



Make No Little Plans

The story of Milton Keynes' early years
told by those tasked with its planning and development...



Make no little plans

***They have no magic
to stir men's blood...***

Make big plans

***Aim high in hope
and work!***

Daniel Hudson Burnham
(Chicago Architect, 1846-1912)¹

Why Milton Keynes?

There was enormous pressure on Bucks County Council for planning within the Green Belt and Fred Pooley said, 'I'm fed up with saying no. I want, as a positive architect planner, to say yes... What would be the implications of building a new city for 1/4 million people in North Bucks?'

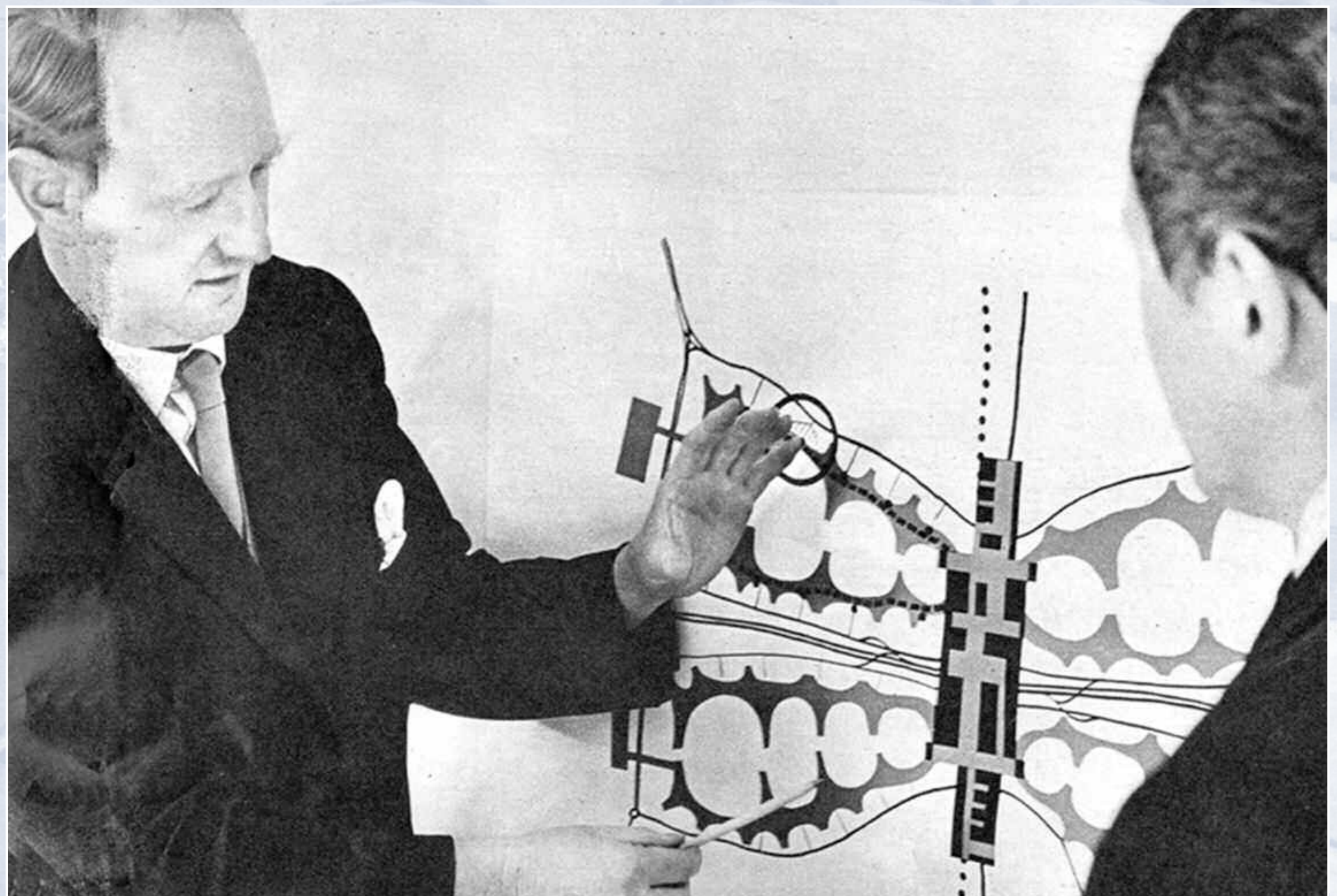
● **Bill Berrett**

7th January 1964, BBC Radio Broadcast:

'Here is the 8 o'clock news... Official planners in Buckinghamshire want to build a new type of city for the motor age in which no-one would live more than 10 minutes' walk from a school or a free monorail service...'



