



# Action Plan – Key Priorities

## Physical and Natural Environment

# Foreword



*“The truth is: the natural world is changing. And we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have and we need to defend it.”* — **Sir David Attenborough**

Our ambition is for Milton Keynes to be the Greenest City. We have always led by example, keeping 40% green and blue infrastructure. No matter how big we grow, we must maintain this. The strategic open space network was established from the outset as an integral element of the design of the city. This network of natural and green spaces is core to the heritage and identity of the new city.

The linear parks, woodlands, grid road corridors and balancing lakes provide more than attractive amenity spaces; they provide connectivity for people, wildlife and water. Enhancing existing sites and the wildlife corridors that connect them such as The Blue Lagoon, Emberton Country Park and linear parks will see great gains in their value to nature and our citizens. Opportunities will be sought for new sites on this scale as the city continues to grow as linked to Plan: MK. New high protection sites will be designated and wildlife corridors will be extended.

Working towards that ambition, we are proud to have co-created this document with The Parks Trust, the parish and town councils and national and local community green groups. This document is an addition to “The Greenest City” Physical and Natural Environment: Position Statement, which outlined the physical and natural environment core policy vision for how Milton Keynes can aspire to become the ‘Greenest City’ and MK Futures 2050. It also develops and supports a key theme of the Sustainability Strategy (2019 – 2050) which sets out a vision for Milton Keynes as the first major world city to commit to becoming carbon negative by 2050 and being a world-leading sustainable city.

In becoming the “Greenest City” this document outlines Milton Keynes as an ambitious and innovative city, taking the action necessary. As the city of the future, Milton Keynes must take the lead and protect and enhance the biodiversity in our city for generations to come.

**Cllr Emily Darlington,  
Cabinet Member for Public Realm**

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# Introduction



## ***The Greenest City (“The Greenest City” Physical and Natural Environment: Position Statement, MKC, 2019)***

*Milton Keynes understands respects and enjoys water in the environment. Our communities will be resilient and adapt to changes in national and local water conditions. The Greenest City will be one that understands the role of water in the city, the function it serves, how it is best managed and how to interact with it to the greatest benefit.*

*Milton Keynes will continue to be a place that appreciates the value of nature. Nature will be everywhere for people to enjoy and improve their sense of wellbeing. We will provide space for nature, enhance the natural value of the city and adapt to climate change.*

*Trees are integral to the landscape and environmental quality of Milton Keynes on par with all other natural utility and infrastructure. The urban forest must inspire collaboration and creativity to ensure it thrives and expands as the city’s green shield and the icon at the heart of “The Greenest City.”*

## **We want MK to be seen and enjoyed as the ‘Greenest City’.**

For it to be the greenest city, it will be one where a high proportion of land is green and is in favourable condition to support biodiversity and to provide opportunities for citizens to access green space and experience nature. The most important sites and corridors for biodiversity should be protected and conserved and linked and connected by corridors that both wildlife and people can move through. Our goal is for wildlife to thrive – evidenced by monitoring a set of key indicator species across the borough. Buildings and structures provide opportunities and niches for biodiversity including green walls and roofs, nesting and roosting opportunities for birds, bats and insects. We need to encourage residents and businesses to manage their gardens and properties in ways that help support biodiversity, providing stepping-stones between green spaces and additional opportunities for foraging and nesting.

Having regular, free and open access to green space and opportunities to experience nature close to where we live, is good for our physical and mental health.

# The Four Pillars



Milton Keynes must take a holistic view on the environment to deliver its greenest city ambitions. To do this the diagram below demonstrates Milton Keynes' approach to the physical and natural environment through the three integrated pillars of nature, water and landscape and trees. A fourth pillar was added to represent the importance of community and individual action.

NATURE

WATER

LANDSCAPE  
AND TREES

COMMUNITY



# Workshop summary



The Physical and Natural Environment: Position Statement proposed that Milton Keynes Council would work with our key natural environment partners to deliver the principles and objectives set out in the vision in the form of an action plan to be ready by March 2020. The engagement and support of The Parks Trust, Parish and Town Councils, and specialist organisations such as The Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Canal & River Trust and local organisations has been fundamental in developing this Action Plan.

