INTERVIEW: MARK

Q1b. Have you always lived in Milton Keynes? (When did you arrive? What was your first impression? What reasons prompted your move?)

MARK:

It's a one-word answer. No, I came here in 96, after working for 25 years in London, and I came here to work. I came to work as a town planner. Therefore, my perception of Milton Keynes was, was very strongly logged professionally, that this was this wonderful, new way of creating places. You do it 'Like Milton Keynes free-thinking, fresh thinking, radically different'. I've never paid any attention to it. It just lodged there in my deep subconscious. For 20 years after I trained as a town planner. I didn't go straight to planning. I went to various other things. I've been an engineer and a rock musician before ever I discovered town planning.

And interestingly, my interest in town planning was because of my experience going to gigs. So, Milton Keynes was very clearly launched in my professional subconscious, that it had been a world apart from my practical experience in my profession, which had all been inner London deprived boroughs, East London. And I got to a stage where I was fed up with badly behaved politicians, I worked 12 years for Harringay and before that 11 years for, no, 11 years for Harringay and ten years for Newham both of which were differently challenging and Newham was a one-party, Labour Party state run by Freemasons. Harringay was a rabid left identity politics Bernie grant, a different kettle of fish altogether but it was tiring. And I figured I'd come here, and life would be peaceful and well behaved. So, one of my perceptions was this is going to be quite and comfortable suburban place. Another perception was this was going to be really interesting professionally because it was a wholly different way, fresh way of making a place - make a community - making neighbourhoods, and all of that. I was doing it for 12 years before I left the council and became the sort of overworked retired individual which I am now. So, I had perceptions and largely oriented around my professional background of town planning.

Q2. What do you feel has changed the most in Milton Keynes?

MARK:

Two things. One, it's become a multicultural place, whereas it was a white suburban place. Before 91 censuses had 4% non-British whereas the current level is about 30%. That is a colossal increase; it's like an 800% increase in the non-indigenous white population, doesn't give us a very high number compared to inner-city places. But compared to where we were, it's a quantum change. And the other change I would flag up is when I came the focus was still on finishing off the master plan of how Milton Keynes had originally been designed, low rise, lots of trees, lots of fast cars. And there's a huge change, to not least carry on growing rather than here was a plan. Let's finish it. Supposed to be finished in 92. I came in 96 still isn't finished. But the shift there is accepting that the place should be trying to make its mark as a city . . . needs to have height; needs to have density; needs to have a cultural program. It just basically needs to grow up and treat itself as an adult. And I think it's on the way it's early adulthood now. Those are the two changes that I would like.

Q3. What, if any, qualities make Milton Keynes unique?

MARK:

It is a sort of Marmite, and the people here get it. People who aren't here don't get it. It's a minority taste. It's a non-conventional approach to life generally. I don't think it's quite as wonderful as it makes out to be because actually, anywhere is going to be a mix. And the mix here includes some fairly strongly conservative forces saying no, we don't want to change we don't want to move with the times. And I find that's fairly unattractive. I think it's presented itself as Arcadia when in point of fact, there have always been quite a sizeable number of people who don't have the benefits, don't have much money, don't have access to a car or two or three and basically they`re deprived.

I guess that can be Milton Keynes as a physical place. Milton Keynes as a community of Milton Keyners or it can be the quality of the way people hold together in a collective identity and neighbourhood identity. So, I think the physical structure is clearly unique to have the open space that is the Ouse Valley, right in the middle of a city of 270,000 is absurdly improbable. You have a Constable landscape with sheep grazing and old medieval farmhouses. And you can't see a building anywhere. And you can look for four or five miles, and there's no building. And that is just bizarre and extraordinary. So, it's wildly different in terms of the physical, the bits of countryside that are embedded in it. And it's obviously very different with its road system, and there is no number to the instances where I've had conversations with people who say: "I think I drove through Milton Keynes, I didn't realize I was driving through it, but the map showed me I've been through" . . . and then it just doesn't feel like you're going to anything which is conventionally perceived as a place. Physically the places are a very unusual model. It is interesting in as much as it's quite hard to read it: in urban design terms, it`s not very legible. You can drive around it and not have a clue you just driven past a series of little enclaves and have people living in, particularly in summer when the trees are in leaf. It says it`s a concealed place, which I don't think is particularly good in many respects. If you look at the people in Milton Keynes, I think there's, there's, wherever you are, there's going to be a mix. But I think there are some people who want to maintain their suburban comfort and don't really want to be Metropolitan. When I first came, I was appointed into the management team of the unitary authority, six months before it became a unitary authority. And of the team of six or seven top people, I think, six of those had London experience. And five of them came directly from London. So, I mean, it was a very interesting selection of the top team. They wanted people who cut their teeth on the inner city, a very different environment from what Milton Keynes thought it would ever become. All through my time, one of the conversations, which was always interesting was talking with the police about the nature of crime in Milton Keynes, and they were quite worried that it would be colonised by Metropolitan crime rather, the comfortable suburban, chicken thieves or whatever what one might expect. And the whole idea that there might be drugs and firearms coming to Milton Keynes was something they were very alert to - very wary of. And I think if you look at all the stuff that's happening about "county lines", there's nowhere in the country that's not affected by county lines drug

