in the west. Some views through buildings are important, e.g. the axis through Fred Roche Gardens (see below). For wider views beyond CMK the green framework to north and south acts as a screen. The best views over the rest of the city and countryside are from height within buildings, especially from the Theatre over Campbell Park and beyond to Bedfordshire in the east, and from The Hub to the west over Buckinghamshire.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The main entry points to CMK from the north and south are by car from Portway and Childs Way and are marked by granite retaining walls turning into the gates which bisect CMK east/west. The regular grid which comprises east to west access boulevards and north-south service roads is impressively spacious and logical, designed to accommodate the motor car; this is a successful plan in many respects. All buildings are accessible by car. Parking regimented in rows in front of the buildings between avenues of trees makes a positive contribution to the streetscape, in contrast to the makeshift arrangements in most towns (Pevsner).

The undulating topography was exploited to prevent views along the entire length of the boulevards (Ken Baker, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.65). The three main boulevards (running west to east) are lined with plane trees, as this was considered to be the best urban tree (Tony Southard, *The Story of the Original CMK*; p.99). They were planned to take 90 years to mature to give scale to the setting and to provide a canopy and a degree of weather protection. This particular species and its extensive use in this way unites the boulevards in a unique scheme. To aid tree establishment and promote longevity, root watering and tree pit drainage were installed throughout (pers comm. Neil Higson 27/7/18). To promote longevity engineers specified tree pits with a drainage system. All the planting in CMK along the boulevards, streets and gates was specified and echoed the planting elsewhere in public places in Milton Keynes, to achieve a uniformity in character, but not necessarily detail. It included many woody ornamentals (plans in CBS), such as *Robinia*, *Buddleia*, *Eleagnus*, *Pyracantha*, *Hypericum*, *Lonicera*, *Salix*, *Roses* and *Cotoneaster*, with bulbs in the spring. In order to allow the planting space to develop, apart from round the edges, it was not densely planted except to get some bulk early on, especially close to the pavements. However, there were always problems with the quality of the maintenance (Tony Southard, *The Story of the Original CMK*; p.101). These problems have continued so that although some of the original planting survives, elements have declined or have been lost.

To the west the main entrance is from the railway station and Station Square. Station Square is by MKDC, along with surrounding office blocks, and is regarded as one of the most remarkable Modernist set pieces in Britain (Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*, p.51). It has been noted as 'A sophisticated and coolly dramatic composition that, because of its position, makes no impact as the termination of an important vista' (Pevsner). The planting around the station, Station Square and the railway line was specified (plans in CBS) and include further flowering woody

ornamentals such as *Prunus kanzan*, *Sorbus*, *Amelanchier*, *Berberis*, *Cotoneaster*, *Forsythia* and *Lonicera*. Some of this survives. The lamp posts formed part of the hard landscaping scheme, in which materials and forms were carefully chosen as a set piece, much of which survives. One of the lamp posts in the square has been replaced and does not match the rest. South-west across Elder Gate from Station Square, the former bus station (listed Grade II), is a free-standing pavilion, influenced by Mies van der Rohe (English Heritage). Original plans survive for the planting around the bus station; the car park to the west is still screened by a row of pines. North of Station Square is a new building, Network Rail's headquarters (2012). The associated planting is notably different from the rest of CMK, based on a more recent palette and design, including ornamental grasses.

North of Station Square is a recent building, Network Rail's headquarters (2012). This is a large scale development, with significant landscaping and planting, both internally and externally. The landscaping contrasts with the rest of CMK, being based on a more recent palette and design, including ornamental grasses.

MKDC laid out wide verges on the main roads (e.g. the Boulevards) and these remain a key part of the landscape and infrastructure design (Mynard and Hunt, *Milton Keynes a Pictorial History*).

### **PERAMBULATION – including both principal buildings and landscape**

This description follows the accepted CMK grid pattern. The sections are numbered 1-4 going north to south and A-E going from east to west. See map at the end of this description.

The description starts with the most important building, the shopping building and its immediate surrounds. Sites featuring gardens which lie between the shopping building and the railway station on the far west of CMK are then covered from east to west. This covers the business district, west of the City Church. Other sites follow on an individual basis.