The council's teams working on Nature, Water, Landscape, Trees and Community invited local organisations relevant to the subject areas to a range of stakeholder events that sought to identify how the vision can be delivered "on the ground". These events identified four cross cutting themes :

- **People:** Overwhelmingly, the greatest feedback was about how we engage all residents in the biodiversity challenge. Comments recognised the depth of the engagement required, "engage everyone, communication is key" and how the message should be tailored to reach all audiences, for example, "Social media, physical signage, local news articles".
- **Place:** It was recognised that effectively managing biodiversity would require significant change in how we manage our green spaces and it could create there challenges: "Perception of restoring "messy" and "Challenge of getting the public on board". Comments demonstrated the different ways people might practically help "Look at our own gardens and community gardens, what could be done differently".
- **Planning and policy:** In addition to the protecting our resources now and in the future, significant comments focussed on how we affect the growth of Milton Keynes through planning and policy. Focussing on the strategies and management of nature, participants were keen that we understood what we currently have in terms of nature and how we could do even better.
- **Programme and Partnership:** For nature to take centre stage it will require a sustained and consistent message from the Council and all its partners. We need to understand what we have, develop plans and work together in partnership.
- The feedback gained from the stakeholder events has been used to inform this Action Plan, outlining the key priorities that emerged for development and delivery to enable Milton Keynes to become the Greenest City.

# Our Action Plan



Working with our key natural environment partners we are developing an action plan for the conservation and enhancement of the habitats on the land and in our control, including parks and green spaces, highway land (i.e. the verges, roundabouts and structures like bridges and bus shelters that provide opportunities for birds and bats to nest and roost,) school grounds. The plan will identify the priorities and opportunities where habitats can be enhanced or provided to support wildlife species.

The action plan will not only protect our current biodiversity but it will also enhance future biodiversity. It will ensure that developments undertaken by the Council are exemplary in delivering against the greenest city objectives for biodiversity, water and the environment.

We will bring forward a Supplementary Planning Document that will make sure that every new development in Milton Keynes has a net biodiversity gain for our borough.

We will ensure:

- ‘Greenest City’ ambition and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity are mainstream objectives in all of our strategies and plans, including the Council Plan, local plans, the Transport Plan and MK Futures.
- The inclusion and effective implementation of planning policies that maintain the green character and quality of Milton Keynes; that protect wildlife sites and corridors and require net biodiversity gain as development takes place; that make provision for the management of water by applying sustainable drainage principles; that protect and enhance the tree resource of the city;
- Establishment of effective, community and environmentally-focused stewardship mechanisms for green spaces and biodiversity habitats as the city expands.
- Leadership and expertise in environmental policy is provided through employment of dedicated biodiversity, landscape and arboriculture officers to lead in the development and delivery of the Council’s biodiversity action plan and tree strategies.

**Milton Keynes Council cannot do this on its own;** We need to work with our key partners, who are responsible for significant areas of the green city such as The Parks Trust and town and parish councils. We will develop a joined-up strategy and plan for biodiversity, including joint mapping and species monitoring activity and provision of advisory services to enable these bodies to develop their own biodiversity action plans.

We will also work with the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership in the in the development and delivery of actions that promote and support biodiversity in the development of regional growth and economic development strategies.

# Measuring biodiversity



Milton Keynes does not have a complete picture of the opportunities and challenges in our city. Working with The Park's Trust, we will continue to:

- Survey and assess green space and biodiversity in MK; to quantify the resource and to look at trends of change and determine what are the factors affecting biodiversity (the threats and opportunities).
- Map our green space and waterbodies – quantifying how much and where it occurs. Also identifying who owns it (*e.g. MKC, town/parish councils, The Parks Trust, other public bodies, private,*)
- Map the habitats within these spaces, with a broad assessment of their condition and connectivity. Including within this the quantity and type of tree cover.
- Within the mapping, identify the key sites (e.g. SSSIs, County Wildlife Sites) and important wildlife corridors.
- Identify a set of key indicator species, collating and taking monitoring information on key indicator species e.g. birds or bumblebees.
- Use comparable information across time to assess the trends of change.
- Identify the trends and reasons for change in biodiversity.

