

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GARDENS TRUST PUBLIC PARKS IN MILTON KEYNES



A Zoom presentation by
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THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPES ASSEMBLY
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Initially this talk was titled ‘Public parks of Buckinghamshire’ however following the addition of Campbell Park to the EH register of P&Gs, I decided to focus on the linear parks of MK’s. But I would just like to mention that at the start of the lockdown back in March, the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust launched a new project to research the public parks in the county the aim was to inspire our longstanding team of R&R volunteers and to keep them engaged through the difficult months ahead when they would be confined at home. It was also to be our contribution to ‘The GT’s Unforgettable Gardens’ campaign. The findings from this project were published in three extra online newsletters which are all available on our website. Our intention is to expand this research at a later date, i.e. when we can get access to archives etcetera and the plan is to publish a guidebook of Public Parks in Buckinghamshire.



You might remember or even have attended the launch of the exciting national project 'Compiling the Record' back in the autumn of 2017 at the Garden Museum. The joint conference highlighted the vulnerability and lack of understanding of post 1945 landscapes, it ended with a call to CGT's and other interested parties to nominate sites. Well in excess of 100 nominations were received including 6 we submitted from Bucks:

High and Over, Amersham (garden) Bekonscot Model Village (garden) Chilterns Crematorium (Cem)

Central MK's (civic spaces) Campbell Park (parks) Bledlow Manor & The Lyde (garden)

This coincided with research that had recently started on the open spaces and parks of MK's by two of our intrepid volunteers. They had already completed an excellent dossier on Central Milton Keynes, uncovering a wealth of archive including detailed planting plans for the numerous landscapes and gardens, many of which are tucked away in squares and away from the main boulevards. Having finished this interesting report which was in quite a different format from our usual garden reports. They then set to work on Campbell Park, in the three years since they have also completed Ouzel Valley park, Willen Lakes, Caldecotte Lake and the Newlands Tree Cathedral.

After a long wait, in August this year the announcement as to which landscapes would be given registration was finally made and all at the BGT were thrilled Campbell Park had been recognised and was awarded Grade II status along with another Bucks site nominated by Karen Fitzsimon The Business Park at Broadwater Park, Denham designed by Preb Jacobsen, also Grade II.



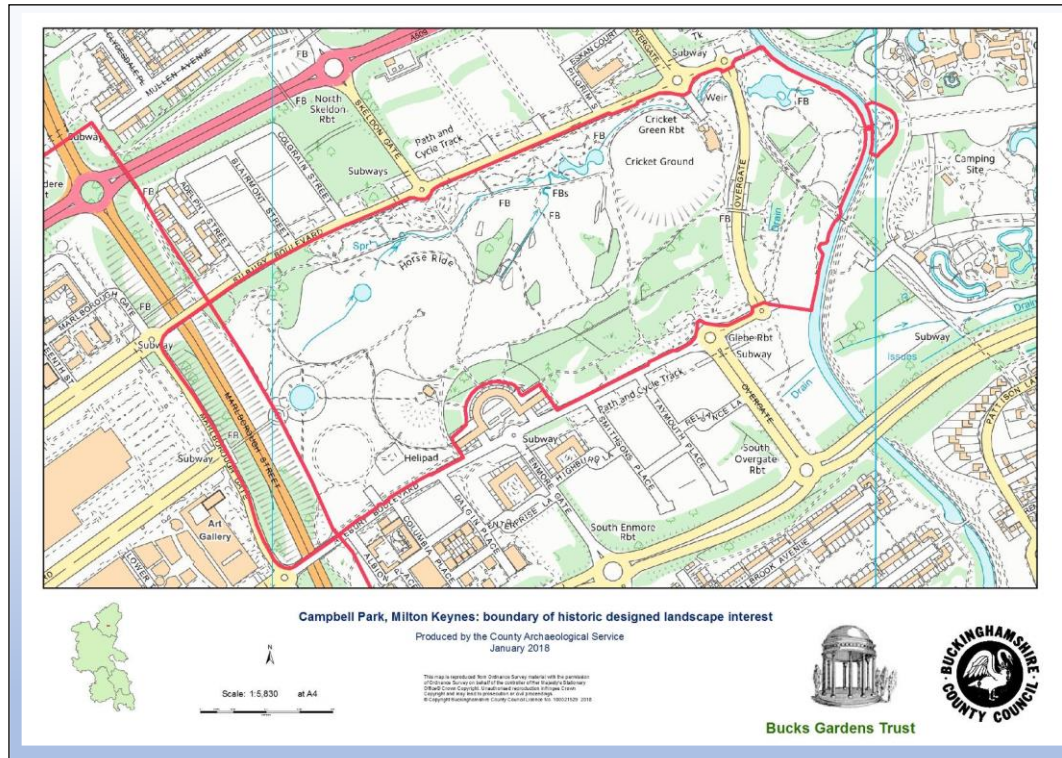
CAMPBELL PARK ONE OF THE FINEST POST-WAR LANDSCAPES

