

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project

## OUSE VALLEY PARK, MILTON KEYNES

September 2022



Iron Trunk Aqueduct



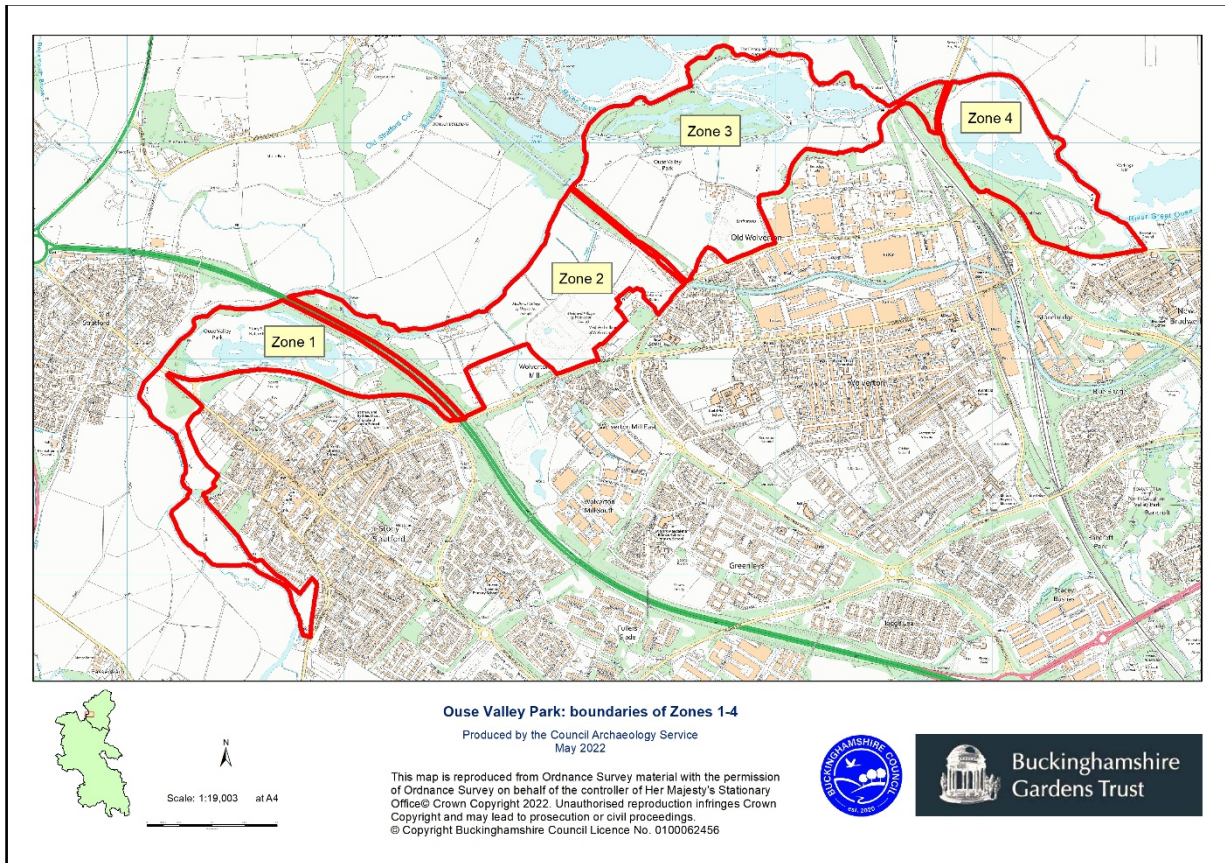
Bucks Gardens Trust



The Finnis Scott  
Foundation



# 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 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, 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](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

<b>COUNTY:</b>	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>OUSE VALLEY PARK, MILTON KEYNES</b>
<b>DISTRICT:</b>	MILTON KEYNES	
<b>PARISHES:</b>	STONY STRATFORD AND OLD WOLVERTON	<b>MK HER: -</b>
<b>OS REF.:</b>	SP787404 Stony Stratford SP806417 Old Wolverton	

## 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, The Tree Cathedral, Newlands, Caldecotte Park, the Ouzel Valley Park and Waterhall Park (the southern extension of the Ouzel Valley).

The Ouse Valley Park is one of the three naturalistic linear parks which were key parts of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation's (MKDC) planned cityscape, enhancing the original landscape of rolling undramatic countryside to provide a landscape character of sufficient strength to contain new city developments and create significant areas of useable and beautiful concentrated countryside within the city boundary. The linear, or valley parks follow the valleys of two small rivers, the Ouzel and Loughton Brook together with the much 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 part of managing flooding. The Ouse Valley Park is a large area which stretches in an arc from Stony Stratford in the west through Wolverton, and Old Wolverton to New Bradwell in the east.

All major park development in Milton Keynes was designed on the agreed principles of "strings, beads and settings" (original design guide and pers. comm. Neil Higson, former Chief Landscape Architect). The strings are linear footpaths, cycle ways, greenways and riding trails. Beads are activity centres and "places" and the setting is usually the visually or physically public landscape which makes up the body of the park. Land uses in this area can include grazing, sports grounds, lakes, wildlife zones, events areas etc., many of which generate income which contributes to the management costs of the park. The policy ensures the provision of publicly available (both visual and physical) green space within the city boundaries. Two primary inspirations were Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of Tomorrow and the British National Parks access to the countryside movement (pers. comm. Neil Higson).

