Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Ouzel up the hill, with ridge and furrow, towards St Mary's Woughton on the Green

OUZEL VALLEY PARK, MILTON KEYNES

December 2019

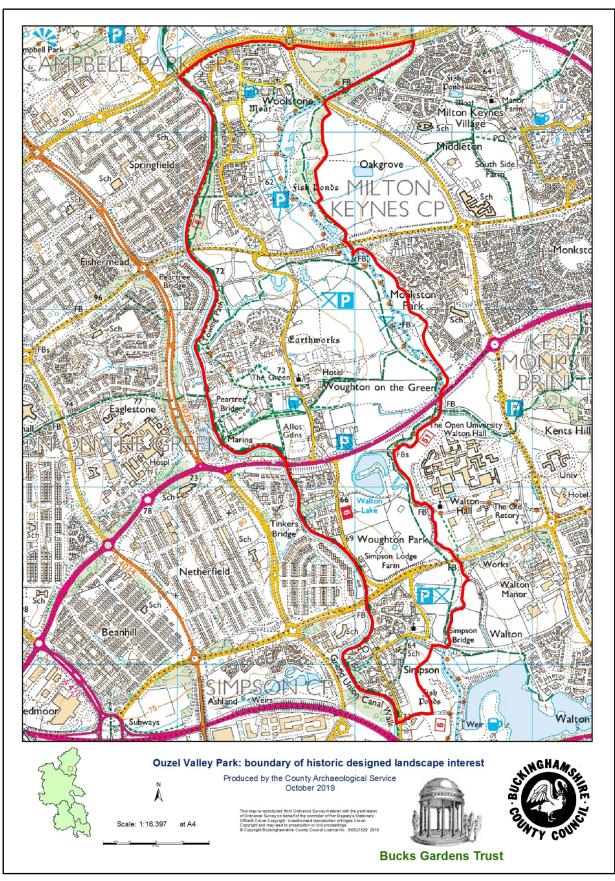




The Finnis Scott Foundation



Bucks Gardens Trust



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



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* 2nd *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, the Finnis Scott Foundation, BCC and other donors. 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

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	OUZEL VALLEY PARK, MILTON KEYNES
DISTRICT:	MILTON KEYNES	
PARISH:	MILTON KEYNES	MK HER: -
OS REF.:	SP 875378, Old Woughton; SP861395 Campbell Park; SP881360 Simpson and Ashland	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

This report is one of a group covering the landscape of the new town of Milton Keynes. The others to date are on Central Milton Keynes, Campbell Park, the Willen Lakes and the Tree Cathedral at Newlands.

The Ouzel Valley Park is a large public park and one of the three naturalistic linear parks which were key parts of Milton Keynes Development Corporation's planned cityscape, enhancing the original landscape of rolling undramatic countryside to provide a new landscape character of sufficient strength to contain new city developments *and create significant areas of useable countryside within the city boundary*. The linear parks follow the valleys of two small rivers, the Ouzel and Loughton Brook, together with the larger valley of the River Ouse, to the north. They form the recreational and environmental lung of the city, as well as being an essential component of managing flooding. The Ouzel Valley Park is part of an integrated planned landscape linking the Ouzel Valley, the Willen Lakes, which are fed by the Ouzel, the Tree Cathedral at Newlands and Campbell Park, the city park of Central Milton Keynes.

All development of the park areas of Milton Keynes was designed around a framework of "strings, beads and settings" (original design guide and pers. comm. Neil Higson, former Chief Landscape Architect). The strings are linear footpaths, cycleways, greenways and riding trails. Beads are activity centres and "places" such as the orchard and allotments in Woughton on the Green. The setting is the visually or physically public landscape which makes up the body of the park. Land uses in this area include grazing, sports grounds, lakes, wildlife zones, events areas etc., many of which generate income which contributes to the management costs of the parks.

The Ouzel Valley Park is part of a landscape system where the detail of the materials, types of horticultural features and planting all work together with the natural and artificial topography to produce an outstanding unified design. It survives intact and continues to be developed in similar character following the original vision.

Archaeological interest

The archaeological evidence has been extensively studied during the development of the area. Evidence of Neolithic, Bronze Age, late Iron Age/Romano-British, Saxon and later medieval settlement. From at least the early medieval period the land was agricultural. There are medieval fish ponds along the Ouzel. The Grand Union Canal, which borders the site, was constructed between 1802 and 1805. A number of ancient monuments are found, see Appendix Two for details.

