

Milton Keynes Inspirational Landscapes

NOW AND FOREVER





Prepared by The Parks Trust
with input from David Lock Associates

June 2021

Introduction

The Parks Trust creates and maintains beautiful and inspirational parks, lakes and landscapes that will be loved by the people of Milton Keynes, forever. As Milton Keynes expands we want to ensure all future areas of the city benefit from the same extent and quality of green space as is found in the established areas of the city.

Our Role

The Parks Trust is an independent charity, and we are proud of our role as steward of much of Milton Keynes' green infrastructure – a network of strategically planned and sustainably managed parks, lakes, woods and roadside landscapes across the city. This network is recognised as one of the best examples of planned open spaces of its kind in the country. 25% of the new city area in Milton Keynes is green space which is managed by The Parks Trust.

The Parks Trust was established in 1992 as an independent body to own and manage the open space network in Milton Keynes. The New Town Development Corporation transferred the green infrastructure to The Parks Trust with an endowment. The Trust has invested and grown this endowment to provide a secure source of income to enable it to manage and maintain the green spaces put into its care. As a charity, the Trust's assets and income can only be used for this purpose.

This remains an exemplar model for the sustainable stewardship of assets that are maintained for the benefit of and enjoyment by the community. It has ensured the network of green space is managed in a coordinated way by a single-purpose, self-financing body that places no ongoing burden on public finances.

25% of the new city area
in Milton Keynes is
green space
managed by The Parks Trust.

The Importance of our Open Spaces

Our open spaces contribute significantly to the environmental, economic and social success of the city, including:

- providing the space and opportunity for people to enjoy outdoor recreation;
- providing a home for our wildlife, protecting habitats and increasing biodiversity;
- conserving and enhancing heritage assets;
- creating opportunities for people to access nature;
- providing sporting and cultural activities with all the health benefits which that entails;
- opportunities to enhance physical, mental health and well-being and social interactions;
- management of flood risk through the protection of flood plains and the provision of sustainable urban drainage systems, including balancing lakes and ponds that are also of value for recreation and wildlife;
- acts as a buffer between homes and busy roads, providing visual screening, lessening the impact of traffic noise and helping with air quality;
- urban cooling and mitigation against the environmental impacts of climate change which will become ever more important over the coming years.

The Future

Milton Keynes continues to be one of the fastest growing urban areas in the UK. By 2050 Milton Keynes Council anticipates the city will be home to a population of around 410,000 (from 285,000 in 2021) with perhaps another 100,000 living close by in nearby areas. Our green infrastructure must grow as the city expands if future generations are going to benefit from green space in the way that we do.

Our vision for the future is based around five key principles.

Principle 1: The Need for a New Green Infrastructure Strategy

The designation, design and delivery of landscape and green infrastructure should be led by and accord with a city-wide strategy.

Since its designation as a new town in January 1967, Milton Keynes has developed from a collection of villages and small towns in north Buckinghamshire with a combined population of around 60,000 people to become home to a population of 385,000. The National Infrastructure Commission has identified the potential for the intensification and expansion of Milton Keynes to a population of 'at least 500,000', re-emphasising the Milton Keynes area as a growth location of national significance.

In order to achieve this, a new city-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy should be prepared and consulted upon which considers the need for district parks that serve the whole, enlarged city and provide movement opportunities through green spaces be it by foot, by horse or by non-motorised wheel.

This work should complement the work that the Council is required to do to prepare plans for a Nature Recovery Network; a Central Government aspiration for a national network of wildlife-rich places and a major commitment in the government's 25-Year Environment Plan.