Ouse Valley Park forms the northern part of the extensive linear system, with the Ouzel Valley Park (the largest area of parkland) and Loughton Brook linear park, developed in the 1970s and 1980s to keep pace with the incoming population.

The earlier landscape in Milton Keynes was undramatic gently rolling countryside, with mixed farming. The linear park system uses the low lying, potentially floodable land along the river valleys and features indigenous wetland species such as willow and poplar and continues the tradition of pastoral farming. The soil is mainly clay, but in the river flood plains all contain gravel. The extensive Ouse Valley Park has many common features with the other two valley parks, but it is the lowest lying and is focused on the most dominant river. It has the most rural aspect of any of the parks, with old trees, hedgerows meadows and new plantations providing excellent habitats for wildlife. The size of the river supported a larger scale of gravel extraction, with the creation of significant wildlife reserves and new wetland areas. As a result this park has continued to change and develop in ways that the other parks have not.

The park views have a sense of wilderness due to the extent of wetlands to the north that is unusual for an urban landscape.

Ouse Valley Park is part of a landscape system where the details of the materials, types of horticultural features and planting 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.

The four zones share a similar rural character with views, particularly to the north and west, over open grassland and the river. Zone one is more urban given the closeness of Stony Stratford and zone three has the greatest sense of wilderness because of the extent of the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve.

In 1973 the eight km river walk in the Ouse Valley Park, along the south bank of the Ouse, was the first element of the Milton Keynes landscape system to be built to serve the existing populations of Stony Stratford, Wolverton and New Bradwell. The Park has changed within the original boundaries, following gravel extraction in three separate sites along the river. In Stony Stratford Nature Reserve (1978-81); the Floodplain Forest (2007–14) and the lake in near New Bradwell (2015-2019). The landscape therefore contains extensive areas of water, which fluctuate depending on the time of year and weather, and are not included in MKDC plans.

The Ouse Valley Park (231 ha) was the first of the three valley parks in Milton Keynes and is similar in its rural feel to the Ouzel Valley Park on the east side of Milton Keynes. The latter is, however, larger at 304 ha, though it lacks the same sense of wildness; being the setting for housing development based on existing villages within the Park. The third linear Park, Loughton has a different character as it follows a much smaller stream, Loughton Brook, through a series of residential and other developments on the west side of the city.

The three linear parks, together with Campbell Park in the centre of the city, form the major parks of the new town and it was intended that the linear parks network would form a continuous mesh across the city (Southard, T; *Milton Keynes Landscape*). By 1980 a relatively high percentage - 13% -of the total city area was planned as open space (Youngman, P; *Milton Keynes Master Plan*) and the design was expected to evolve in response to changing needs. The character and strength of the parks and their enhancement of the natural landscape helped define the unique atmosphere of the whole new city (pers. comm. Neil Higson).

### **Archaeological interest**

The archaeological evidence was extensively studied during the development of the area. The motte and bailey castle, deserted village and monastic grange at Old Wolverton are a scheduled ancient monument. The deserted village is considered to be the best surviving example in Milton Keynes (Historic England: Historic Town Assessment Report Wolverton and New Bradwell). Buried remains of a Roman building have been found nearby together with Roman and Saxon coins and metalwork (Historic England). Neolithic remains were found during the excavation at the Manor Farm gravel works (Hanson)

### **Architectural interest**

The Park's contemporary design is largely a response to natural landform, with some ground modification to create in particular the floodplain forest. The Park includes within its setting a number of original buildings and features; many of which are either listed or are ancient monuments. Most of these are domestic in scale, but include the remains of a medieval castle and the dominant aqueduct and viaduct carrying the Grand Union Canal and the West Coast Railway respectively, over the River Ouse.

### **Artistic interest**

The Ouse Valley Park is part of an ambitious publicly-funded park system on a scale rarely achieved in later C20/21 England, building on the traditions set by the best C19 public parks, such as Birkenhead, Merseyside and Central Park, New York. In scale of ambition and unity of design the Milton Keynes linear park landscapes to which the Ouse Valley belongs (the Ouzel Valley and Loughton Brook) are comparable with the Thames Barrier Park, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the Olympic Park, but follows the British National Parks principle of incorporating agriculture, recreation and varied public events within the designed plan. In style and character these are all very different. The Ouse Valley is laid out in latter day naturalistic English landscape style providing a setting for new urban development. The views are carefully manipulated both within and beyond the Park to take advantage of the gently rolling topography.

The Park is part of a landscape system where the details of the materials, types of horticultural features and planting 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.

### **Historic interest**

The 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 with careful management by Milton Keynes Parks Trust.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The area covered by the Ouse Valley Park has long historic associations and includes a number of historic features. Wolverton, now known as Old Wolverton and largely within the Park, was held by associates of Edward the Confessor and subsequently awarded to Manno the Breton following the Norman Conquest (*Victoria County History, VCH*). His successors probably built the castle in the C12 (*VCH*). The remains of the castle are within the Park, just to the north of Old Wolverton Road and, further north, also within the site, are the remains of a medieval village, stretching about one km east/west, together with the site of an agrarian monastic grange (*Historic England, HE*). Part of the Park between Old Wolverton Road and the Ouse was parkland in the C16 and C17 (*VCH*). A number of the buildings in this area of the Park are listed and date from the C18 and C19 (*VCH*). Stony Stratford was once in a position of considerable importance owing to its location on Watling Street and there are royal connections dating back to King John.