### **From the Shopping Building to the Railway Station (roughly east to west)**

#### **The Shopping Building (site D2 and E2)**

One of the most significant buildings in Central Milton Keynes is the Shopping Building (listed Grade II) which occupies two grid squares in the east half of CMK flanked by Silbury Boulevard to the north and Midsummer Boulevard to the south. This is reached going east from the railway station (1.3 miles) up the hill along the central Midsummer Boulevard and is on the highest point of the site. It was built 1975-79 by MKDC's Architect's Department under Derek Walker and is described by Historic England as a 'highly regarded, little altered 650m long steel and glass structure, heavily influenced by Mies van der Rohe, and is the outstanding post war retail development in England'. The listing entry also references the high quality finishes and artistic interest in respect of public art works, notably Lilian Lijn's *Circle of Light*.

For Historic England the two public squares (Middleton Hall and Queen's Court) and the two arcades running east/west along the length of the Shopping Building are the most important elements in design terms internally. The clean lines of the arcades are marked by planting and seating and much of the original planting survives. It was designed and planted by Tony Southard, with assistance from Andrew Snoddy of Edinburgh Botanic Garden. On the south arcade, which gets direct sun, there are

cacti and Mediterranean type plants. On the north side plants and trees are more shade loving. The ground was prepared for large trees by digging bore holes to find the water table and the plant beds exceed the surface area of the marble planters by 1m in all directions (Tony Southard, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.117). When first opened the Shopping Building had no doors and was intended for open access. Despite the provision of heated doorways however, the winds and frost destroyed £26,000 of initial planting. (Tony Southard, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.49). The major retailers also insisted in any case on doors for security as well as comfort. This was contrary to the original architectural vision for community space and access (Derek Walker, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.63).

Queen's Court is to the west and is unroofed and Middleton Square is to the east and is enclosed and used for exhibitions and fairs. The geometry of Queen's Court is related to the Boulevards and the building grid and originally included a square pool, with fountain, and pergolas and planting consistent with this geometry. The pool had Cornish granite edging designed to be flat, so the water flowed evenly over the four sides. (Stuart Mossdrop, *The Story of the Original CMK*, p.73). Queen's Court was remodelled in 2010 by Allies and Morrison and the pool and fountain were removed and the sculptures relocated elsewhere in the building. The original planting plans survive (CBS). **The Food Court and the Theatre and Gallery (site E3).**

The Food Court was built by MKDC in 1987-8 and is to the south-east of the Shopping Building. It was built on the same principles, but without its clear logic or quality of materials (Pevsner). It included two arcades with large scale planting on a similar scale to the Shopping Building, which survives. The Theatre and Gallery building is on the far east of CMK, where it adjoins the Green Frame leading to Marlborough Street and Campbell Park.

### **Midsummer Place (site D3)**

Midsummer Place adjoins, but does not touch, the south-west end of the Shopping Building. Opened in 2000, it covers Midsummer Boulevard to the north and therefore damages the original openness of the grid system of boulevards. It was designed by GMW Architects under management guidelines then in place to protect the Shopping Building. It is rescued from banality by the glazed food court at one end and an open square (Oak Court) at the other (Elain Harwood, *Building Design*, 2010). Oak Court was named after an oak tree, which was one of the few randomly sited original trees of significance. This tree was included in the plans for the development and a substantial sum of money was spent on its protection, but it was pronounced dead in 2015. Saplings are growing from acorns harvested.

### **Central Business Exchange or CBX (site C3)**

Central Business Exchange or CBX lies west of Midsummer Place and Saxon Gate. It was begun by MKDC 1983/6 as a business/leisure centre, with office blocks and a hotel. Between the hotel and the leisure centre is an open courtyard garden. On the far west face of the development is a winter garden under a huge slope of glass. The planting was designed by Tony Southard (plans at CBS). It was described as "an unbelievable tropical jungle in the middle of Milton Keynes" (*Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1987). The design took over a year and included 190 species of plants, with a stream, waterfall and terraces. One of the garden's prizes was a majestic Travellers' Palm (*Ravellana sp.*). It was

intended to create a pleasant place for the public rather than the experts. The garden is currently private and belongs to a leisure club, but it is still recognisable from the contemporary description.

### **Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Fred Roche Gardens and Regency and Sovereign Courts (site C2)**

North of the CBX and Midsummer Boulevard is the City Church of Christ the Cornerstone. This was built in 1988-91 by Planning Design Development and has a dome as a landmark feature. Pevsner describes the architecture as confused with the dome and classical features relating to what could otherwise be just another office block. The design incorporated small courtyard gardens to north and south (original design in newspaper feature c. 1989, City Discovery Centre) and these still exist, though in simplified form.