1961, Fred Pooley is Chief
Architect and Planner of
Bucks County Council



Fred Pooley and Bill Berrett,
TV presentation, 1964



Pooleyville's proposed
New City Monorail

13th January 1966, The Government announces a future city:

The Government liked the idea of a new city in North Buckinghamshire. It would fit in the Regional Plan to be published shortly, and so it decided to use the New Towns Act to set up a Development Corporation to invest public money and take the risk that it would be repaid.

● **Lee Shostak**

¹ *Make No Little Plans* is also the title of a book published in 2011 by Living Archive MK about the Town Planning and Urban Design Studio, David Lock Associates – DLA – in Central Milton Keynes.

(Images from <http://billberrett.info/north-bucks-new-city>)



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The Milton Keynes Master Plan

The Development Corporation for Milton Keynes was established in March 1967, led by Lord 'Jock' Campbell and tasked with preparing a Master Plan for the new city of Milton Keynes.

First of all we had the decision of who to appoint as the Master Planners – I always intended we should employ [Richard] Llewellyn-Davis because I knew him and he had very open ideas and we very much agreed about things. But the Ministry made us go through a tremendous business of asking four people to make presentations. Then everybody chose Llewellyn Davis.

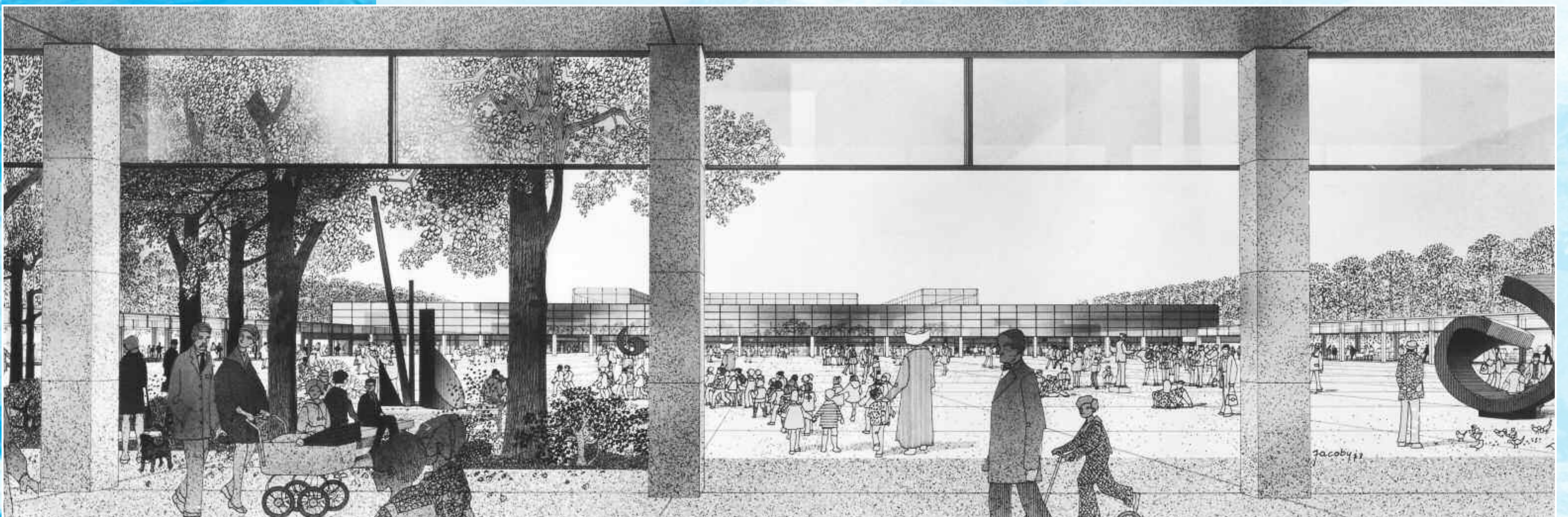
● **Jock Campbell**

The Board appointed Fred Pooley as a special Advisor, but disregarded his idea of a city built around a public transport system; the Llewellyn-Davis team argued instead for freedom of movement for cars – a city based on a grid system... And there was space to create a true garden city, to create a city for everybody. The Plan was strategic, not detailed, leaving it to others to specify...

● **Lee Shostak**



Original drawings for the MK Master Plan by Helmut Jacoby (1926-2005)





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Buying the Land



The designated area of Milton Keynes pictured in 1970. The original caption reads: 'This photograph shows the area from Bletchley to Wolverton in North Bucks to be developed as a New Town called Milton Keynes. The village in the centre of the picture is Simpson.'

The Master Planners' 1968 Interim Report laid out the bare bones of the plan and recommended that first developments should be in a crescent linking Wolverton and Bletchley. Within five years 12,600 acres (6,000 ha) had been acquired at £840 per acre.

As a trainee surveyor in Tiger Bay, Cardiff, I'd seen appalling living conditions – houses with earth floors, a dripping water tap in the yard... I came to MK Development Corporation in 1969, primarily responsible for buying the land on which the city was built. We had one compulsory purchase order in Woughton-on-the-Green where I lived; and I would visit the village pub...