The site when it was formerly agricultural land was crossed by the Grand Union Canal in 1811, when the Iron Trunk aqueduct was constructed. Close to the south and east the town of New Wolverton began to grow after the arrival of the Canal and mushroomed after the building of the London and Birmingham Railway works in 1838 (Pevsner). The company chose Wolverton because it was almost half way between London and Birmingham and remained dominant within the town until closure in the later C20.

In 1945 Wolverton Urban District Council commissioned Geoffrey Jellicoe to produce an urban master plan to replace the old, mono-industry town. The plan included comprehensive outdoor recreation, using what is now the Ouse Valley Park, and it recognised the value of the river setting and pastoral views, forming a green belt for Wolverton. Manor Farm, an early C19 building adjacent to the medieval village, was to be an outdoor centre and a lido and golf course were also proposed (A design for Wolverton UDC, Jellicoe G.A. and Baker, A. CDC B060/03). The plan was not enacted and after the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 the UDC had to take account of the County Development Plan. Wolverton UDC had wanted the 10,000 London overspill population, but lost the arguments in favour of Bletchley. Meanwhile proposals for a new city in North Buckinghamshire progressed.

Milton Keynes was designated a new town in 1967 including Stony Stratford, Wolverton and Old Wolverton. Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) was established in the same year and the Master Plan was published in 1971. Landscape was worked out in its broad outlines from the beginning (Pevsner). In line with Ebenezer Howard's Garden City doctrine of pursuing the benefits to all citizens of integrating the qualities of Town and Country 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. All park areas were given development plans and those for the Ouse Valley Park (1982) exist in Buckinghamshire Archives (P – MKDC/5/5/12). The plans are not detailed and describe the existing rural and naturalistic aspect and there is no project implementation record. In general most of the planting in the parks was intended to be indigenous wetland species; willow, poplar etc. thinly planted along the rivers, but with a dense space forming back up of oak, ash, maple and lime thickening towards the park fringes (Southard, T., *Milton Keynes Landscape*). The Park is currently recognisable from the descriptions in the park management plans and the planting is broadly consistent with the original principles. Park development principles are exemplified in the design, for example "settings" form the majority of the open space including large areas of pasture land between Old Wolverton Road and the river. "Beads" are exemplified by focal points for specific activities, including water sports and buildings of interest, such as the Iron Trunk Aqueduct and "strings" are the connections between different elements of the Ouse Valley Park and between the Park with Wolverton to the south and with New Bradwell to the east. The guiding principle of the overall plan for the park system was to sustain and enrich a large area of naturalistic countryside enlivened by a wide range of uses and activities composed together to create the green lung of the city as a fundamental contribution to quality of living for citizens.

A consultation document on a plan for Stony Stratford (CDC: B060/01, 1975, MKDC and Milton Keynes Borough Council (MKBC)) stated that the town enjoyed open countryside settings and that the importance of the Ouse Valley as a recreational area for residents and others should be confirmed. In 1989 a Plan for Stony Stratford by MKDC and MKBC (CDC: B060/01) stated that the Ouse Valley Park might be regarded as fulfilling the function of a District Park and comprised a broad sweep of riverside meadows extending between Stony Stratford and New Bradwell. Picnic places and play areas were to be provided with a network of surfaced paths, including a river walk of 8km.

In 1988 MKDC and MKBC published a plan for Wolverton. This included proposals for the development of the Ouse Valley Park to provide informal recreational facilities for the area (CDC A/84/08/B060/03: A Plan for Wolverton). There was concern that this provision would fall short of standards elsewhere in the new city, but that the existence of the river, the Grand Union Canal and their surroundings, would to some extent offset this shortfall.

The Park was started in 1973. There are no construction records and the park development plans respect the countryside described in 1982. The landscape was changed (within the boundaries) as a result of gravel extraction in three areas (see overview above); the most ambitious being the Floodplain Forest.

MKDC was wound up in 1992 and its powers subsumed within the Commission for New Towns (CNT). 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 key staff were transferred from MKDC. It retains responsibility for the Ouse Valley Park along with other parks and spaces in Milton Keynes. MKPT has maintained the original landscapes to a high standard with mostly minor changes, for example to enhance environmental diversity. However, in the Ouse Valley, in conjunction with CNT, MKPT developed an ambitious proposal for gravel extraction at Manor Farm (located in the river area between the Grand Union Canal and the west coast railway line) with the intention of establishing a floodplain forest of a kind eliminated in Britain thousands of years ago. The project was funded by the commercial sale of the gravel. Mineral

extraction by Hanson Aggregates began in 2007 and was completed in 2014. The previous Park boundary alongside the riverside walkway has been kept, but the subsequent restoration of the site has created an extensive mosaic of water channels and pools which have been colonised by wildlife and will provide a diverse eco-system habitat for different species (Hanson Press Release: 12/10/16).

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

The 231ha. park is the second largest of the linear parks, after the Ouse Valley Park. It lies in the flood plain of the Great Ouse as it flows from Oxfordshire through to the Wash at King's Lynn. It is a large and complex site, defined by the eastern and southern banks of the river for about 8 km, as it forms the north boundary of Milton Keynes, at this point. It lies the west and north of Stony Stratford, north of Wolverton and east of New Bradwell. It contains a large part of Old Wolverton but does not encircle it as the south side is beyond Old Wolverton Road a large part of Old Wolverton, the original element before the railway town. The northerly arc is 8 km and the rough width is 0.7km

The Park boundary starts in the west at a car park in Mortimer Park on Calverton Road, to the south west of the small town of Stony Stratford, within the Milton Keynes boundary. At this point the Park is a narrow strip of land and the western boundary is the River Ouse. About 1.8km north there is a break in the Park at Queen Eleanor Street, the extension of Watling Street (V4) and the River turns east and at this point becomes the northern boundary. The Park resumes beyond the road and becomes the Stony Stratford Nature Reserve. The river continues to form the northern boundary and runs about 0.8km between Queen Eleanor Street and the A5 to the east. A footpath under the A5, near to the River, links the nature reserve to the Park to the east and at this point the Park opens out and becomes much wider. The northern boundary continues to be the River, this flows north east around Old Wolverton and goes under the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, which carries the Grand Union Canal. Beyond this to the east the boundary path goes under the West Coast railway line and Haversham Road, before looping southwards to join a car park to the north of Newport Road in New Bradwell.