The new strategy should:

- Identify new green infrastructure in areas of growth and focus on enhancing these.
- Ensure design responds to local context and local need.
- Plan for biodiversity net gain where development leaves biodiversity in a better state than before.
- Include a network of leisure routes (footpaths and cycleways as well as the adopted redways), horse riding trails and adopted bridleways.
- Plan for more large, dedicated and functional events areas allowing for cultural and community celebrations as well as opportunities for sporting spectacles.
- Provide communities with places where they can come together for shared experiences aiding cohesion and civic pride.
- Plan for area-wide strategic sustainable urban drainage systems network which is capable of alignment with the Water Resource Long Term Planning Framework and the emerging Water Resources Management.
- Link linear parks with other green infrastructure features in the wider area.
- Form a central role in the Oxford to Cambridge open space arc.

Principle 2: Landscape-led Planning

Landscape is at the heart of shaping new and great places. Nowhere in the UK demonstrates this better than Milton Keynes, perhaps the greatest single strategic scale landscape project ever undertaken in the UK.

Recognising the Assets

The provision of green infrastructure should be the starting point for all plans for new developments and should be informed by assessments of the existing landscapes and habitats within the proposed development area.

One of the successes of the plan for Milton Keynes was the way it ‘thought big’ and incorporated existing landscape features, watercourses, habitats and sites of heritage importance within the city. These were used to define the linear park network which, in turn, shaped the layout of the city. The parkland landscaping schemes were designed to embrace and celebrate existing features and the simple but powerful concept of strings, beads and settings has given us a rich and diverse parkland network.

Through careful design and planting linear parks, most homes and businesses in the city are within easy walking distance of open spaces and everyone can see and connect with nature.

Early Delivery of Spaces

As the city expands, as much of the planned green infrastructure provision within a new development should be in place so as to provide a receptive green setting, before residents move in. This encourages residents to create attractive and healthy neighbourhoods where people want to live, play and work. It is important to make sure these spaces are well maintained and looked after from day one long into the future so that Milton Keynes will continue to be the beautiful green and blue city we know and love today.

Planning for Open Spaces

All future large scale master and development plans, should be informed by landscape and habitat assessments in line with planning policy requirements, rooted in an understanding of both environmental and ecological principles. Assessments should be evidence-led and account for both natural and man-made features. Future plans should include the need for continuity and connectivity between green spaces.