One evening, a young man came in complaining bitterly about this man 'Brookman', who was throwing his father out on the streets! He'd like to meet him!

Of course, the pub went extremely quiet – everybody looked at me.

So I said, 'I'm Brian Brookman.'

He said, 'How can you possibly – ?'

I told him about Tiger Bay and said, 'If I had to choose between a farmer and the thousands of people living in such conditions and getting them a decent home – the farmer will lose every time!'

● **Brian Brookman**



Woughton-on-the-Green looking towards Peartree Bridge, 1972 (LAMK, Iain Cawthorne Collection)



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The Housing

You had huge pressure to get housing built – Government was unhappy about our lack of progress; industrialised building methods developed; and the private house market just disappeared – all contributed to big-scale production in quick time!

● **Frank Henshaw**

What Derek [Walker] offered was the sweeping sort of great schemes. He'd produce a plan as a *fait accompli* – 'If you don't accept this then the housing programme is going to go!' He was quite ruthless.

● **Peter Waterman**

When I joined in around '71, only six or eight houses [had] been built... I'd go to other new towns and we were the butt of all the jokes. I'd say, 'You'll see.' Later, when Milton Keynes was building 3,000 houses a year, I did enjoy saying to them, 'Just 3,000 this year!' That meant ten houses every day! It was a tremendous time.

● **Don Ritson**



Conniburrow under construction



Great Linford under construction



Greenleys under construction



Fishermead



Coffee Hall



Netherfield



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Social Development

My personal aim, as Arts and Cultural Development Officer, was to make the arts available to 99% of the population – so we had to do things differently! What really bothered me in the Master Plan was growth from the grass roots level. When Jock Campbell asked me, 'What do you think is the most important thing?' I said, 'People, not buildings'.

● **Cynthia Stroud-Watson (née Hargate)**



Bradwell Common
Community House



We wanted new residents to settle in without worry and be involved in the creation of their city. Arrivals Workers would visit every household, and Community Workers would help stimulate local activities. We sought to be different from the other new towns. They didn't have the freedom we had, or the creativity – some of it crazy, but some was good...

Young families might have no other family support, so they supported each other...

The Social Development team facilitated all that, on every estate, in the Community Houses. That was a most significant operation at a local level.