The narrow east boundary is the recreation ground on Newport Road at New Bradwell, 0.1km wide, north-south.

The south boundary is complex. For about 0.5km from the Mortimer Park car park the Park is little more than the path by the river. At this point there is a bridge over the mill race, which becomes the east boundary of this part of the Park for 0.5km. Beyond this, between the Mill Pond and Queen Eleanor Street, the Park opens out slightly and is bounded to the south and east by former industrial buildings, a school and the buildings of the High Street.

Queen Eleanor Street then forms the south-west boundary as it becomes the broadly wedge-shaped Stony Stratford Nature Reserve. This boundary extends for 1.4km, alongside Queen Eleanor Street, until the cross roads with Wolverton Road, to the south. Wolverton Road runs east under the A5 and for about 0.2km this is the southern boundary of the Park. About 0.1km east of the A5 Mill Lane runs north into the Park and this is the western boundary of an area of land around Wolverton House, which is not part of the Park, though it is open to the public. This extends about 0.2km north into the Park and about 0.3km east along Stratford Road, at which point Stratford Road again becomes the southern boundary for 0.3km until it becomes Mill End, a narrow lane which cuts off the corner to the north of the junction between Stratford Road and Old Wolverton Road. Mill End is about 0.2km east/west before it merges with Old Wolverton Road. To the north of Mill End and Old Wolverton Road small areas of private land belong to Wolverton Park and Longueville Court, both accessed from Old Wolverton Road.

Old Wolverton Road continues as the southern boundary for about 0.7km east of the merger with Mill End until a car park by a track leading north to Manor Farm Court. Here the south boundary heads north for 0.2km around Milton



Keynes Council Waste Recovery Park and other assorted industrial uses, including an area for managing the extraction of gravel. This area is a large irregular rectangle, with the site for gravel extraction extending 0.6km into the Park to the River path under the railway viaduct. Just east of this site boundary a car park on Haversham Road leads north-south through the Park and forms the east boundary of the industrial site. East of Haversham Road the south boundary for 0.2km is the V6 before it meets Newport Road at the Stonebridge roundabout, which continues east for 0.6km as the south boundary of the Park until it meets the New Bradwell recreation ground.

The landform is lowland flood plain with pastureland for sheep and pollarded willows by the river. The soil is non alluvial loam over gravel (Historic England: Historic Town Assessment Report Wolverton and New Bradwell). The river has been actively managed for a long period, as shown by the construction of weirs and water mills, as well as gravel extraction and dredging. The largely level land slopes down gently northwards to the river from a small ridge along Old Wolverton Road where the medieval castle would have been an impressive defensive site (MKPT leaflet 4/1992; CDC).

The low-lying Park is bisected north/south by three major transport routes – the A5, the Grand Union Canal and the West Coast Railway, spread out roughly equidistantly across the site. The site also adjoins a large industrial complex, but it retains a peaceful atmosphere and is the most rural of the linear parks within Milton Keynes. Old trees, hedgerows, meadows and new plantations provide excellent habitats for wildlife. The views are wide with big skies, mostly over flood plain and open grassland. The dominant historic buildings being the Iron Trunk Aqueduct and the Railway Viaduct. At Stony Stratford the views over Northamptonshire are traditional pastoral, but the aspects beyond Old Wolverton to the north have a sense of wilderness, due to the extent of the wetlands and the backdrop of the woods which rise up to the east at Stanton Low.

## **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The eight low key entrances with car parks are spaced out to provide access to the four zones. There is one on the far east point and one on the far west point of the Park and four along the southern boundary roads. There is one point of access on the northern boundary by the river at Stony Stratford and a second access point for Stony Stratford Nature Reserve, north east of Queen Eleanor Street. There is an access to the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve off Haversham Road by the river in north east. A network of internal footpaths connects the whole Park, with the 8 km river walk as the main route. There are also footbridges connecting the Park to the wider countryside to the west and north. There is a car park at Mortimer Park in Stony Stratford, one to the north of Queen Eleanor Street to give access to the Stony Stratford Nature Reserve and three car parks along Stratford Road/Old Wolverton Road. A car park almost on the north boundary, west of Hanslope Road gives easy access to the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve. A car park off Newport Road at New Bradwell gives access to the allotments and to the east section of the Park.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

The dominant buildings are the Iron Trunk Aqueduct and the Railway Viaduct, which are widely visible across zones two and three. Further buildings add interest.

The Iron Trunk Aqueduct (Scheduled Monument) crosses the Park for 0.8km diagonally from Old Wolverton Road, running north across the Ouse into Northamptonshire. It was brick built in 1808-11 for the Grand Union Canal Co. to replace an earlier structure that had collapsed (Pevsner). A footpath on the east side on top of the Aqueduct gives views over parkland and beyond and, below, is access to parkland flanking the river, along a footpath through a 27m long cattle squeeze included in the original design of the building. Within the Park, alongside the Aqueduct on the west side, are a set of original wharf buildings (Pevsner).