West of the Church a terrace leads to Fred Roche Gardens (formerly called City Gardens), named after the General Manager of MKDC. From this terrace an axis leads to Bouverie Square, sloping down to the west, passing through Fred Roche Gardens, Regency Court and Witan Court to Bouverie Square.

Fred Roche Gardens are bounded to the north and south by buildings which are consistently simple and conforming to the earliest Central MK style (Pevsner). The Gardens feature as a green space on the first maps of CMK and are present as a designed area by 1985. The site is rectangular and slopes gently west. The design has a formal layout with a central brick path and is lined along the north and south sides by alleyways of trees. The eastern section nearest the Church is laid out as an amphitheatre, with terraces, grass and shrubs. The garden is then divided by a walkway running north to south, lined with hedges and trees. The middle section has a pergola, running east/west, part of which is missing. The pergola is set in beds made of brick with lavender hedging. At the western end the garden's final section would have contained a square water tank, but this has been filled in and grassed over. There is a seating area with a number of black metal benches in the original design for Milton Keynes. The garden is notable for three steel sculptures by Bernard Schottlander, 1983 (Pevsner).

Plans exist (CBS) for the site with the design as built and as currently recognisable. Apart from the water tank, the major difference is that one of the plans shows a bandstand with formal beds to north and south. This is to the immediate east of the central path and would have faced the eastern end of the pergola. There is now no obvious trace of the construction and it maybe that it was not built. An early MKDC photograph of the garden (City Discovery Centre) shows the present layout, but with no sign of the bandstand on the proposed site.

West of an access road (Upper Fifth Street) are Regency and Sovereign Court (MKDC 1984-5) and between them a small, rectangular formal garden, quartered by paths. The quarters are laid to lawn and there is a deciduous tree in the north eastern corner, with hedging along the eastern side.

### **Witan Court (site B2)**

Witan Court is immediately west of Sovereign Court, across Witan Gate. Witan Court eschews minimalism in favour of towered gateways and arches (Pevsner). In the centre is a small, circular, courtyard garden, surrounded by beech hedges and ringed by deciduous trees. At the focal point is a water feature, which apparently no longer works.

### **Bouverie Square (site B2)**

Bouverie Square lies west of Witan Court, across the access road, Upper Fourth Street. It is surrounded by buildings from 1987-90 – a ‘hotch-potch’ (Pevsner). The Square’s design is circular with grass, ringed by two sets of trees; the inner evergreen and the outer deciduous. There is shrubbery and hedging in between. Conifer hedges line approaches to north, south, east and west. A drawing (City Discovery Centre) by PDD Ltd for MKDC shows a formal layout with trees surrounding a square, quartered with paths and with a central feature. The accompanying text shows that this location was intended to have the feel of a London square and Pevsner comments on this similarity.

### **Other Sites**

#### **Milton Keynes Central Library (site D1)**

The Central Library (listed Grade II) is in the north-east quarter, on the north side of Silbury Boulevard, facing the north-west end of the Shopping Building to the south. It was built by Buckinghamshire Architects’ Department (1979- 81) and was intended to be the first stage in a building to include also a museum and offices. The Library has a commanding façade, with subtly detailed principal spaces and a small but diverse collection of public art (Historic England). Behind the Library reference has already been made to the Secklow Mound (SM).

#### **Milton Keynes Council Offices (site D1) and adjoining Norfolk House and Ashton House**

The Council Offices stand immediately west of the Library, also facing the Shopping Building across Silbury Boulevard to the south (1977-9 by Faulkner-Brown Hendy Watkinson Stonor (Pevsner)). Narrow rectangular beds are set into the ground to the front and sides, with brick walled beds along the west side. These are now largely filled with *Berberis*, or are empty. Intended planting included drifts of *Crocus tommasinianus*, hardy geraniums and formal box hedging, as well as shrubs such as *Hebe*, *Amelanchier*, holly, *Pinus mugo* (plans at CBS).

West of Saxon Gate from Council Offices are Norfolk House and Ashton House (MKDC 1975-9), two long parallel slivers of mirror glazed offices (Pevsner), with landscaped grounds including the stainless steel sculpture Octo by Wendy Taylor.