● **Ralph Willcox**



Fishermead Community
House



A family move in to
Fullers Slade



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The City of Trees – MK's landscaping



The Milton Keynes Bowl
concerts



The Belvedere in winter,
Campbell Park



Campbell Park in spring



V8 Marlborough Street
in autumn



The Tree Cathedral by
grid roads H5 Portway
and V10 Brickhill Street

Milton Keynes' landscaping pervaded every development. **Fred Roche** said, 'We'll never have resources for beautiful buildings like Florence or Venice. If the city succeeds, it will be in its landscape and trees.'...

Campbell Park is probably the biggest urban park produced from scratch in the UK...

The Bowl was an old brick pit 120ft deep (36.5m). We built its amphitheatre from the city's spoil. Rock concerts were a very good way of producing revenue!

● **Brian Salter**

Dutch Elm disease and the 1977 drought made **Milton Keynes a very clean sheet of paper!**
● **Neil Higson**

Fred Roche felt we needed something faster-growing so we had **very dense tree-planting** to make a great show very quickly whilst the forest trees grew through the canopy. The landscape of Milton Keynes looks magnificent and I'm very proud of it.

● **John Napleton**

I'm always proud to say there is more wildlife in Milton Keynes now than before we started. It was **infrastructure investment not cost!**

● **Bob Hill**



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Central Milton Keynes – The Shopping Building



We were in constant discussion about size. Eventually the decision emerged to build a **regional shopping centre!**

● **Chris Woodward**

We wanted cast iron for **spanning big spaces** and glazing for naturally-lit, weather-protected streets. Jock [Campbell] couldn't understand us: ½ million sq. ft. of shopping? Who'd come and sign up in the middle of Buckinghamshire? But he backed it, bless him.

● **Stuart Moss crop**

The elevated road was an enormous structure with the **biggest pour of concrete** which took 24 hours!

● **Ken Baker**

Our agents advised: 'Build it small – let it grow with the population' – sensible, commercial advice, but the Board rejected it: it is not Milton Keynes' style. We're going to **hit the marketplace between the eyes!** We're going to do it and make it work! And, by God, weren't they right? The building was, and is, a masterpiece – and hugely successful from day one!