The Railway Viaduct stands c.1.3km east of the Aqueduct and is also red brick (listed Grade II). Built in 1837-8 by Robert Stephenson, it remains substantially unaltered. At 201m long and 174m high over the Ouse Valley it is the most impressive of several viaducts on this line and still carries the West Coast main line.

Within the Park, west of the Aqueduct is the Church of Holy Trinity (Grade II\*). The church was rebuilt in 1808-14 (Pevsner) and the small churchyard has some fine yew trees. South west of the church, on private land within the Park and visible from it, is Longueville Court (Grade II), built in the early C18 as the rectory. East of the church is the castle motte (Ancient Monument), surrounded by iron fencing and obscured by shrubbery. The motte is visible across zone two. North-east and west of the motte are the remains of the medieval village, including ridge and furrow traces ([www.parkstrust.org](http://www.parkstrust.org)).

East of the Aqueduct, within the Park, is a group of C18 and early C19 buildings of stone and rubble – Manor Farm, including a model C19 farmyard, and Manor Farm cottages (listed Grade II). The field south-west of Manor Farm was laid out as a small park in the C19 and has a pond and some fine stands of oak.

Two mills of significance stand within the Park along the Ouse, both recorded in Domesday Book (1086). One to the east of the A5, is accessed by Watermill Lane from Wolverton Road. While the site has been in use since Domesday, the red brick Wolverton Mill and Miller's House are C18 and C19 (listed Grade II) and have been converted to residential use. The second is at Stony Stratford, in the far west section of the Park. The current operation dates from 1600. The Old Mill buildings burnt down in 1985 and have been rebuilt as residential for multiple occupation. It was a requirement of the developer to maintain the footbridge, millrace and continuity of the river walk (The Mill and the Willows: Development Constraints Brief, Milton Keynes Council, MKC, 3/96: CDC B060/01).

## **PERAMBULATION**

The perambulation has been divided into four zones, based on the MKDC Linear Park Management Plan of 1982, running in a northerly arc from west to east. The zones divide the Park into sections from Stony Stratford (zone one) in the west to New Bradwell in the east (zone four). The two outer zones (one and four) are smaller and relate to their respective neighbourhoods. Both act as local parks for their respective neighbourhoods of Stony Stratford and New Bradwell. Zone one has a backdrop of Stony Stratford buildings and zone four contains a large allotment site for New Bradwell. The two inner zones (two and three) form the central wide open flat lands of the Park. There is no formal character but within each zone there are individual features forming part of the design. The planting reflects the pastoral and river landscape described in the early management plans and the design is based on the landscape with a network of paths, cycle ways, riding routes, greenways and lanes linking the park internally and externally to the wider countryside. Major changes have occurred as a result of gravel extraction. The perambulation in each zone describes the area and how it connects with the adjoining zone and surrounding countryside and neighbourhoods.

### **Zone One: Stony Stratford West of the A5**

The management plan describes this area as 23.5 ha. It is floodplain grassland with tree planting along the river bank. The route starts in the far south west of the Park at the car park at Mortimer Park on Calverton Road, Stony Stratford. It proceeds north west by the river and finishes on the eastern side of the Stony Stratford Nature Reserve, adjoining the A5 to the north-east. This section of the Park serves as a local Park for Stony Stratford and a number of streets on the west side of the town give access.

The stretch of the river by the car park on Mortimer Road is used for swimming and canoeing and there is a small picnic site. The area has had recent tree planting and has an unspoilt aspect with views west over the river and fields

to Passenham. This is consistent with the Management Plan, which described flood plain grassland, with pollarded willows and provision for water recreation by the car park.

From the car park a path leads north along the east side of the river for 0.5m until it meets a bridge over the millrace. At this point the Ouse Valley Park becomes an island, known as the Millfield, with the Millrace forming the east boundary and the river flowing along the north, west and south sides. At the south junction of the river and the Millrace is a weir. The riverside path continues to follow the river bank with a further path along the west side of the Millrace, now a quiet tree-lined backwater to the main river. The Millfield is bisected by a path running north/west and where this meets the riverside walk there is a footbridge over the river. Views extend east over Stony Stratford and west over open grazed fields. The setting looks very similar to that described in the 1975 Plan for Stony Stratford.

The Millfield has been in the ownership of MKPT since 1992 and is managed for amenity, with the north section subject to a change in 2005 from amenity grassland to a late summer cut to encourage wildflower growth. An avenue of Black Poplars lines the path by the river, planted in 2005. In the south section is a children's play area constructed in 2007 ([www.parkstrust.org](http://www.parkstrust.org)).

The former mill site is on western side of the Mill race, at the north eastern corner of Millfield. At this point the river path crosses the Millrace on a footbridge and continues north for about 0.8 km until it meets Queen Eleanor Street, which forms the Stony Stratford bypass and which exits the town north of the High Street. The park area is floodplain grassland, with pollarded willows and includes former fields between the river and the High Street to the east, which are marked on a C17 map ([www.parkstrust.org](http://www.parkstrust.org)). Toombs Meadow is a small wooded area in the north-east corner between the grasslands and the High Street.