Architectural interest

The Park relies for its contemporary design largely on natural landform, with some construction to create, for example, a viewpoint over the River Ouzel to the Woolstones. The Park includes within its setting the original medieval villages of Great and Little Woolstone, Woughton on the Green and Simpson, all of which feature listed

buildings mostly of modest, domestic scale, apart from a number of churches. See Appendix Two for details. The Park was designed around these settlements to provide an attractive location for new housing in this area of the new city. These estates were designed or strongly influenced MKDC architects and associates in a variety of styles which are described in some detail by Pevsner.

Artistic interest

The Ouzel Valley Park is part of an ambitious publicly-funded park system on a scale rarely achieved in later C20/C21 England, building on the traditions set by the best of C19 public parks, such as Birkenhead, Merseyside and Central Park, New York. In scale of ambition and unity of design the group of Milton Keynes landscapes to which the Ouzel Valley Park belongs (the Willen Lakes, the Tree Cathedral and Campbell Park) is comparable with the Thames Barrier Park, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the Olympic Park, but in style and character these are all very different. The Ouzel Valley Park is laid out in latter day naturalistic English landscape style providing a setting for new urban development and enhancing the attraction of existing small villages. The views are carefully manipulated both within and beyond the park to take advantage of the gently rolling topography.

Historic interest

The Ouzel Valley Park is of high historic interest as part of a set of designed landscapes for public use developed in the later C20 in England, and for its high quality of design and survival intact.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Ouzel Valley Park was planned by Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) as part of the overall scheme for Milton Keynes New Town. Milton Keynes was designated as a new town in 1967 and MKDC was established in the same year. The Master Plan was published in 1971 and its landscape was worked out in its broad outlines from the beginning (*Pevsner*); as MKDC considered high quality parks and green spaces important, not only for the outdoor activities of residents and visitors, but also to establish a green image for the new city and as a desirable setting for its buildings. Neil Higson was appointed Chief Landscape Architect in 1977, grouping together all landscape architects already employed and strengthening the team. According to Higson (pers. comm. 2018) MKDC had previously been too strongly influenced by architects and architecture.

The Ouzel Valley was one of three linear parks, mainly following the three (the other two being the Ouse to the north and Loughton Brook to the west), river valleys running through the city area, which were an important foundation of this new landscape. In addition to forming the recreational and environmental lungs of Milton Keynes, they contained an extensive network of leisure routes and a series of large balancing lakes for flood control and water recreation. (Higson, Usherwood, Southard). The original area of the Park was farmland, mainly pasture along the river valley, with settlements going back to pre-historic times. The predominant tree species across Milton Keynes had been elm, but this had been eliminated by Dutch elm disease by 1977. Along the Ouzel were specimens of once pollarded willow. Work was started in the early 1970s and took about 20 years to complete (maps published by MKDC and successor bodies), beginning in the south and west, with the area on the north east bank of the Ouzel being the last to be landscaped.

MKDC developed a set of design principles for major landscaped areas (see Appendix One). These were described as "settings", "beads" and "strings". "Settings" were those areas which formed the majority of the open space and in the Ouzel Valley Park were planned to cover productive woodland, areas for stock grazing, fenced horse paddocks, sports grounds, flood balancing meadows, an orchard, a vineyard, allotments and wildlife environments. "Beads" were the focal areas for specific activities and in the Ouzel Valley Park included pubs, play areas, sports centres, conserved historic features, a canal boat marina, car parking and picnic areas. "Strings" were the network of

corridors connecting open spaces within Milton Keynes and in the Ouzel Valley Park include footpaths, cycle ways, the canal and its tow path and existing lanes and roads (pers. comm Neil Higson April 2019).

An important part of the Ouzel Park *development* plan was its role in providing an outstanding setting for quality housing in the Woolstones and Woughton on the Green grid squares (pers. comm. Neil Higson May 2019). This new housing was set within and around the historic villages of Great and Little Woolstone, Woughton on the Green and Simpson, which were included in the Park design and were within its boundaries.