● **Allen Duff**



*The shopping centre
under construction*



*The shopping centre under
construction*



*The shopping centre,
May 1979*



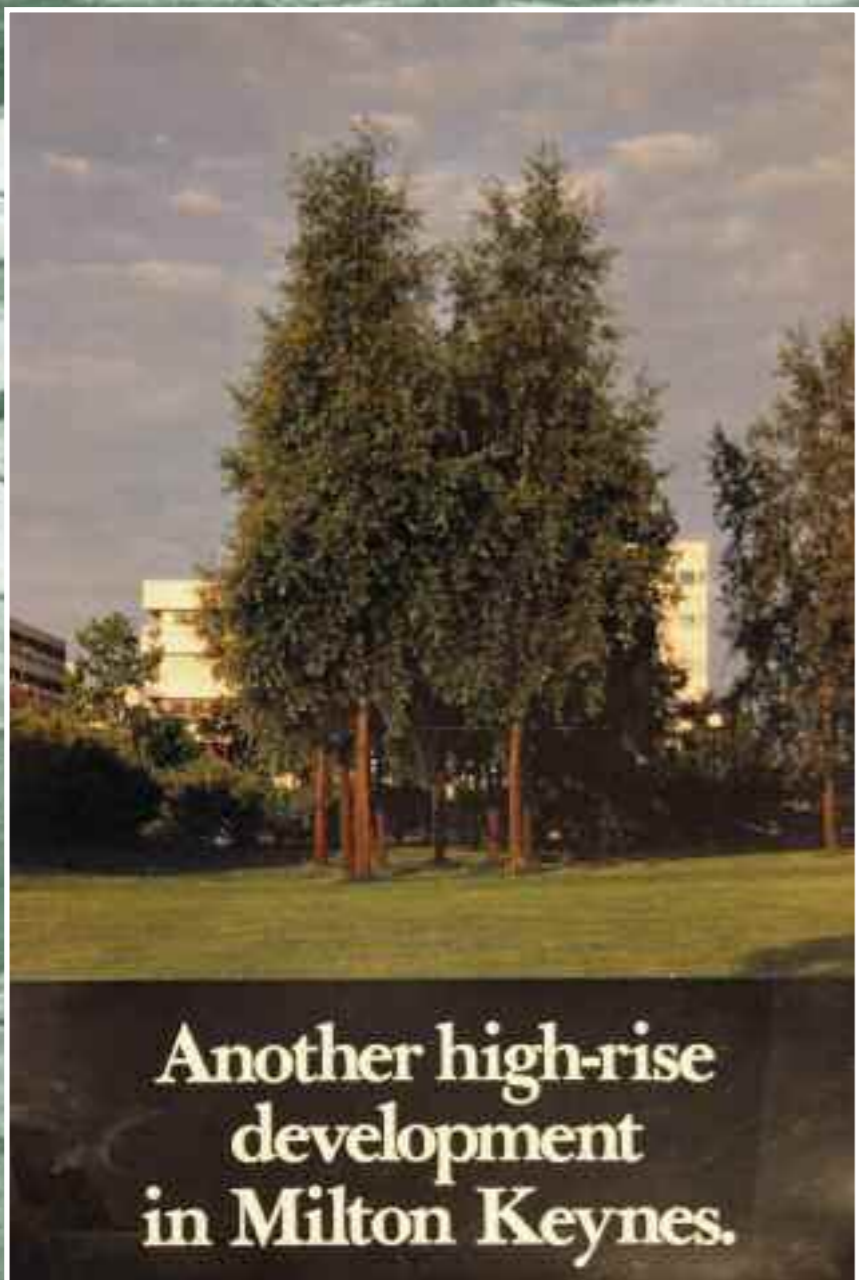


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