East of Queen Eleanor Street the land changes to become a large wedge-shaped nature reserve, bounded to the east by the A5 and to the west by Queen Eleanor Street. Its broad (about 0.8km) north end is the River and its south-east tip is a wooded strip to the west of the A5. The reserve is accessed by a circular path, which runs round the perimeter of a watery area composed of small lakes, with trees and shrubs with bird hides. The extraction of gravel for the A5 in 1978-81 was seen as a positive opportunity to enhance conservation and this site was developed to MKDC design with five interconnected lakes, constructed of varying size and depth to provide different habitats. 7,000 trees and shrubs were planted and meadowland reinstated together with paths, bridges and hides. (Leaflet, 28/2/90 on Stony Stratford Wildlife Conservation Area: CDC B060/01/58.03). In 2008 the site was restored with the help of the Stony Stratford Riverside Parks Group and vegetation was cleared and the hides renovated ([www.stonystratford.gov.uk](http://www.stonystratford.gov.uk))

### **Zone Two: Between the A5 and the Iron Trunk Aqueduct**

The management plan describes this area as 63ha. It is floodplain grassland, with tree planting along the river, especially around Wolverton Mill, and also with trees lining Mill Lane and along the southern boundary with Stratford Road. Zone two is to the east of zone one and is the area between the A5 and the Iron Trunk Aqueduct. The route goes east/west along the northern boundary of the river and there are two main access routes north/south.

In the linear management plan zone two includes 34ha farmed (unspecified) and 7ha grazing areas. It is largely lowland flood plain and the plan stated that the character should be one of informal recreation taking place against a background of agricultural land.

Zone two is accessed from zone one to the west by the riverside path which goes under the A5 and forms the northern boundary of the Park. South of the riverside path there are two other short paths proceeding east/west under the A5, connecting the Nature Reserve in zone one with the Park in Zone two.

About 0.2km east of the A5 embankment the riverside path passes a large weir, where the millrace begins and runs for 0.8km south-east to Wolverton Mill. The river runs parallel to the north and both stretches of water meet 0.2km east of the Mill, creating a long, thin island. Between the weir, the millrace and the A5 embankment mixed planting of shrubs and trees and a picnic area form a feature as envisaged in the original management plan. At Wolverton Mill, Mill Lane runs north/south for 0.4km to a car park on Wolverton Road on the southern boundary of the Park.

On the northern Park boundary the riverside path follows the south boundary of the Mill buildings and their gardens before re-joining the river at the point where the millrace and the river meet. A small stream flows south into the river at this point. The aspect continues to be open grassland with grazing and the footpath continues along the river east for 0.8km until meeting the Iron Trunk Viaduct.

A diagonal path crosses the Park for approximately one km from the riverside path on the northern boundary to the southern boundary on Old Wolverton Road, just west of the Canal. This path begins about 0.3km east from the Mill buildings and follows hedgerows and field boundaries before sloping upwards to follow the northern boundary of the Church of Holy Trinity and the Motte and Bailey Castle. It then reaches Old Wolverton Road, which is the southern boundary of the Park.

### **Zone Three: Iron Trunk to Haversham Road Car Park**

The management plan describes zone three as 88 ha. It is flood plain grassland rising gently southwards from the river to Manor Farm. The northern area is now the watery landscape of the Floodplain Forest. Zone three is to the east of zone two and is between the Grand Union Canal and the Railway Viaduct to the east. It is the biggest of the zones. Zone three is crossed east/west and north south by a network of paths. The route followed is along the northern boundary formed by the riverside path, with descriptions of access north/south from Old Wolverton Road.

The park management plan describes this area as flood plain, rising gently southwards from the river towards Manor Farm and Old Wolverton Road. It is dominated to the west by the 11m high Iron Trunk Aqueduct and to the east by the Wolverton Railway Viaduct.

The path along the river runs east from Zone two underneath the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, using the 27m long cattle squeeze. The river path, lined with willows, continues for about 1.8km to the Railway Viaduct along a meandering stretch of the Ouse.

To the south between the river and Back Brook is the 25 ha (MKPT Annual Report 1996) Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve. This was once pasture land, but was quarried for sand and gravel between 2007-14 and redeveloped as a nature reserve with 2km of pathways and boardwalks and three bird hides. It was opened to the public in 2016 and is the most impressive wildlife habitat creation in Milton Keynes' history. The area is designed to fill with water from the west when the river floods and is not fully accessible in wet weather. For most of the year Konik ponies and cattle graze marginal areas on the site. ([www.theparkstrust.org](http://www.theparkstrust.org))

At the east end of the Nature Reserve the river path turns south and crosses Back Brook over a footbridge. It then turns east under the Wolverton Viaduct to join the car park on Haversham Road after 0.3km.

On the southern boundary of the Park at the car park on Wolverton Road to the east of the Canal, a track proceeds 0.4km north east to Manor Farm. To the north of Manor Farm this track joins a path going east west through the Park linking the Canal with the riverside walk at the Viaduct to the north east. The land is slightly raised and there are views over the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve and the river about 0.5km to the north.

#### **Zone Four: From Haversham Road to New Bradwell Allotments**

The management plan describes zone four as 32.5 ha. It is typical floodplain grassland with trees along the river, with a further tree belt crossing the zone east/west along a small brook and masking the allotment site to the south east. Water is dominant with the river to the north and a small lake to the south of the river path, created recently following gravel extraction. Zone four is the far eastern section of the Park between Haversham Road, going north/south and the recreation ground at New Bradwell, on the far east boundary. From the car park west of Haversham Road the river path leads north for 100m before turning east under Haversham Road to a small car park and picnic tables with tree planting. From Haversham Road the path follows the river eastwards for 1.2km before turning south towards New Bradwell, where it terminates. About 0.1km before the eastern boundary a path turns south for 0.2km to access Newport Road, where there is a small car park and an area for allotments.

