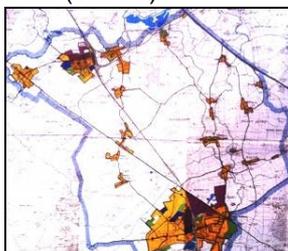




## New housing: 'what we heard in Milton Keynes' 16/11/10

The new city of Milton Keynes is 40 years old. How has the 'church' engaged with 'new housing'? Are there specific lessons from MK for the wider church? Some members<sup>1</sup> of the Churches Group for New Housing Areas thought that it would be good to visit, listen, reflect and write - even if for short time and in a small area. This web paper is a snapshot of headlines and comments - heard from church leaders we wish to thank.<sup>2</sup>

Past (1970's)



Present



Plans: eg Calverton 150 to 16,000 people



### **MK still expanding**

MK is 40 years old but still expanding greatly. The 237k population is projected to be 400k. The main areas of new housing growth are on the east and west sides of the city. Ross Northing, Vicar of the established town of Stony Stratford at the north end of MK, is also Rector of Calverton, a hamlet of 150 souls with a medieval church. The projected new population here is 16,000 and the new housing area will be larger than the old town.

### **Sense of identity**

We heard that many people living in MK have a strong sense of identity with MK as a 'good place to be'. People frequently move house e.g. 4 times in 7 years, but it often within MK itself. MK 'identity' and 'networks' across the city are important (more than in the local grid squares). The church also has strong networks across the city: eg 'Bridge-builders' in schools; Environment Group; Homeless care etc. Although the sense of identity with MK is strong, issues of mobility and commitment make 'building community' difficult (see later).

### **New church buildings**

In response to the enormous housing programme of the 70's and 80's, a large number of shared church buildings were built with community facilities. Often sponsored by several denominations, they were LEP's (Local Ecumenical Projects or Partnerships). We visited 'Christ the Cornerstone' in the city centre, and heard: 'We cannot replicate the church planting of the 1980's with the resources we have now. We are very grateful for all that has been given in the past and need to 'up the act' of our congregation to reach out to new areas now'.

### **Changed worldview**

MK was designed with a modernist 1960's view – which has changed. 'Our major issues are the changing social environment, the un-churched, changing ecumenical scene, the new vision of living responsibly, economic pressures and the impetus of 'how to be church?', says Mary Cotes, Ecumenical Moderator for MK. 'We are engaging in Fresh Expressions and pioneer ministers and the question of new church buildings is both yes and no. The idea to re-enact the 60's/70's master plan "no", but new independent churches and ethnic churches may say "yes" as renting community buildings: some have sought land in new build areas'.

<sup>1</sup> Simon Taylor, Jim Currin, Lisa Nolan, Judith Schultz, Roger Paul, James Cassidy, Steve Williams and Ian Chisnall

<sup>2</sup> Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga, Mary Cotes, John Bradley, James Cassidy, Nick Adlem, Ross Northing, Alison Drury

### **Nature of the congregation changed**

'The nature of the congregation has changed dramatically' says James Cassidy who has returned to the same RC church as parish priest for a second time. 'The Population in the 1980's was fairly homogeneous - but now we have 47 nations represented at Mass. The transient population was illustrated when I found that only 12 families remembered me when I returned in 2002'.

### **Mobility**

People in MK move house by a factor of 40% more than in other parts of the country. Last summer 30 Primary Schools had vacancy for Head, and a family centre built in April 2010 is already looking for its second manager. This issue of high mobility raises lots of problems for continuity, especially for volunteer based organizations like the church trying to provide outreach facilities.

### **Commitment**

Another challenge is the geographical spread and 'lack of consistency' of people for regular commitment. 'Consumerism means that people want things provided for them, without much personal cost and commitment'. People respond to one off events rather than ongoing activities. In addition, women's roles have changed; many families cope with issues of separation; 'the car is key', and local activities suffer when people travel elsewhere to get what they want – which is another challenge for a new local church congregation.

### **Schools and church**

A major theme we heard was the importance of schools and church working together on new estates. Schools seemed generally keen for this and appreciated the voluntary help of Christians in many capacities. The Watling Valley Ecumenical partnership, for example, has good working relationships with every school in their area. We visited 'Christ the Sower' school and heard about 'partnership', from the chaplain Nick Adlem.

Note 1: Discussion followed about schools and proposed 'blue-print' plans which save development costs. New schools using old plans could make them less adaptable to local partnerships for community provision.

Note 2: Chaplaincy is a 'vibrant model' of engaging in new housing areas eg Hospital, Civic, Shops, Prison, etc

### **Partnership**

We kept hearing about the importance of partnership and inter-agency work and networks, especially for children's, school, family and church work, but also for Local Authorities, planners. We heard examples, eg Age UK, the Parks and Police. This raises questions of personnel, and the capacity for many Christians who feel called to create community with the pressures of 'mobility' and 'commitment' above.

### **'Going with the flow'**

'Capacity' raised the question of 'following the organic' growth. Good working relationships lead to networks and partnership which are mutually beneficial, but may mean developing activities which did not fit a previous plan or intention - often leading to a change of direction. This can be good, but providing 'consistency' can be difficult.

### **Making the most of given resources**

We heard of St Giles Tattenhoe - a very small 'box pew' 1540's chapel with no electricity until 2007, which stood in open fields with a local population of 12 people, until surrounded by new housing. A church planting group had previously met in the training room at Morrison's supermarket as part of the Watling Valley Ecumenical Partnership. After several years St Giles church now has regular congregations offering a range of worship opportunities.

### **Ongoing questions we heard from local church leaders:**

1. How do church, school and community networks fit in the 'current 'big society' agenda?
2. How can the worship reflect the diversity of people present?
3. Partnership is key: but how can it be sustained in a mobile population?