#### **Grafton Park (site B3)**

Grafton Park lies in the south-west quarter between CBX and the former Bus Station. It is in contrasting style to Fred Roche Gardens, but plans or early photographs are elusive. It is bounded to the east by Witan Gate House (PDD Architects 1989-90), by more recent office developments to the north and south, and by the Jaipur Restaurant to the west. It featured as a major green space from early MKDC plans and from about 2000 was included in street indices as Grafton Park. The long, fairly narrow rectangular site slopes east to west and is surrounded by shrubs and hedging. The ground has been sculpted into interesting landforms and to mound the northern and southern sides planted with birch and pines. At the eastern end a large informal pool is surrounded by bamboo and birches. This feeds a small stream, or rill which flows down the site through waterfalls to a more formal, central round pond. From here the stream flows more gently to disappear at the garden’s western boundary. The stream interconnects with the main path running east-west, with metal grids

to act as bridges for pedestrians. The path is lined with ornamental grasses and sedges and the garden is laid to lawns leading up to the boundary shrubbery. A number of silver metal benches in the original CMK style form features, plus a metal sculpture in the north-east corner, possibly called The Kiss and rescued from a London Business site (pers. comm. Neil Higson 27/7/18 - the sculpture has no label and is not included in the Milton Keynes Arts Guide).

### **Saxon Court and Sentry Court (now Westminster House) (sites C4 and D4)**

Saxon Court and Westminster House are on the south side of CMK, flanking the central Saxon Gate. They were designed in 1980-81 by MKDC and are very regular, each with a central atrium of two galleries. The atrium planting was designed by Tony Southard (Saxon Court: Notes on Landscaping by Tony Southard: City Discovery Centre). The galleries were lined with boxes of *Philodendron* designed to hang down. On the atrium floor in each building were four square beds geometrically spaced with large leafy plants. The cost was £19,000. The trees included *Albizia*, palms, banana and cassia. Some of this planting still exists.

### **The Hub (site C3)**

The Hub (2006) is to the south of CBX and includes hotels, offices and residential apartments. It is higher and denser in scale than earlier developments. In the centre is an open space with fountains, surrounded by large planters set with birch trees.

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Personal comments by Neil Higson, former Chief Landscape Architect, MKDC; 27/7/18

## MAPS

Heron Maps, *Milton Keynes Official City Atlas* (editions of 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1985).

## OTHER MEDIA

BBC News report 20 May 2013 on influence of Milton Keynes on Chinese New Towns  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-22594623>

## ARCHIVAL ITEMS

### Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

Within D-MKDC/5/2/4/11 (plans):

L3/16/202/1/4 and L3/16/202/1/4

L3/16/200 to 254

Within this L3/16/202/1/4 -7 dated 1981-4 includes plans of various parts of MK - predominantly Bradwell Common and Fred Roche Gardens/Silbury Court, also tree planting on Midsummer Blvd.

### Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre,

B060, Beazer to build new "cathedral" for MK.

B060, *MK Citizen* (24 July 1994), [Witan Court].

B060/43, Bouverie Square.

B060/43, "London" Square for CMK.

B060/43, *Daily Mirror*, 21 May 1987, CBX planting: City Discovery Centre.

B060/43, Marketing Brochure, Regency Court.

B060: 71.8 Notes on planting in Food Hall 1988.

Southard Tony, 'Saxon Court: Notes on Landscaping', 10 May 1985.

Jill Stansfield & Gill Grocott November 2016

SR edited 13 June 2017

Amended with comments and appendix by Neil Higson, former Chief Landscape Architect MKDC, August 2018.



## **Appendix One**

### **Brief Outline of the Milton Keynes Landscape Design Team – Neil Higson, Chief Landscape Architect MKDC, July 2018**

I worked with Fred Roche in Runcorn New Town. When Fred was head hunted as General Manager of Milton Keynes in 1975 he asked me to join him to lead the landscape design team. I attended an interview with him and Derek Walker, Chief Architect. Fred wanted to appoint me and Derek wanted to appoint Tony Southard, a qualified architect, planner and landscape architect. A compromise was reached, Tony and I were offered parallel jobs.

There was still a lot to do in Runcorn and I had developed a strong liking for the place and its people so after serious consideration I turned MK down. My wife and I started a small landscape practice in 1975. We were offered some work in Milton Keynes. One of the first projects was Willen Lakeside. Two years later I was drawn into MKDC to start the Central Landscape Unit which grouped together all the landscape architects already employed and strengthened the team.