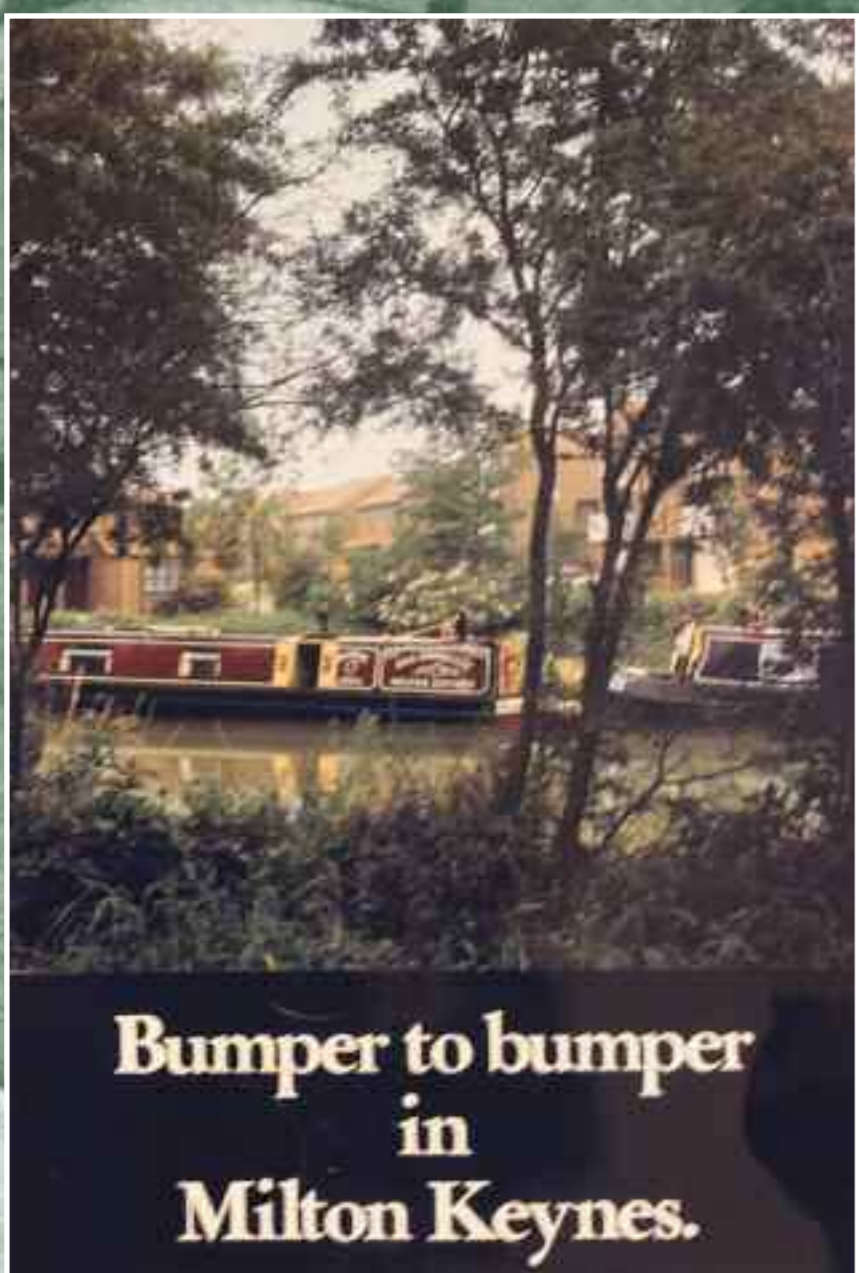
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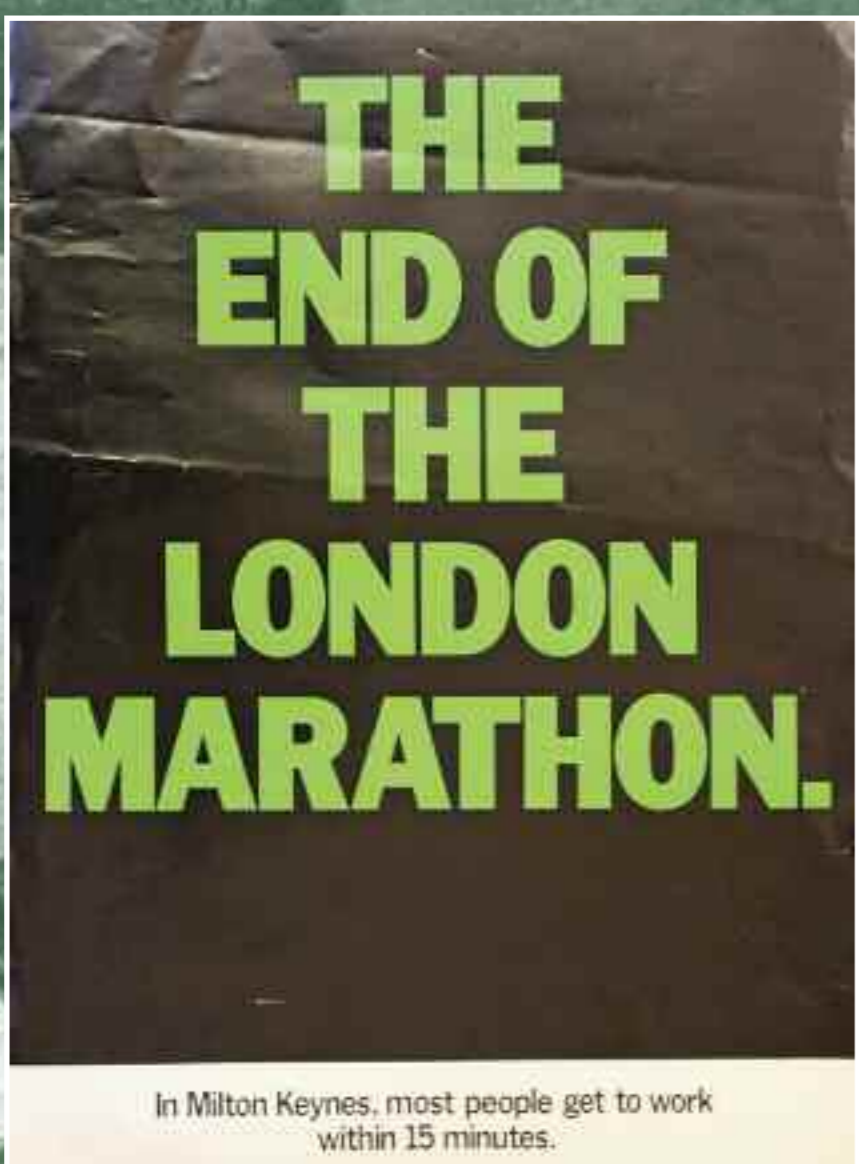
Marketing Milton Keynes



Another high-rise
development
in Milton Keynes.