This is a relatively small area of the Park and is typical low lying flood plain. It is bisected by a small stream in a ditch with low trees and bushes, running west from the Ouse for about 0.8km before disappearing under Haversham Road. The section to the north is the larger and was used for gravel extraction until recently. Hansen was given planning permission in 2014 and work started in 2015 for three years, followed by 18 months of restoration. This area is fenced and is not publicly accessible. About half has been made into a small lake, just north of the stream, with a belt of reeds and grassland between the water and the river path further to the north. The river path was maintained for the duration of the gravel works and new fencing has been erected on the southern side to prevent access to the former gravel pits and lake, together with new planting of willow trees and alders alongside. The rural atmosphere of zone four, as described in the original park management plan, remains and is enhanced by views over the new lake as well as over farmland and water to the north and east. On rising ground further to the east there are views of plantation woodland, Joan's Piece, which was planted on top of a refuse site ([www.parkstrust.org](http://www.parkstrust.org)).

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##### **Other Documents**

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##### **Maps**

Milton Keynes Official City Atlas 2017

##### **Other Media**

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J. Stansfield, G. Grocott May 2022

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Bucks Gardens Trust is indebted to Neil Higson for kindly offering advice and comments.

## APPENDIX ONE

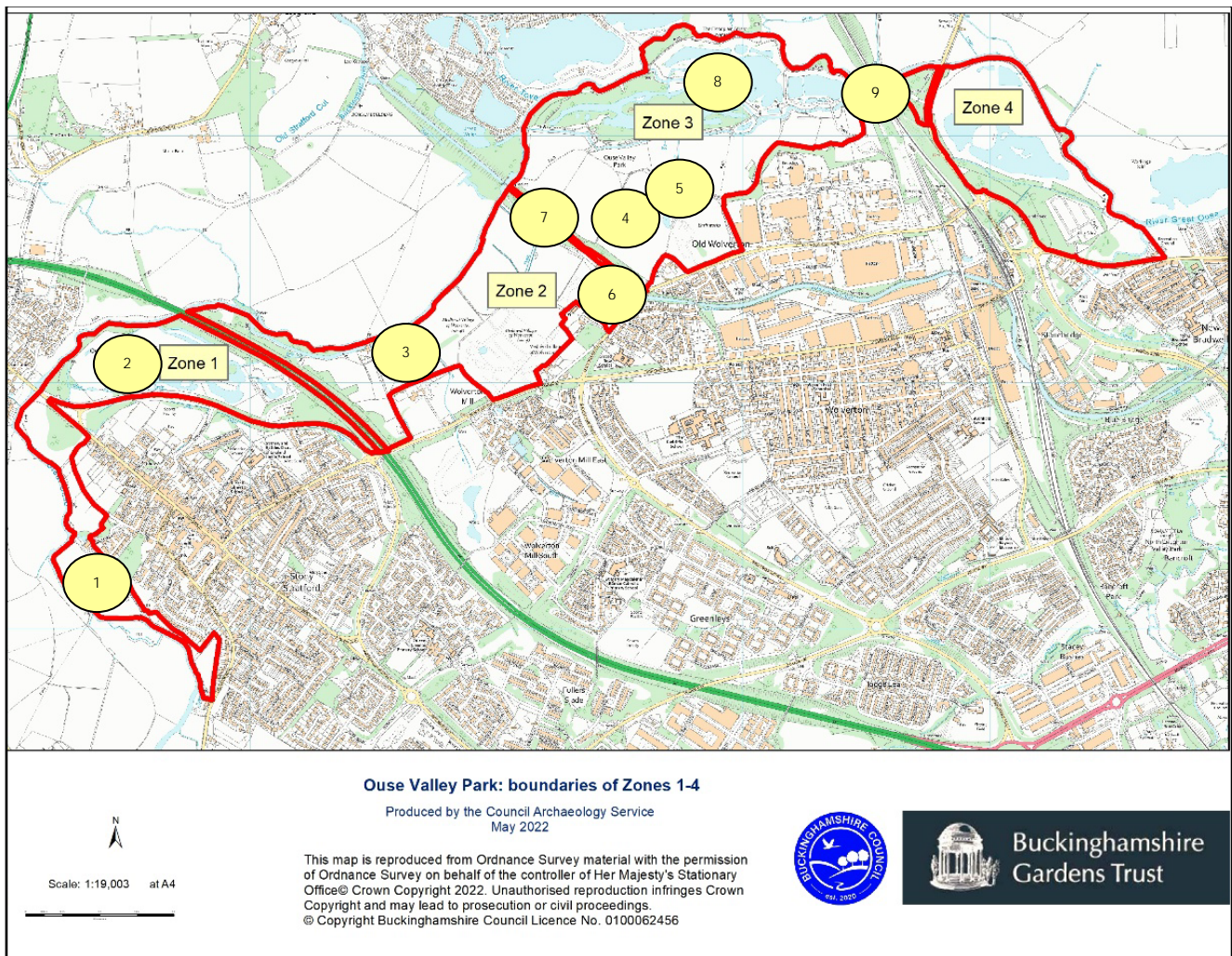
### MKDC Planning Design Brief Principles for Landscapes in the New Town

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 long 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 (limited access, but could be costly to create and manage), with those of the open countryside (limited public access, but open aspect 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 and managing 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 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 was envisaged would be provided by the private sector. Water was also seen as enhancing landscape value and as having opportunities for recreation and sports. Water features included existing rivers and waterways and artificial lakes, which were constructed to deal with floods.