Under Derek Walker's leadership the previous regime had been dominated by architects and architecture. Derek and I pursued very different design philosophies. His was much affected by "modernism"; mine was strongly influenced by the Garden Cities movement, national parks and the very varied landscapes of Great Britain. He saw the landscape task as creating "the labyrinth of freedom" for the people of the new city.

In CMK Derek's approach was completely appropriate. It gave clear structure and dignity to the centre containing the conglomerate of commercial developments MK had to accept at that time, and presented the magnificent shopping building beautifully.

Tony Southard became my deputy in the Central Landscape Unit and group leader for CMK.

We had to turn concepts into reality. The planting component of the Centre was struggling due to unfavourable ground conditions and extreme drought. It was not always an easy task however to find intelligent understanding in some other professionals. Valuable support came from Recreation Unit foresters and arboriculturists and their leader Brian Salter.

## Appendix Two

### Central Milton Keynes: Provisional List of Public Art

#### The Shopping Building (site D2 and E2)

**The Conversation**, 1995. Nicolas Moreton – Kilkenny black fossil limestone and bronze – in north west corner (external)

**The Meeting**, 1995. Nicolas Moreton – Birds eye Derbyshire fossil limestone and bronze – three panels as focus of small amphitheatre in north west corner (external)

**Flying Carpet**, 1989. **Dream Flight**, 1989. **High Flyer**, 1989. Philomena Davis -Bronze (in planters in Silbury Arcade)

**Vox Pop (The Family)**, 1988. John Clinch – bronze – in Queens Court

**Circle of Light**, 1980. Liliane Lijn – aluminium and copper wire in Midsummer Arcade

**A Mighty Blow for Freedom \*\*\*\* the Media**, 1988. Michael Sandle – bronze – on south side (external)

#### The Food Court and the Theatre and Gallery (site E3)

**Dangerous Liaisons**, 1995. Philip Jackson – bronze

**Paparazzi**, 1996. Steven Gregory – bronze

**The Object**, 1995-97. Dhruva Mistry – stainless steel

The following three works are inside the **Theatre**:

**Moon Drawing**, 1999. Alison Turnbull – graphite and ink on concrete

**Wallwork**, 1999. Michael Craig-Martin – laser cut mild steel

**Electric Sheep**, 2003. Bruce Williams – laser cut images into steel and glass lightbox

**Xscape**, 2000. Diane Maclean – polished stainless steel (to the south of site E3, by the Xscape building).

#### Midsummer Place (site D3)

All three works internal

**Sitting on History**, 1996. Bill Woodrow – bronze

**Midsummer Place Glass**, 2000. Ann Smyth – coloured, carved and etched glass

**Frog Clock**, 2000. Kit Williams – mixed materials, mechanical

#### Central Business Exchange and The Hub (site C3)

**Winter Garden Panels**, 1988. Jeremy Turner, Mark Adams and Christine Tacq – sycamore and watercolour (forms the cladding for a column within the garden – not publicly open)

**The Space Between**, 1992. Ellis O'Connell – patinated bronze with fibre optic elements

**Lightflow**, 2007. Peter Freeman – digital LEDs and mirror stainless steel – The Hub square

#### Christ the Cornerstone and Fred Roche Gardens (site C2)

**City Church Cross**, 1991. Alan Evans – steel

Bernard Schottlander – painted steel:

**3B Series No 5**, 1966-68

**2M Series No 4**, 1960s

**3B Series No 2**, 1968-69

**Milton Keynes Central Library (site D1) and environs**

Boyd and Evans - acrylic on canvas – both works inside the Library:

**Ficton, Non Fiction and Reference**, 1984

**Some Day**, 1984

**The Whisper**, 1984. Andre Wallace – bronze

**Black Horse**, 1978. Elizabeth Frink -bronze (to the west of the Library outside Lloyds Court)

**Milton Keynes Council Offices (site D1) and environs**

Stephen Gregory – acrylic on canvas – both works inside the building:

**Catwalk**, 1977

**City Centre 1**, 1977

**Octo**, 1980. Wendy Taylor – stainless steel, water (to the west of the Council Offices, across Saxon Gate)

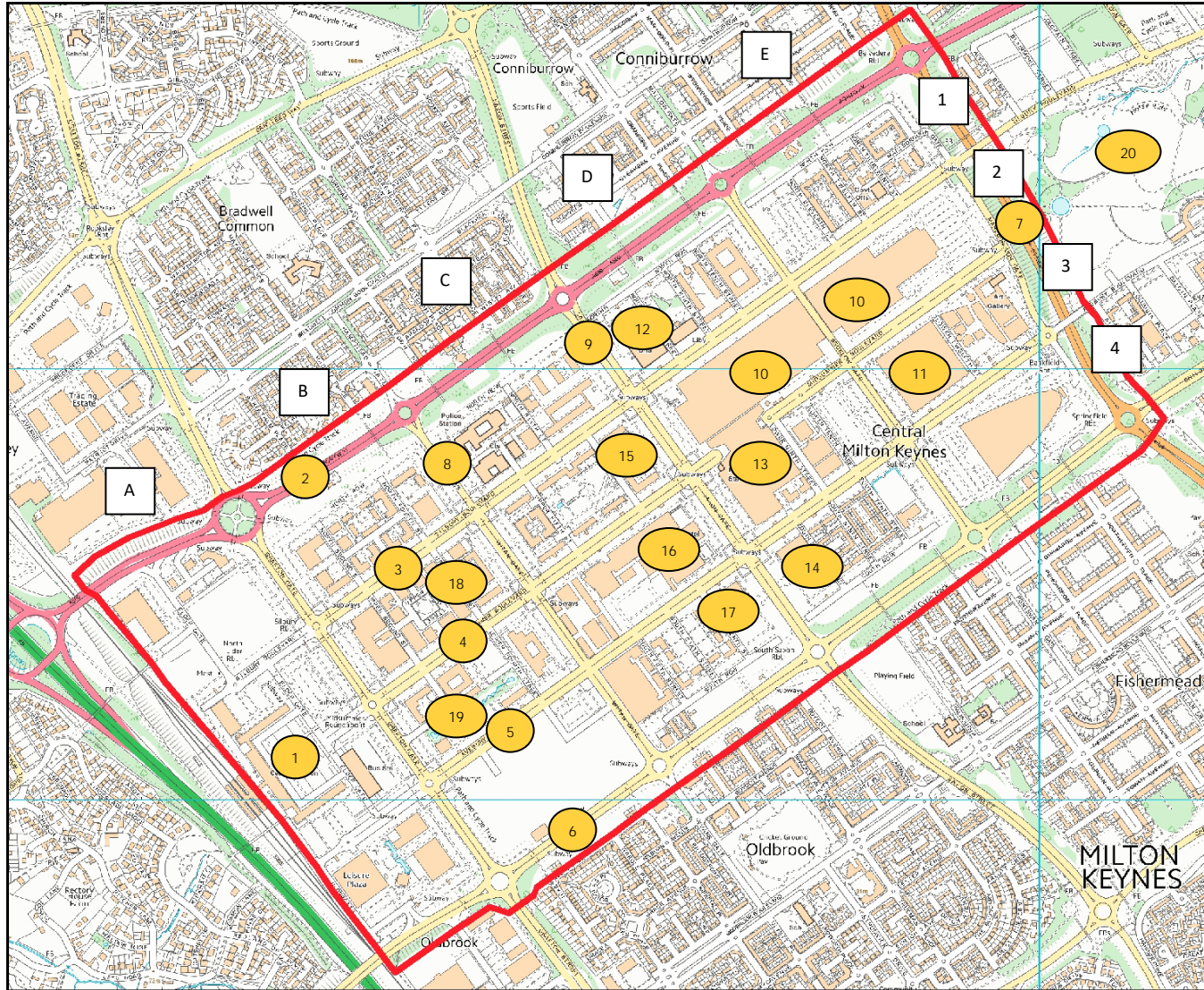
**Saxon Court (site D4)**

**Essence**, 1982. Wendy Taylor – bronze – external on Avebury Boulevard

**Station Square (site A2)**

**O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast**, 1984. Ronald Rae – hand carved Scottish granite

# KEY HISTORIC FEATURES

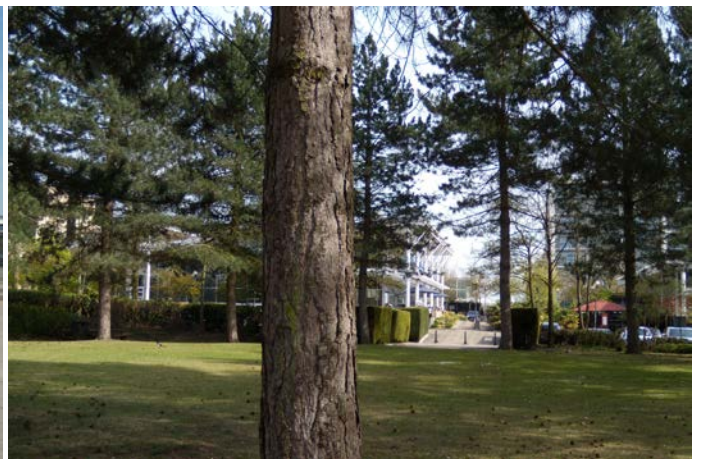


1. Railway station, Station Square & Bus Station (A2/3)	2. Portway
3. Silbury Boulevard	4. Midsummer Boulevard
5. Avebury Boulevard	6. Childs Way
7. Marlborough Gate	8. Witan Gate
9. Saxon Gate	10. Shopping Building (D2 & E2)
11. Food Court, Theatre, Gallery (E3)	12. MK Central Library, council offices & Secklow Mound (D1)
13. Midsummer Place (D3)	14. Saxon Court (D4)
15. Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Fred Roche Gardens (formerly City Gardens) (C2)	16. Central Business Exchange (C3)
17. Westminster House (C4)	18. Witan Court & Bouverie Square (B2)
19. Grafton Park (B3)	20. Campbell Park