Bumper to bumper
in
Milton Keynes.



In Milton Keynes, most people get to work
within 15 minutes.



We had confidence in what we were doing
commercially because with **3000 jobs a year**
coming in at our peak, it was working!

Early MK posters with wordy narrative made
people switch off. So we moved to 'The Testimonial' –
people who'd moved to Milton Keynes saying, 'It's
great! Why don't you move to Milton Keynes?' Then
ads went to a cheeky phase like 'Rush-Hour in
Milton Keynes' showing a guy on a bike; or a picture
of the M4 rammed solid with a junction sign for
Slough and underneath it: 'Berks (as in Berkshire) –
Move to Milton Keynes'...

The Shopping Building opened the gates for TV
advertising. A later ad, borrowed from a French film,
shows a little chap carrying a red balloon around
Milton Keynes. It still gives me a shiver today when he
comes up the steps into the Bowl where thousands of

local children await the **Great Milton Keynes
Red Balloon Race...**

Our market research identifying potential
investment overseas focused on Germany,
Scandinavia, the US and Japan. We were trying to
say, 'We're not small-minded: **Milton Keynes
wants to play on a much bigger stage!**'

● **Bob Hill**





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*The grid road system
in Milton Keynes
follows a simple
north-south pattern:*

*'V' roads are vertical
generally going from
north to south and
are all named
'Streets';*

*'H' roads are
horizontal generally
going from east to
west and are all
named 'Ways';*

*and they all intersect
each other at
roundabouts.*

MK's Grid Roads and Roundabouts



What's important is ease of navigation – and it is extremely easy in Milton Keynes!

● **Frank Henshaw**

Engineers will tell you that roundabouts give you 'weaving length'. When you want to weave into another lane on roundabouts, you've got time. Traffic lights make you all... stop and it's easy to get jammed. Roundabouts are much easier. They're a damn good idea!

● **Don Ritson**

Bucks County Council had responsibility for built roads in early MK, and so put roundabouts in on a temporary basis – because it was then a rural area and rural areas aren't suited to traffic signals. But they've become permanent and Milton Keynes is renowned for them now!... We originally felt that 40mph was [an] appropriate speed for grid roads – at no stage did we anticipate 70mph. But the County Council went for 50mph (80kph)!

● **John Wardley**



Grid roads under construction



Winter on V8
Marlborough
Street



Roundabout at the
H7/V7 intersection



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Believing in the dream... Reflections



The CMK Team at
Wavendon Tower, MKDC
HQ 1974

It was a thrilling place to be. We'd learn from the mistakes of earlier new towns and make a place fit for everybody. This permeated the staff; it was a family, all ages and backgrounds. What MK did was provide a vision.

● **Ralph Willcox**

I'm extremely proud of being involved with the most fantastic team there's ever been. Nobody will recreate a Milton Keynes again.