We will deliver the biodiversity baseline by March 2021. This will form the basis of measurement and action for the council and its key natural environment partners. This will continue to be enhanced and evolve as we grow as a city including exploring ways that residents can contribute to the on-going monitoring of biodiversity in our city.

# Nature



*The people and communities of Milton Keynes are fundamental to ensuring that we all champion opportunities to develop nature, water, trees and landscape around us. We have to work together to ensure that we continue to make the outside world accessible to all.*

## Conserve

Milton Keynes has been designed and built on green principles, these must continue to be reinforced as the city develops and grows. Existing parks and open spaces, and their founding principles, must be conserved as a priority and existing sites of high biodiversity managed and protected

## Restore

We will calculate the current biodiversity value of the city. This base line will identify priority areas for restoration and investment in the existing environment. This will inform future management practices to improve their ecological value

The environment and landscape will continue to be a key feature of the city:

- The city will be friendly and accommodating to wildlife and be a vibrant and living landscape
- We will work collaboratively with The Parks Trust, Parish & Town Councils, other partners and the community to develop a city scale approach to biodiversity
- Ensure that nature is placed at the heart of landscape management decision making
- Provide space for leisure, recreation, active travel and other opportunities for physical engagement with the natural environment

## Create

With partners we will continue to create diverse habitats across our city, ensuring new woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and water courses are of high quality for wildlife. Opportunities to extend and connect areas of biodiversity will be sought. Linear parks must continue to be integrated into expansion areas resulting in greater biodiversity gain and extension of wildlife corridors. Additional land will be brought into management for the purpose of increasing the resilience of our ecosystems.



# Nature actions



- **Control of invasive species**, especially in areas where they impact on the survival of biodiversity including tackling rats, pigeons and seagulls as well as invasive plants such as Japanese Knot weed.
- **Identify creative spaces to develop habitats including developing green roundabouts and green-roofed bus stops and buildings** to provide wildlife refuges especially for invertebrates like bees, bugs and butterflies that are crucial for pollination and other animal survival.
- **Plant wildflowers on appropriate grassed areas** to diversify grasslands and provide a wider species mix and invertebrate friendly plants to support the food chain.
- **Create safe habitats**, including bird and bat boxes and integrate them into buildings to ensure they remain in place and reduce maintenance requirements.
- **Ensure developers** are designing biodiversity friendly schemes, for example spaces in fences or hedges for hedgehogs. Encourage sharing of information with homebuyers on good practice.
- **Produce and adopt supplementary planning documents** Protect and enhance biodiversity through “net gain” within areas under development and ensure this is considered at the planning stage, building on our current practice.
- **Mapping** - develop a borough wide land use map to inform ecological habitat types and connectivity.
- **Encourage Community orchards** – Supports pollinators, community involvement in the natural environment and understanding of food production and supply.
- **Country parks** – Improving the existing country park and enhancing biodiversity. Creation of a new country park in the south and consideration of additional linear park extensions / country parks in the eastern and western flanks of Milton Keynes.

# Water



## Conserve

Milton Keynes has a long heritage in developing multi-functional blue infrastructure and integrated storm water control. We should ensure that the resilience provided by these is enhanced through new developments. Conserve the pond network to ensure healthy and aquatic habitats to enable natural water and flood management systems.

## Restore

We will understand the current condition of our water courses and water bodies. Opportunities will be identified to restore degraded water landscapes, improve their functional capacity and support greater biodiversity.