## CURRENT IMAGES



Station Square (left); Bus Station now the Buszy (right).



Station Square looking east from station (left); Bouverie Square (right).



Midsummer Boulevard, view eastwards (left);  
Porte cochere and shopping building from Midsummer Boulevard (right).



View west along Avebury Boulevard (left); Shopping building north arcade with planting (right).



Grafton Park.



Grafton Park, dry rill.



Grafton Park view to The Jaipur (left); The Space Between, 1992. Eilis O'Connell, Exchange Square (right).



Fred Roche Memorial Gardens (formerly City Gardens MK) including a sculpture by Bernard Schottlander



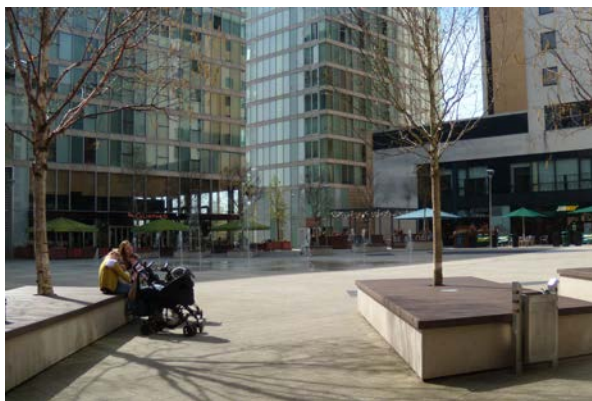
Fred Roche Memorial Gardens and Christ the Cornerstone Church (left); pond filled in (right).



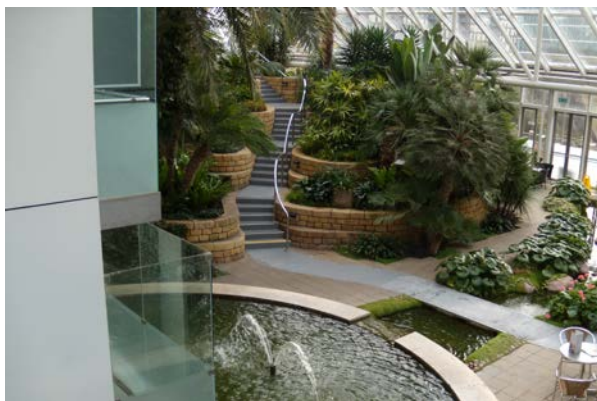
Summer Court, a courtyard garden in the CBX - between the Holiday Inn (west) and Winter Garden (east)



Witan Court, derelict water feature (left); cherry tree avenue near Grafton Park, note dieback (right).



Water features near The Hub (left); Octo, Wendy Taylor, 1980, Silbury Boulevard (right).



Above: CBX: the Winter Garden from various angles, designed c1984.