● **Tony Hird**

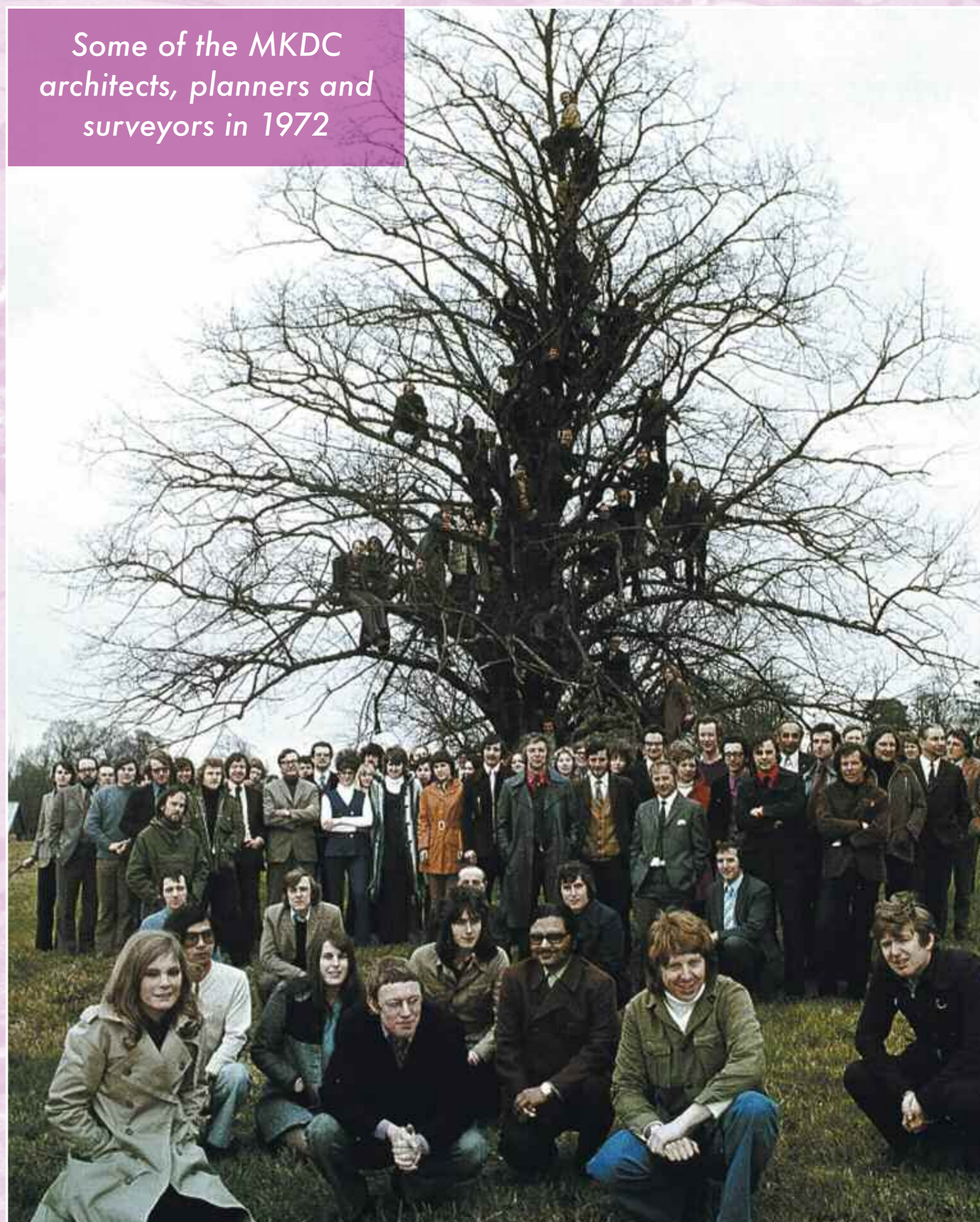
What was critical in its creation and its sustainability was empowerment – you could go and do stuff and didn't have to come trotting back to get approvals. As long as I was behaving, doing deals within a reasonably loose framework, then back at the ranch I would get support.

● **Bob Hill**

We were passionate about what we did – whether architecture, social development, land acquisition, or building – and were determined to do it well. It was – and still is – a drug of the most pleasant feelings, but it takes over and pressure from home creates conflict: marriages broke up, with commitment to MK a contributory factor. We were pioneers. The excitement of it all was overwhelming, mind-filling all the time. We didn't talk about risk, but about success – you resolved problems rather than sink under their weight. It was exceptional, unique. All who were involved in MKDC during the '70s and '80s say it was an extraordinary place to work. And what made it special? Lord Campbell, Fred Roche and Frank Henshaw.

● **Allen Duff**

Some of the MKDC
architects, planners and
surveyors in 1972



I want it to be known as a place which is good to live in, to bring up your family in, with facilities to offer a good rounded lifestyle. This was the difference in Milton Keynes with other new towns – of a scale able to provide its own facilities. People should be able to feel proud to say, 'I live in Milton Keynes'.

● **Frank Henshaw**



Wavendon Tower interior,
the home of MKDC, 1972