I thought I would read you this article by Rowan Pelling which recently featured in The Times and summed up many people's thoughts on MK's

'I'm humbled by the truth about poor derided Milton Keynes'

It is hard for us in the UK to embrace a place that is planned on a grid system, with 130 roundabouts. However, it turns out that grids, spacious suburbs and 5,000 acres of integrated parkland are just what is needed in a pandemic. While more cramped neighbouring towns such as Luton and Bedford, have seen their COVID-19 rates soar, infection rates in MK have been low by comparison. Added to which MK's has a booming economy due largely to the leading retail companies that have based huge warehouses there, these businesses having been boosted significantly in recent months by the huge increase in on-line purchases.

Slide 4



The 46 hectares that make up Campbell Park are a key part of the MK's development corporations planned cityscape designed in 1967, the park links urban CMK to a green corridor consisting of a swathe of naturalistic parkland all the way to the Ouse Valley. It is one of the most imaginative parks to be laid out in the C20 and is now recognised as being of national significance, work started on the park in 1975 and it was opened in 1984 by Lord Campbell of Eskan, the recently retired chair of Milton Keynes Development Corporation from 1967 to 1983.

It lies on an axis with the MK shopping centre to the west of the axis the topography rises to a mound with a beacon, known as the Light pyramid 2012 by Liliane Lijn. To the east there are views to Willen Lakes, the Tree Cathedral and beyond to Bedfordshire. Its framework is based on its natural and constructed landforms, bold planting masses, tree lined roads and a complex of path systems. The design was mostly landscaped by Neil Higson of MK's development corporation. According to Pevsner, he was responsible for the semi natural landscape which followed the tradition of C18 landscape gardens. Higson himself has said that he was more influenced by Joseph Paxton and understandably Fredrick Olmstead (NY's Central Park). The area nearest to CMK is formal in character with the MK Rose as its focal point, this was formerly a large circular pool with a fountain. It was replaced in 2013 by the new collective place of reflection and memorial designed by Gordon Young, the circular design consists of 105 pillars which feature a calendar of days important to the people of MK's. From here paths radiate as in a Patte d'oie or goosefoot design.

On the boundary map, follow route from the Rose, along NE edge where the formal city gardens are located, the central area or parkland is grazed by sheep and the area is interspersed with tree planting which gradually slopes east to the Grand Union canal. To the south there is a woodland ridge planted with native species.

Cricket pitch events plateau specially designed benches railings, steel bridges and of course sculptures eight of which are significant





CAMPBELL PARK OVERVIEW , WITH WILLEN LAKES IN THE DISTANCE



NEWLANDS TREE CATHEDRAL

Overview of park, clearly see the Rose, Events Space, bridge from CMK, views towards Willen Lakes and Beds

Newlands Tree Cathedral

One of only three in the UK, and the only municipal one, the others at Whipsnade and Oban were planted by private individuals in response to WWI. It is also the work of Neil Higson and was planted in 1986 it is based on the plan form of Norwich Cathedral. For more information on the cathedral see the dossier on our website.

Slide 7



CP was originally conceived as a sculpture park and although not on the scale planned, as previously mentioned it did include 8 significant sculptures

Circle dance, Claire Wilkes 1997 steel structure and cane The MK Rose and detail

The Gnomon or shadow caster Peter Bowker 1994 slate & bronze The Head Allen Jones 1990 steel

Cave Ivan and Heather Morrison 2011 concrete and wood. See MK Parks Trust website for more details



There are currently more than forty public parks in MK's which are managed by the Parks Trust and more green spaces are being added each year.

There are also 1251 kilometres of roads in the town many of which form green corridors these are also landscaped and come under the management of the Trust.

Sculpture Chain Reaction Ray Smith 1992 celebrates the end of the first phase of MK's creation.

Labyrinth - Campbell Park




THE PEOPLES PARKS

Willen Lakes Caldecotte Lake and Ouzel Valley park. They are designed on the strings, beads and settings format. Strings being footpaths, cycleways and riding trails, beads are the activity centres and buildings, and the setting is the visual landscape that makes up the body of the park. Ouzel Valley Park is on the site of an abandoned medieval village evidence of this remains in earthworks, fishponds, and moats. Peace Pagoda is located at Willen Lakes.