MKDC was wound up in 1992 and a charitable trust, Milton Keynes Parks Trust (MKPT), was established to be responsible for parks and green spaces in Milton Keynes. MKPT was given a 999 year lease, with a property endowment to provide a revenue stream and it retains responsibility for the Ouzel Valley Park along with other parks and green spaces in Milton Keynes.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

The 304 ha. site runs along the east side of Milton Keynes from just south of the Willen Lakes in the north to Simpson Village in the south, a distance of about 4km. To the west of the Park boundaries are the largely residential areas of Springfield, Peartree Bridge and Tinkers Bridge. To the east, beyond the Park boundaries are Oakgrove and Monkston Park, both also largely residential. To the south is Walton Hall, where the Open University is located.

The Park is bounded by Childs Way (H6) to the north, by Simpson Road to the South, by the Grand Union Canal (built between 1802 and 1805) to the west and by a strip of land which runs along the east bank of the Ouzel to the east. We would usually exclude the settlements, but it is very difficult in this case to do this as the Park is so closely designed to envelope them. They have therefore been included because their visual relationship with the wider Ouzel Valley Park was integral to the design. The landscapes within the settlements are self-contained; it is their relationship with the wider Ouzel Valley Park design that is the important aspect.

The Park takes the form of a broad green corridor along the River Ouzel, which flows north to join the Ouse at Newport Pagnell. Whilst the river is largely in its natural bed, the canal has been landscaped with a broad-walk, lined with poplars, as well as the original towpath (Ouzel Valley Park: Milton Keynes Parks Trust, 1992).

The land slopes gently towards the east and the soil is mainly Oxford clay, overlaid with glacial drift deposits and river gravels. The area has a long history of settlement, shown by several Ancient Monuments within the site and includes a number of villages, dating to at least Saxon times, built on the higher ground on the west bank of the Ouzel. These were included in the original Park design. Earthwork surveys show a dense pattern of ridge and furrow field systems, especially towards the southern end of the Park. Agriculture continued as the main economic activity until the development of the new town, and this is shown by the limited change in the landscape until then, with the field pattern established after the enclosure movement in the late C18 largely remaining within the Park (details of Ancient Monuments and listed buildings within the site are given in Appendix Two).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Four grid roads cross the Park horizontally in order north/south: Childs Way (H6), Chaffron Way (H7), Standing Way (H8) and Groveway (H9). These are landscaped by mounding with trees and shrubs to complement the landscape. They are connected by Newport Road, which runs north/south and which pre-dates the new town and provides access to the Ouzel Valley Park for motorists. There are parking sites at Woolstone, Woughton on the Green and Simpson.

Access for pedestrians and cyclists is via a network of paths and cycle routes, consistent with the design policy of establishing green corridors, or 'strings'. These routes connect it to the Willen Lakes to the north, to Caldecotte Lake to the south and to housing estates and villages, both within the Park and beyond, in Oakgrove and Monkston Park to the east and Springfield and Peartree Bridge to the west. Paths and cycleways in some areas cross and enable the experience of the ridge and furrow patterns of the farmland, the canal and its towpath, and existing lanes and roads.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Ouzel Valley Park is a naturalistic linear Park broadly following the line of the River Ouzel. The landscape is complex (pers. comm. Neil Higson 2019) and was designed in terms of the 'strings', 'settings' and 'beads' park development principles, see Appendix One, with examples described below. It includes within its boundaries the existing villages of the Woolstones, Woughton on the Green and Simpson, which act as "beads" within the park "settings" of grazing areas, paddocks etc and which formed the nucleus of new housing developments in the Park by MKDC. The site description is divided into three, corresponding with the area of the Park adjoining each of these villages, proceeding north/south.

The northern section adjoining Great and Little Woolstone

This section is approximately 1.2 km in length and the Park is constrained by the narrow area between the Ouzel and the Grand Union Canal. The park landscape is a setting for the villages of Great and Little Woolstone and the new development built by MKDC. To ensure the quality of this setting great emphasis was placed on creating significant green links between the park by the Ouzel and the Canal. In Woolstone these included allotments, paddocks, a cricket green, play facilities, planned open spaces, and incorporated ancient monuments. A connected path network strung these features together, along with the provision of small car parks (*pers. comm. Neil Higson, 2019*).

At the northern end of the Park is the Poplar Tree Plantation, planted with a mix of 19 species including rare varieties. This occupies the triangular area between Childs Way, Brickhill Street (also part of the grid road system running north/south) and the River Ouzel, forming the south/east boundary.

Within the boundary of the Park, to the south and west of the Poplar Plantation, the villages of Great and Little Woolstone lie between the River Ouzel and the Grand Union Canal and are linked in a loop by one old lane (Newport Road) and one new one (Pattison Lane). There are a number of historic buildings and scheduled monuments (see Appendix Two for more detail) and clusters of housing developments designed by MKDC and associates and some private architects.