Milton Keynes has an abundance of water features including lakes, rivers, ponds, floodplains and wet woodland which provide opportunities to connect communities with their environment providing physical and mental health benefits. Water will be managed holistically as a resource in conjunction with the wider natural environment. Milton Keynes has an abundance of water features including lakes, rivers, ponds, floodplains and wet woodland which provide diverse habitats for wildlife and places to connect people with the environment, providing physical and mental health benefits. We will take a holistic approach to managing water as an essential shared resource within the natural environment.

- The city will be designed to make it resilient to potential pressures of flood and drought as a result of climate change
- We will preserve and enhance our natural water resources for future generations
- The quality of our water resources will be managed carefully to ensure they are physically, chemically and biologically healthy and can support diverse wildlife.- The city will work to manage its surface water environment to ensure downstream catchment flood resilience

## Create

To address surface water flooding, urban growth and regeneration an integrated approach of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) will be followed. Surface water will be attenuated and treated using methods that blend infrastructure, nature, landscape and trees. Milton Keynes will create a more diverse portfolio of water landscapes that support greater biodiversity.

# Water actions



- **Integrated Approach** Milton Keynes will continue its legacy as leaders in developing multi-functional water management. Better ways of working between partners to achieve an integrated strategy for water management and the environment. This should include local communities playing a part.
- **Engage Communities** to develop a community led approach for maintaining and conserving water resources for future generations.
- **Appreciate how water behaves** - Water does not stop at boundaries; adopt a regional approach to managing water resources. Recognise the different sources of flooding and the challenges climate change will bring.
- **Reaffirm support** for the Bedford to MK canal extension, which could include new pathways and green space.
- **Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** on new developments are designed to promote biodiversity for both greenfield and brownfield sites and the delivery good of quality SuDS. Develop regional SuDs where possible.
- **Create new balancing lakes** for future generations; our approach will use the existing blue infrastructure within the city area as the basis for extending the system into new development areas and linking to neighbourhood schemes for managing surface water.
- **Build flood resilience** to adapt to the challenges of climate change and develop a master drainage plan to identify beneficial areas for future water regulation.
- **Protecting our resources now and in the future** - Maintain and conserve water assets we have in terms of flood risk, drought, and biodiversity and water quality. Replacing and improving existing infrastructure where needed. Protect the river corridors in Milton Keynes by retaining/enhancing buffer zone or create where possible.
- **Making space** for the sustainable management of water in the environment – providing space for storing excess water and flood water in times of heavy rainfall and permanent water during times of drought, and providing opportunities for enhancing the landscape of the city, for people to enjoy access to water for amenity and recreation, and wetland habitats for wildlife.
- **Water bodies** (lakes and ponds) and watercourses (rivers, brooks and ditches) are in good condition as habitats and with good water quality .

# Landscape and Trees



## Conserve

We'll protect veteran, ancient, historical or trees of particular cultural importance through Tree Protection Orders. Recognise and respond to pests and disease and identify trees requiring action.

Record our tree stock in an integrated database enabling monitoring and recording processes. Establish a base line of tree stock, condition and ownership within the urban forest.

## Restore

Our locally developed guidance Right Tree Right Place will herald planting methods, appropriate aftercare, maintenance and species choice to ensure minimum intervention and maximum benefit. Employing the principles of ensuring that the right trees are being planted in the right places will minimise bio-security risk, ensure greater resilience and improve the ability of our tree stock to adapt in the future.

We will understand the value of our trees and consider them a collective resource, managed to maximise their potential in maintaining the environmental quality of Milton Keynes:

- The combined elements: trees in parks, streets, private gardens, public land, highways and urban woodlands are the urban forest; and should be viewed and managed as one.
- We will maintain the original vision of Milton Keynes by ensuring necessary tree removals are mitigated, maintaining the overall tree stock
- We will ensure a diverse population of tree species is maintained, resilient to climate change and biosecurity challenges
- Milton Keynes will take a lead in engaging Forest City principles for urban living

## Create

We will work with partners to identify and map canopy cover, areas of low cover and opportunities to increase tree stock and canopy cover with an increasingly diverse species and age range. We will look for opportunities to create and connect areas of woodland.