Slide 10




Gardens in CMK including The Fred Roche Memorial Garden, The Winter Garden and Grafton park




Great Linford Manor Park – Heritage Fund Project

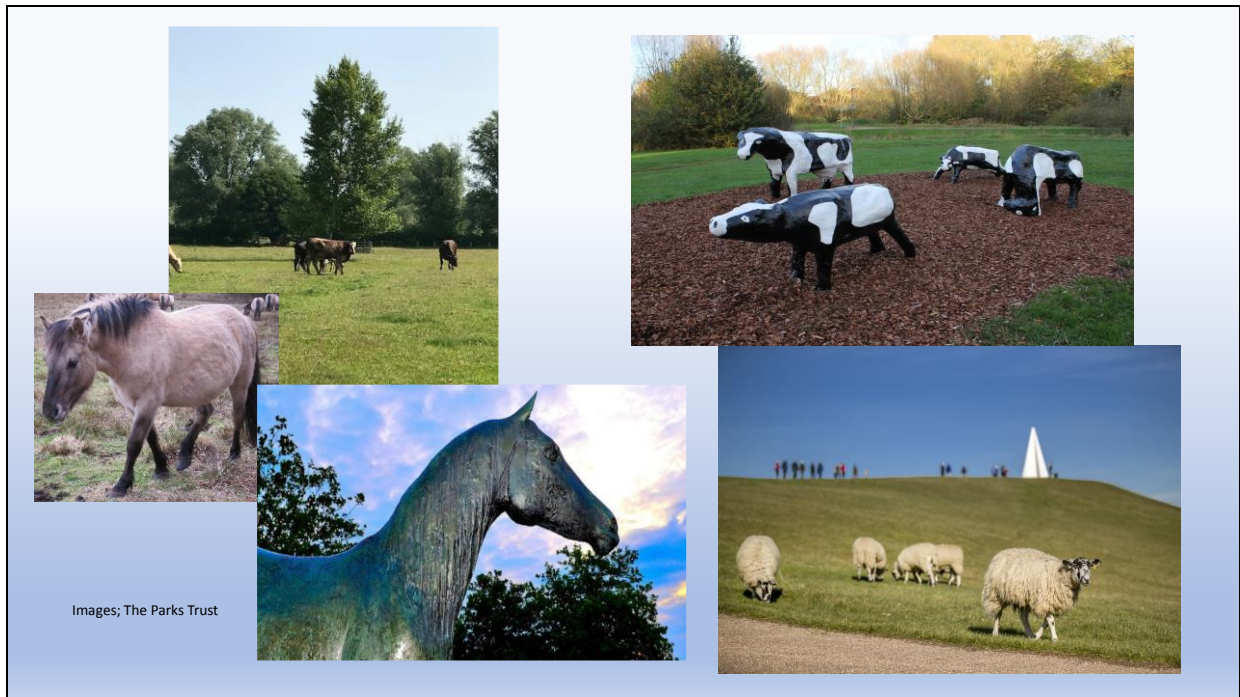





Images C de Carle



MK's is not just about new parks Great Linford Manor Park is also maintained by the Parks Trust. The C17 and C18 designed landscape located to the north of the town is currently being restored with a grant from the Heritage Fund. The centre piece is the house and an area of pleasure ground which is privately owned. The park is open to the public, it includes a doric seat, a water garden, cascade, and wilderness. As before more info on the Parks Trust website



Animals in the parks

The parks trust works with a farmer partner on stock management across the parks, at the height of summer there are up to 500 cows, 400 sheep as well as konik ponies a hardy primitive European breed, which graze along the valley of the Ouse. The animals are used as a means of land management as well as food production and also animate the landscape much in the way that they did in the eighteenth century.

Concrete Cows (Liz Leyh who worked with MKDC on their commitment to public art in urban and landscape settings, you will not see them now as they are too fragile to remain outside and now reside in the museum) and Elizabeth Frink's Black Horse in Central Milton Keynes.

'On behalf of all of us at the Parks Trust, please thank all of those at the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust who have raised awareness of Campbell Park and nominated it to the 'Compiling the Record' project'.

Philip Bowsher, Head of Environment & Volunteering, Milton Keynes Parks Trust



'I believe the most significant influence of our work on the world of public landscape is in the importance of landscape infrastructure in large scale beautiful and healthy environments providing quality of life for all'.

Neil Higson Chief Landscape Architect of Milton Keynes Development Corporation from 1977

Campbell Park and quotes

Final slide websites Parks in Trust, MK Parks Trust and Bucks gardens trust website where you can find all our research reports including those on MK's I have mentioned in this presentation.

www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

www.fieldintrust.org

www.theparkstrust.org.uk



<https://bucksgardenstrust.org.uk>

<https://www.theparkstrust.cm>

<https://www.fieldsintrust.org>



Many thanks to our volunteers Jill Stansfield, Gill Grocott. Neil Higson and the Parks Trust without whom this project would not have been possible.
Finally, a huge thank you to Virginia Hinze who set us off on our research and recording journey, when she trained our volunteers and gave us valuable support whilst we set up the project.

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