Holy Trinity, Mill Lane, Little Woolstone, has C13 features and was turned into a community centre by MKDC. On the west bank of the Ouzel, south of the church, is a good rectangular moat, with adjacent fishpond (Pevsner). To the west of Holy Trinity is Church Farm, dating from c1600. Other historic buildings in this area are the C19 Cleobury Farmhouse, converted to offices by MKDC in 1986, the mostly late C17 Manor House and the School of 1861 (Pevsner). Pevsner describes the housing by MKDC, built both amongst the older village buildings and along Pattison Lane, as having a variety of styles and influences. In the centre of the village are a cricket green and children's play facilities.

Great Woolstone is to the south down Newport Road. Holy Trinity Church dates from 1832-33, replacing a medieval building, and Manor Farm Cottage and Hill Farm are both C18. The Rectory is by William Butterfield, 1851, though only parts of the original remain. The design influenced the steep roofs and dormers of Hughes and Bicknell's terrace housing of 1984-8 (Pevsner). To the east of the church is a complex of fishponds, probably manorial, fed from the

Ouzel with traces of a moat south of the church.

To the west the Woolstones are bounded by a narrow strip of landscape running parallel with the Grand Union Canal. This forms the western boundary of the Park. Beyond this and outside the Park is Springfield.

To the east there is a broader area of landscape within the Park between the villages and the Ouzel. This area features from north to south the medieval moat, paddocks, allotments, the site of the medieval fishponds and areas for grazing with some mature willows on the river bank towards the southern end.

At this point the Park on the east bank of the Ouzel is a relatively narrow strip, planted with willows, running north/south from the Poplar Plantation to a crossing over the Ouzel just south of Chaffron Way. At mid-point the area broadens to include a small viewing platform, constructed in c.2000. This has views over the river and reed beds and the site of the former fishponds to the west.

This narrow strip of land forms the eastern boundary of the Park at this point. Beyond the Park is the ongoing development of Oakgrove.

The middle section: Woughton on the Green

In the middle section (approximately 1.5km in length) the area between the Ouzel and the Canal widens considerably and the Park settings broaden out into field and pasture between Newport Road and the Ouzel. Part of this is to accommodate flooding. The area on the east bank of the Ouzel at this point becomes a narrow barrier strip to screen housing developments in Monkston Park, beyond the Park boundary. Beyond the Canal to the west, outside the Park, lies the housing development of Peartree Bridge.

In the west section, between Newport Road and the Canal is the village of Woughton on the Green, including new housing built by MKDC, together with a range of features which provide a setting for quality new development within the Park. The different areas are linked by a network of paths and cycle ways. The Park retains much of the post enclosure field system, with original ridge and furrow. There are clumps of trees along the Ouzel, including mature willows, some of which are used for the manufacture of cricket bats.

At the north end of this section, on the west side of Newport Road is a water garden for wildlife surrounded by protected groups of trees, with paddocks to the north. On the east side of the road is an overflow pond for the water garden, with a small car park and picnic site.

Woughton on the Green lies approximately 0.5km within the Park, to the south of the water garden along Newport Road. The church of St Mary's lies just to the east of Newport Road. It is medieval, restored in the C19 (Pevsner). Immediately to the north on Newport Road is Woughton House, now a hotel, built c1840 (Pevsner). Both the churchyard and the hotel grounds have the remaining original mature trees and are features within the Park landscape.

West of the church, stretching from Newport Road to the Canal is the village green, the largest in Buckinghamshire (Hunt, Julian presentation, 19 November 2018), accessed via a road called The Green, which leads from the church to a bridge over the Canal. On the south side of The Green is The Olde Swan Inn and some picturesque timber framed and thatched cottages and small farms, all originating from the C16 and C17. At the north-west corner of The Green are two large farms: Peartree Farm, c.1825 and Manor House, c19 with earlier features (Pevsner), details in the Appendix. To the north of the Green is a small field with remains of pre-enclosure buildings and an ancient

trackway. Surrounding this field, the houses of the late 1980s, laid out in a small wedge, are large and expensive and in a variety of architectural styles (Pevsner).