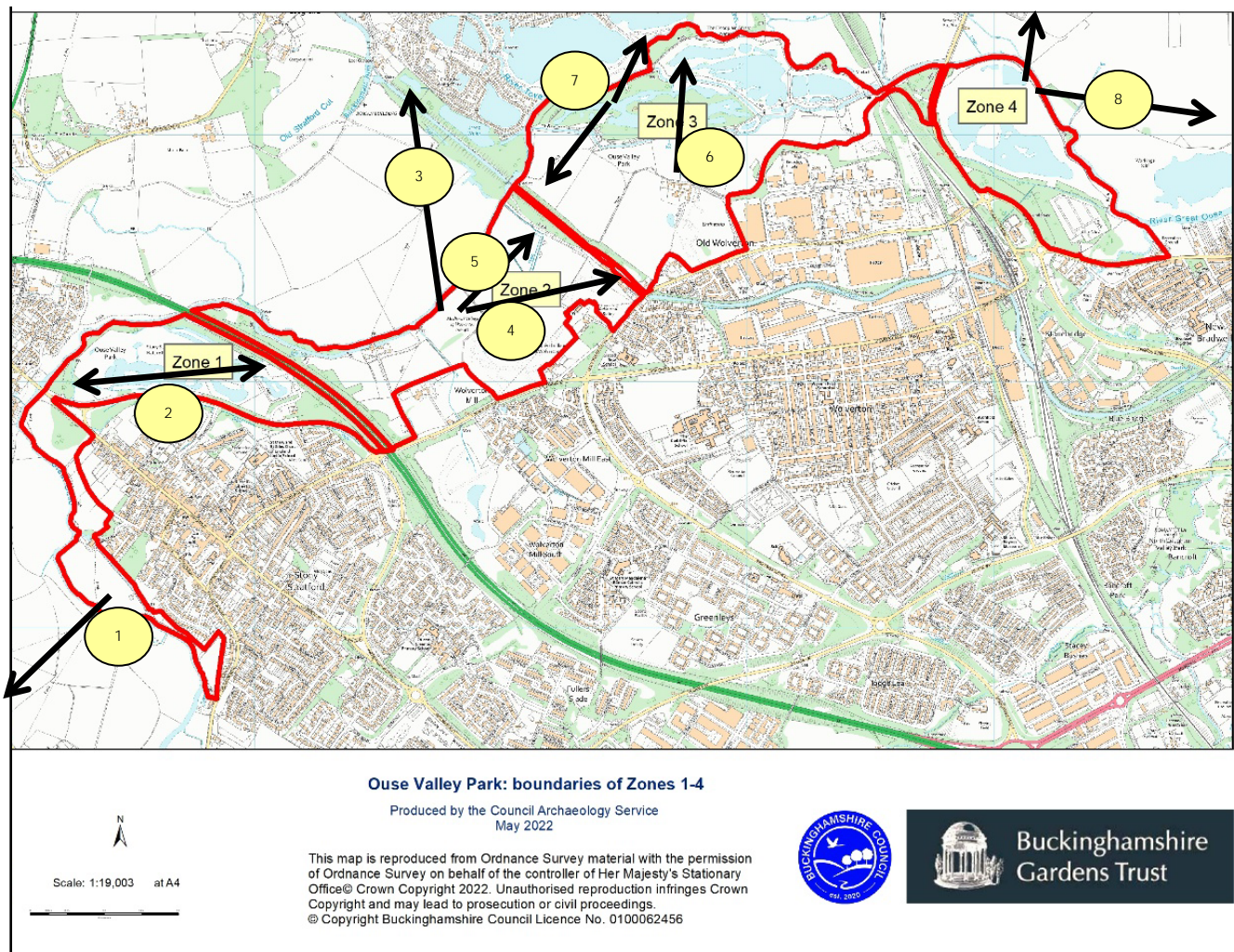
An MKDC paper from 1984 on the financial implications of the Linear Parks in the City Discovery Centre (CDC, B060:58) shows a total planned capital investment of £13.9m, not including land costs and that the linear parks were expected to have total revenue costs of £829,000 once they were complete.

# KEY HISTORIC FEATURES & VIEWS



## Features Map Key

1. Millfield, Stony Stratford
2. Stony Stratford Nature Reserve
3. Wolverton Mill
4. Site of medieval village
5. Manor Farm
6. Holy Trinity Church and Castle Motte
7. Iron Trunk Viaduct
8. Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve
9. Railway Viaduct



**Views Map Key to Viewpoints**

1. From Stony Stratford, zone 1 south-west to Passenham
2. Through Stony Stratford Nature Reserve east/west
3. From Wolverton Mill north to Cosgrove
4. From Wolverton Mill east to castle motte over medieval village
5. From Wolverton Mill north-east to Iron Trunk Viaduct
6. From Manor Farm north to the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve
7. From the river path in zones 2 and 3 - east/west to the Aqueduct and Viaduct, as well as north to Cosgrove
8. From the river path in zone 4 north to open countryside and east to Joan's Piece



## CURRENT IMAGES (2022)



Cows and the remains of the medieval village



View over Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve



Holy Trinity Church



Castle Motte



Wolverton Mill



Manor Farm



Stony Stratford Nature Reserve



Lake in Zone 4