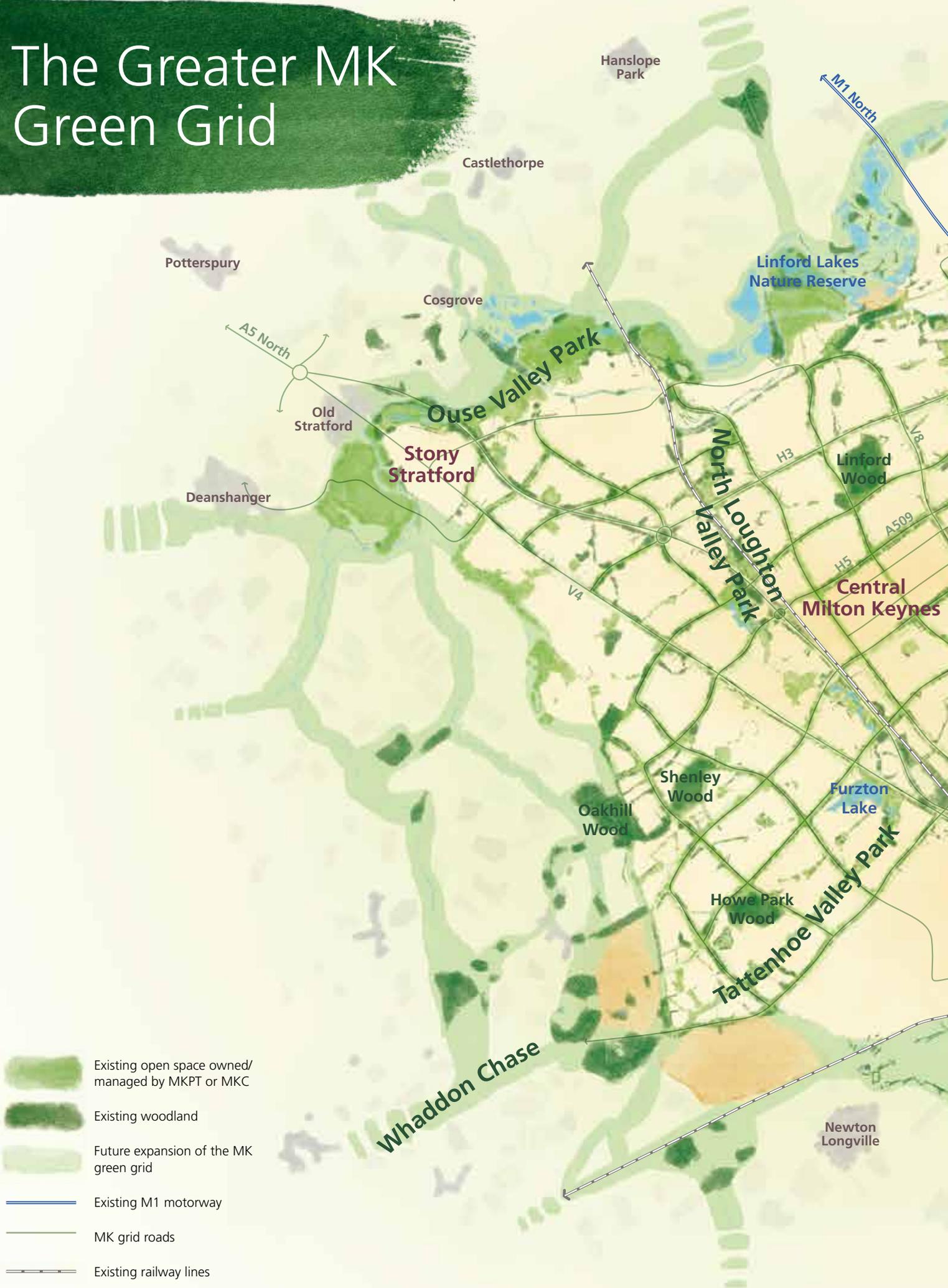
Good master planning will help to determine how much of the future city areas will comprise managed open space, informed by robust technical studies and assessment. Strategic scale development areas have provided around 40% of green and blue space, and we see this as an important guiding principle.