South of the Green, between Newport Road and the Canal are a large (about 0.3km in length) community orchard, planted with old English varieties, an extensive area of allotments and there are links to the west through to the Milton Keynes Marina on the Canal. To the east of Newport Road and adjoining Standing Way (H8), to the south, are sports facilities, with a vocabulary of both hard and soft landscaping, floodlit areas, changing pavilions and car parking.

The southern section: Simpson Village

The southern section is around 1.2km in length. South of the village of Woughton on the Green the Canal turns to the east and the River Ouzel bends westwards, thus narrowing the area of the Park. The east bank of the river is dominated by the buildings of The Open University, which lie beyond the Park boundary in Walton Hall. Beyond the Canal to the west, and outside the Park boundary, is the housing development of Tinkers Bridge.

Within the Park, west of the Ouzel lies Walton Lake, about 0.2km wide, crossed by a narrow central peninsula with bird hides. It was landscaped as part of the original flood defence works, but this use was overtaken by the establishment of the much larger lakes of Willen to the north and Caldecotte to the south and it has been allowed to develop a dense and varied marshy vegetation over much of its surface. This unusual swampy area is good for wildlife (Ouzel Valley Park: Milton Keynes Parks Trust 1992). Close by to the west is a group of rare black poplars.

The bulk of the parkland south of this is primarily managed by agricultural grazing, crossed by leisure routes and cycleways to the Open University. There are several small car parks and play facilities. Newport Road runs alongside the Canal, before disappearing at the junction with Groveway (H9).

South of Groveway is Simpson, which is the third in the series of villages within the Park, which form such a feature of the Park design and landscaping. It lies to the west of the Ouzel and its original houses, some of them timber framed and thatched, are scattered along the village street (Simpson Road), see Appendix for details. The church of St Thomas and St Nicholas is mostly C14 (Pevsner), with a Rectory of 1872. South west of the church lies Simpson Villa, c. 1830. To the south east of the village street and close to the river are earthworks and fishponds, associated with the manor house, Sympson Place. The house was demolished in 1802 and was probably Tudor.

The southern boundary is Simpson Road, which crosses the Park east/west and beyond lies Caldecotte Lake.

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Maps

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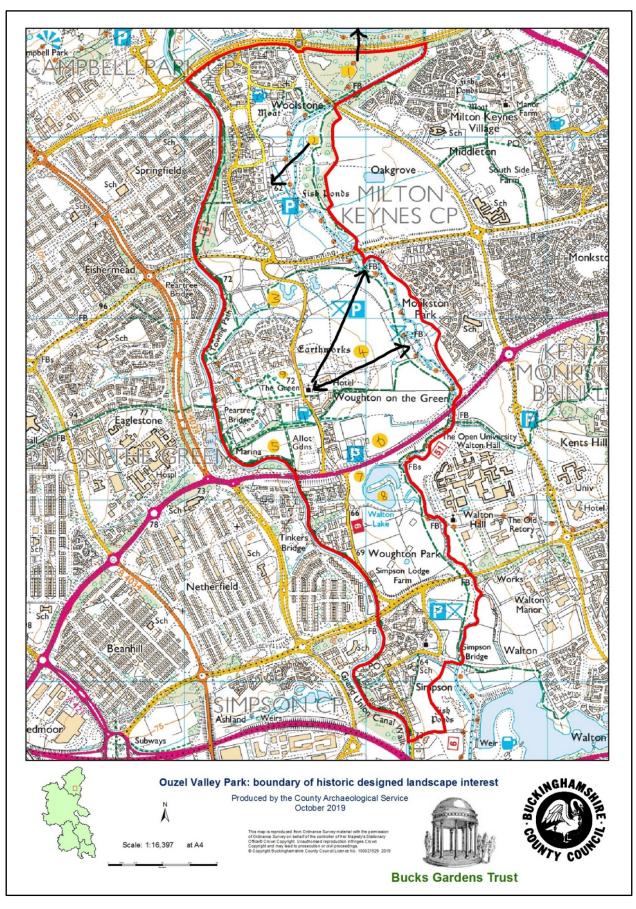
Other media

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City Discovery Centre

MKDC: Local Plan Inquiry, September 1992 (B060:58) MKDC: *Linear Parks and other major open spaces, financial implications* (B060:58) Simpson Village Walk (B060:58) MKDC *Woughton Plan* (B060:61)

J Stansfield, G Grocott Edited SR November 2019



KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS

1. Poplar plantation	2. Viewpoint
3. Water Garden	4. Ridge and Furrow
5. Orchard	6. Sports Grounds
7. Black Poplars	8. Walton Lake and the birdhide
9. The Green	