# Landscape and Trees actions



- **Right tree, right place** - Increase tree species diversity for greater resilience and ensure trees can reach their potential without causing damage to infrastructure. Provide sufficient space for trees to develop above and below ground.
- **Increase canopy cover** with trees to provide shade, habitat, improve air quality, flood resilience and reduce building heat loss in winter. Engaging with landowners and housing providers.
- **Extend wildlife** corridors in to new developments and ensure connectivity is maintained to allow movement of wildlife through the city.
- **2 for 1** Commitment to plant 2 trees for every 1 tree that is removed in mitigation of infrastructure damage, following the principles of “right tree, right place”.
- **List of appropriate trees for Milton Keynes** –Tree species which are best suited for our climate, soils and urban density in a variety of situations, parks, streets, gardens. Sharing with developers at an early stage in the planning process.
- **Protecting** our diverse grasslands and linear parks to ensure that their benefits are understood, conserved and enhanced.
- **Advocate** responsible use of plant protection products within the environment.
- **Increase** use of wildflowers to diversify urban grasslands, supporting at risk pollinator species.
- **Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)** being developed to facilitate access, connectivity and wellbeing. Providing opportunities for residents to connect with the natural environment and linking communities via historic routes.
- **The tree resource is extensive** (e.g. percentage of land under tree canopy) and in favourable condition (e.g. woodlands in active management; street trees in good condition; veteran and notable trees mapped and protected).

# Community



## Nature

We will work to enable all members of the community to have equality of access to nature. We will seek to encourage people into the city's natural environment, many for the first time. Through this approach we will aim to transfer new skills and knowledge and strengthen emotional connections with the natural world.

## Water

The water environment is something to be enjoyed in both urban and rural areas. We will enable communities to enjoy and better understand the city's balancing lakes, watercourses and the wider network of blue infrastructure. Sustainable drainage systems will be seen a positive tool for providing local amenity benefit as well as managing flood risk.

We will work with stakeholder and communities to improve our mutual understanding of the natural environment. Seek opportunities and facilitate information exchange, training and events that inspire and lead to lifelong change.

- Enable and promote the positive impact of nature particularly for those who stand to benefit most from the substantial mental and physical health benefits.
- We will advocate public interaction with water in a safe, informed and respectful way
- The urban forest comprises all the trees in the urban realm – in both public and private spaces. We will seek to unite land owners in a uniform approach to holistic tree management, reflecting their crucial role in the wider urban ecosystem.

## Landscape and trees

With our partners we will inform, engage, educate and consult the community on the urban forest. Communities will be encouraged and empowered to take an active role in the urban forest through the collection of data, planting, maintaining trees and events. We will look to trees as a way to help improve

# Community Actions



- **Eco warrior program** – ‘Eco Warriors’ is an environmental education scheme currently in primary schools across MK. It encourages pupils in years 3-5 to learn about recycling and the environment. Participating schools also sign a pledge for eco-friendly changes. Further roll out to secondary schools and nurseries due in 2020.
- **Encourage and Get involved** – promote community involvement and engagement in the natural environment through the many active groups already delivering within the borough.
- **National Park City** – engage the whole community in the ethos and work with stakeholders to develop a plan to make Milton Keynes a place where people and nature are better connected.
- **Community Infrastructure fund** – match fund for parishes and town Councils to address their environmental priorities.
- **Thinking differently** – Sharing and signposting information to help people make informed decisions on things such as cutting the grass less, creating environments for insects to thrive.
- **Networks** – Working in partnership to create networking opportunities to help individuals and groups come together for support, information and mobilisation.
- **Citizen science** – Work collaboratively with community groups, individuals and organisations to create opportunities to capture information to monitor the health and growth of biodiversity in MK.
- **Promote initiatives** - such as the annual Milton Keynes Festival of Nature to encourage the community and businesses to engage in and help to protect wildlife in the city.
- **Support and enable** - community and voluntary groups to take local action for wildlife and care of the environment.
- **Support community groups** - by improved partnership working with the MK Community Foundation to enhance the profile their fundraising and grants in this area

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