
Call for Papers and Participation

New Towns: Learning from the Past, Shaping the Future

The Historic Landscapes Assembly 2026: A Two-Day Conference

Milton Keynes | 23 – 24th September 2026

Overview

This two-day conference and assembly in **Milton Keynes** bring together **academics, practitioners, policymakers, and those with direct experience of New Town development** to explore how the histories of New Towns can inform their futures.

New Towns represent some of the most ambitious urban experiments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As many face renewal, adaptation, or reimagining, there is an urgent need to reflect on their origins, lived experiences, and long-term trajectories. This event places **historical insight at the centre of forward-looking debate**, asking how lessons from the past can meaningfully shape future planning, design, governance, and community life.

The conference is conceived as both a scholarly forum and a space for professional and intergenerational exchange, encouraging dialogue between research, practice, and lived experience.

Conference Structure

Day 1: History and Futures

- **Morning:** Historical perspectives on New Towns
Papers and reflections on the planning, design, governance, social life, and political contexts of New Towns, with particular attention to Milton Keynes and comparable developments in the UK and internationally.
- **Afternoon:** Using history to inform the future
Contributions that explicitly engage with how historical analysis, memory, and experience can inform contemporary challenges and future directions for New Towns. This may include policy, practice, design, sustainability, governance, and community engagement.

Please note that we will suggest overnight accommodation but bookings will be the responsibility of the attendees.

Day 2: Milton Keynes in Context

- **First thing:** Introduction to Milton Keynes
A brief overview of Milton Keynes as a New Town, including its planning history, design principles, and subsequent development.
- **Rest of day:** Guided site visits
Structured tours around Milton Keynes, offering participants the opportunity to experience the town firsthand and continue discussions in situ.

Topics of Interest

We welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to:

- Histories of New Town planning, design, and governance
- Lived experience, memory, and everyday life in New Towns
- The role of practitioners, institutions, and professional bodies
- Landscape, infrastructure, and environmental planning
- Social, economic, and cultural legacies of New Towns
- Milton Keynes in comparative perspective
- Regeneration, adaptation, and long-term change
- How historical knowledge can inform future planning and design decisions
- Sites within Milton Keynes for guided visits

We particularly encourage papers and contributions that **bridge historical analysis and forward-looking perspectives**.

Who Should Contribute

The conference welcomes participation from:

- Academic researchers (across planning, landscape architecture, architecture, history, geography, sociology, and related fields)
- Planning, landscape, and urban design practitioners
- Policy professionals
- Individuals who were directly involved in the planning, design, development or management of New Towns
- Early-career researchers and reflective practitioners
- Those able to guide or suggest a site visit

Non-traditional formats (such as reflective accounts, practice-based perspectives, or collaborative presentations) are welcome alongside conventional academic papers.

Submissions

We are seeking presentations of 15-29 minutes. Please submit an abstract of **300–400 words**, outlining:

- The focus of your proposed contribution
- Its relevance to the conference theme
- How it engages with the relationship between past and future

Submissions should include the author's name, affiliation (if applicable), and contact details, and be sent to **Jill Sinclair**, jill.sinclair@thegardenstrust.org and **Jan Woudstra**, j.woudstra@sheffield.ac.uk by **1 May 2026**.

Please note that the Gardens Trust is a small charity so we will not be able to routinely offer fees or expenses to speakers.

Collaboration and Partners

The **Gardens Trust** is actively seeking collaboration with professional and academic partners, including professional bodies, universities and research centres. We are pleased to be partnering with the Landscape Institute and welcome additional partners too.

We welcome expressions of interest from organisations and institutions interested in co-sponsoring, contributing to sessions, or supporting the event.

Further Information

Details regarding registration, venue, programme, and suggested accommodation options will be circulated following abstract selection.

For enquiries or partnership discussions, contact **Linden Groves**, linden.groves@thegardenstrust.org.