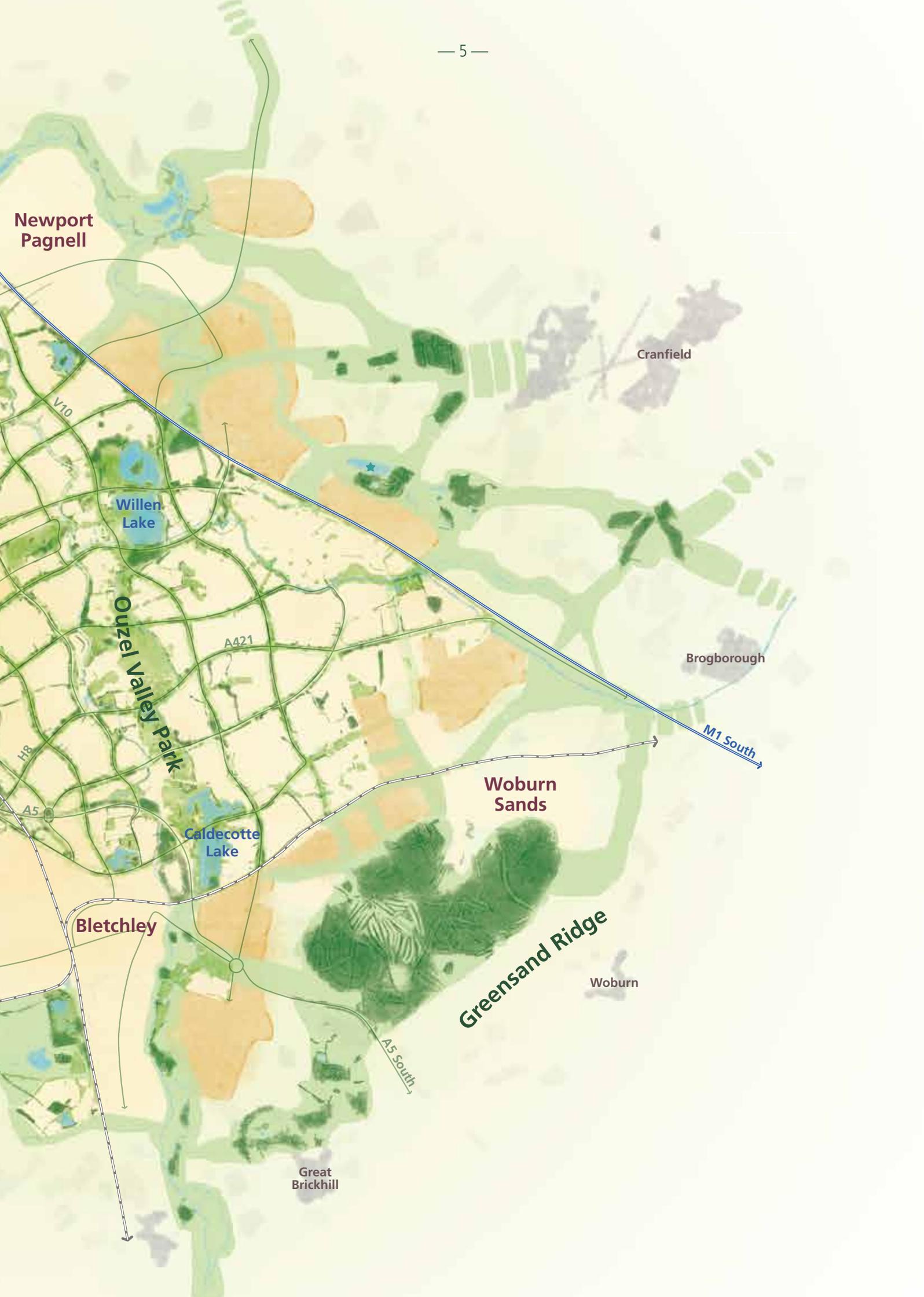
But it is not just about quantity of open space – we need those new areas to be of equally high quality in containing features and facilities that new residents need and will enjoy throughout the year.

Landscape and habitat assessments should identify areas of value that need to be protected and conserved and show where there are opportunities to strengthen local landscape character and make habitat connections in the layout and design of new development.



The Greater MK Green Grid





Newport Pagnell

Cranfield

Willen Lake

Ouzel Valley Park

Brogborough

M1 South

Woburn Sands

Caldecotte Lake

Bletchley

Greensand Ridge

Woburn

Great Brickhill

A5 South

Principle 3: Joining up Open Spaces

As Milton Keynes grows, we must ensure the green spaces and water bodies continue as a single, interconnected strategic network across the city which links with the landscape beyond its boundaries.

Making Connections

Connecting green spaces provides biodiversity benefits forming a continuous and unbroken matrix of habitats that aids the movement of wildlife. It also provides enormous benefits for people too, providing pleasant-to-use green pathways that enable movement by non-motorised means, be it on foot, bicycle, horse or mobility scooter, with all the physical and mental health benefits that the use of and access to green space brings. The green space network is one of the defining features of Milton Keynes and much appreciated by the people who live and work here. However, there are gaps in the network now that should be filled.

The map on pages 4 and 5 shows how the existing open space network could be:

- extended as Milton Keynes continues to grow and expand;
- where the gaps in the network are and where the missing links require intervention so that it can be joined up and;
- how wildlife rich woodlands and watercourses around and near to Milton Keynes may be joined to our network too.