Key to Numbered Features

Appendix One

MKDC Planning Design Brief Principles for Landscapes in the New Town

MKDC set out general principles for landscape designs in the Planning Design Brief. Landscapes were intended to enhance the natural character of the area and to feature mainly native species. Planting was to be a mix between the quick and slow growing, to provide both immediate impact and sustainability for the longer term. Existing features were to be incorporated where possible, both for preservation and education, including a number of ancient monuments. In addition, park development principles were adopted, which aimed to combine the advantages of the conventional town park (unlimited access, but could be costly to create and manage), with those of the open countryside (limited public access, but an open access and less expensive for public agencies to provide and maintain). MKDC wanted a framework to encourage agricultural, sporting and commercial agencies to be involved in providing features and activities.

Three main elements were established to determine park planning. In the first instance a network of green corridors, called "strings" were to be created at an early stage, largely by public agencies, to provide essential continuity for the system. Focal points, termed "beads", were then to be created or incorporated within the "strings". These would have a variety of uses, including car parks, picnic areas, sculptures and gardens, as well as cafes, pubs and leisure attractions, which might be wholly or partly funded by the private sector. Finally, MKDC called "settings" those areas which formed the majority of open spaces. This term covered woodland, grassland, grazing and commercial recreation. Much of which it envisaged being provided by the private sector. Water was also seen an enhancing landscape value and as providing opportunities for recreation and sports. Water features included existing rivers and waterways and artificial lakes, which were constructed to deal with floods.

An MKDC paper from 1984 on the financial implications of the Linear Parks in the City Discovery Centre (*B060:58*) shows a total planned capital investment of £13.9m, not including land costs and that the linear parks were expected to have total annual revenue costs of £829,000, once they were complete.

Appendix Two

Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments

Great and Little Woolstone

Manor Farm Cottage, 36 Newport Road. Grade II The Cross Keys Public House, 34 Newport Road. Grade II Hill Farmhouse, 41 Newport Road. Grade II The Old Rectory, 56 Newport Road, Grade II Moated site and fishponds, scheduled monument The Woolstones Community Centre (formerly Holy Trinity Church), Mill Lane, Grade II* Rosebery Music Room (formerly listed as Holy Trinity Church), Newport Road, Grade II Bellcote/Gazebo to the west of Church Farmhouse; now part of No.20, The Cottage, Mill Lane. Grade II Manor Farm Cottage Manor Farm House, Newport Road. Grade II Church Farmhouse, Mill Lane. Grade II Cleobury Farmhouse, Newport Road. Grade II

Woughton on the Green

War Memorial Cross, St Mary's Church, Newport Road. Grade II Church of St Mary, Newport Road. Grade II* Cottage Farm, The Green. Grade II Cairn Cottage, The Green. Grade II Woodbine Cottage, The Green. Grade II Old Tudor House, The Green, Grade II North Cottage, The Green. Grade II Frenches Farmhouse, The Green. Grade II Appletree Cottage, The Green. Grade II The Manor House, The Green. Grade II The Old Rectory Farm, Waterside, Grade II Moated site and fishpond at Old Rectory Farm. Scheduled monument. Old Swan Public House, Newport Road. Grade II Old Thatch, Newport Road, Grade II

Simpson

Simpson House, Simpson Road. Grade II 442, Simpson Road. Grade II 205, Simpson Road, Grade II The Forge, Simpson Road, Grade II 203 Simpson Road. Grade II 187 and 189, Simpson Road, Grade II 456 and 458, Simpson Road. Grade II Barn to west of of 458, Simpson Road. Grade II Manor Farmhouse, Simpson Road. Grade II The Old Bakehouse, Simpson Road. Grade II Church of St Thomas, Simpson Road. Grade II* Simpson War Memorial Obelisk, Junction of Simpson and Hamer Road. Grade II Medieval Manor of Simpson. Scheduled monument. Pump House, Simpson Road. Grade II Canalside Cottage, Simpson Road. Grade II Lock, Simpson Road. Grade II Lock View Pine View, Simpson Road. Grade II The Red Lion Public House, Simpson Road. Grade II

CURRENT IMAGES (2018)



Walton Lake looking north east to Open University



The Poplars



The canal broad walk at the Woolstones



The community orchard



Children's play area near medieval moat at the Woolstones



Sports Pavilion at the sports ground