Strings, Beads and Settings

We advocate following the principle of 'Strings, Beads and Settings':

Strings

These are linking 'strings' or corridors of green and blue infrastructure across the city and form the connections between the 'beads'. Strings should be identified at an early stage in the planning of new development. Features and assets that form strings could be play trails, wildlife corridors, and watercourses. They connect and facilitate movement within the landscape for people, wildlife or water.

Settings

These are areas of green space that are designed to surround and provide the setting for the beads. They form the majority of the open space and may include woodland, grassland and open water areas used for forestry, agriculture, grazing, surface water attenuation, sports and recreation.

Beads

These are the focal points of activity, function and attraction. Examples of beads are play areas or sports pitches or a facility such as a café. Ecological beads may include areas of high biodiversity value such as ancient woodland or a cluster of ponds. They should be connected to other beads by the strings.



Principle 4: Learn from the Past

The green infrastructure network in Milton Keynes was planned and designed according to sound principles that have proven to be effective as the city has matured.

The network of open spaces in Milton Keynes is the result of visionary planning looking to the long term, where the creation of green infrastructure was seen as fundamental to building an attractive and functional city as part of the new town masterplan.

The masterplan responded to the existing landscape of the area, including its river valleys, ancient woodlands, old hedgerows, veteran trees, archaeological sites, Grand Union Canal and characterful villages. These were treated as assets to be incorporated in to the creation of an attractive, modern city and remain integral and defining elements of the city 50 years on.

The open space network was created on a strategic city-scale and designed to provide access both to local green spaces for people close to homes and workplaces and to larger-scale parkland with a wider range of recreational and leisure activities both in terms of green spaces and blue (or water) spaces. The use of this network of spaces provides opportunities to conserve and enhance important areas for archaeology, heritage and wildlife as well as improve the wellness of its local users.

The way that development is planned and delivered in Milton Keynes today is now very different to those early days of the city. However, key underlying principles remain as important now as when the city was first established. They should continue to underpin the development of the city as it grows, to ensure the green landscape continues to make this a truly great city.



Principle 5: Ensuring Future Stewardship

Our parklands, open spaces, green infrastructure and water bodies must be cared for and maintained in perpetuity by an appropriate stewardship body.

The Parks Trust remains the guardian of strategic open space in the city with a model that is the envy of other international towns and cities. There have been other piecemeal maintenance and management arrangements adopted in some parts of the city but these are less accountable and do not embrace the strategic requirements of a wider green infrastructure network.

We remain well placed to continue our focus on managing, protecting, and enhancing new areas of strategic open space as Milton Keynes expands. This allows those important smaller local spaces such as pocket parks, allotments and sports pitches to be managed by community organisations such as Parish Councils and local special interest groups.

Future stewardship arrangements need to be planned from the start of any new development with funds provided to cover the costs of maintenance of open space in perpetuity. It is now common that such obligations are placed on developers when planning permission is given. Well planned green infrastructure adds value to developments, helps make them attractive and assists in the requirements to mitigate environment impacts of development such as managing surface water and delivering biodiversity net gain.

The physical arrangement of how open space will be maintained needs to be carefully considered when new areas are being designed and built so that it is practical and cost effective in the long term. This includes considering things such as how land will be accessed from public roads by maintenance equipment, avoiding planting forest scale trees close to buildings, the durability of structures such as bridges, fences, retaining walls and path surfaces.

Future stewardship should also ensure that users and neighbours of open space know which body is responsible and accountable for the land, its maintenance and offer the opportunity to engage with them. They should make it clear for people where the opportunities are to enjoy access to green space within their areas.

Building on over 30 years of active experience The Parks Trust offers advice and guidance to planners and developers on the design of new parks and landscape in and around Milton Keynes and how to maximise the opportunities of strategically planned green space for the benefit of all.







The Parks Trust
Campbell Park Pavilion
1300 Silbury Boulevard
Campbell Park
Milton Keynes
MK9 4AD

www.theparkstrust.com