dealing. That has certainly come to Milton Keynes, and we occasionally have high profile homicides and things happening in, in Milton Keynes, which does suggest that it is not as unique, the characteristic of the people has been to try and hold back the tide of Metropolitan-isation. And everything that goes along with that, that applies to culture, it applies to crime it applies to house types. There are many ways in which the offer that people get in Milton Keynes helps to define what sort of a place and how the people see it . . . When we got an Ikea, then that suggests that we're going for slightly urban apartments. And I mean, that's over the last 15 years, you've seen development of apartments, not all of them attractive, but very different from what was ever built in the original Milton Keynes becoming more Metropolitanised. Therefore, that in itself is a process. Milton Keynes is, I think, still, a little bit in denial, that it's also, bits of it have been in denial that it's becoming multicultural. So, the answer to the question, I think that there's a resistance to accept change, which is bizarre in a place that is designed as breaking the mould of places. But there was a curious bit of research that was done. There was a survey at some point about 20 years ago, (very soon after I came, and I can't remember who did it - probably something to do with the OU) which was establishing that the younger generation was much more averse to change than the older generation in Milton Keynes, because the older generation, they had come here as pioneers. Therefore, they were of the challenging, radical, subversive nature. Whereas the younger children have just been born into this suburban sort of place. They've been to school; they've never had to up sticks or move. And they didn't have the same footloose hunger that the older generation did. And they were just comfortable and where they were, and they were quite reactionary. I've never seen more of that along those lines. But interesting that you should find that that shift of there being less support for growth and evolution in younger people and older people. It's maybe this is part of the mythology. And I think talking about story and Milton Keynes, there's a complete spectrum between accuracy, historical accuracy, and mythology that's developed, and all the interesting stories are mythology. So, it could be that some of the things that I'm alluding to are actually part of the mythology rather than necessarily historically accurate and I can't actually remember where I saw that bit of survey material.

It presents the idea that the topology that it's because the older people were the pioneers because they pioneered and came, and the younger people have had nothing to challenge them they don't come from anywhere unattractive. They don't need to better themselves because everything is so comfortable here in Milton Keynes.

There's one other line of answer to your question which is around the way it is built with grid-squares in grid communities and that sort of structured neighbourhood within the new town bit. I'm not talking about the rural bit I think the rural bit of it is much similar to any rural bit anywhere where you've got medieval agricultural villages and the old, feudal order captured in the nature of the houses there. So, you've got a slice of old England in the two-thirds of Milton Keynes that's an old rural bit. In the new bit, you've got a different model which is bound to influence both how the place looks and how the place feels to residents, which is the idea of . . . Well two ideas really, one with clearly defined physical neighbourhoods within which the aspiration was that all their local needs will be fulfilled. They got their local parks and playgrounds and nursery schools, their primary schools, secondary school, nearby local shops, local jobs, that whole mix. That never quite worked, because they never built it quite as it was supposed to be built. However, the principle of needs being met close to home is one element of how the neighbourhoods work. Then there's another neighbourhood, another element of neighbourhood. I'm a great believer in propinquity of place, which is one of the themes that underlies Milton Keynes, the people who develop Milton Keynes city of the future said, No longer will people need to have other people on their doorstep, and relationships just with their neighbours. People will be in a virtual world where their connections are miles away. At one level that's quite prescient, and with the internet coming in, which was not even dreamed about in 1967. You've got a much stronger non-place neighbourhood than you had before. But I really don't think neighbourhoods work if you don't have your physical place. That is somewhere, where you can have face to face contact. So I think every grid-square should have its coffee bar where people can hang out and meet, and it's a sort of village equivalent of the water cooler, every village should have its own water cooler or its stocks, or it's well, or it's bus stop whatever it is. So I'm not sure that the physical representation of neighbourhoods fully achieved what we set out to be the model of Milton Keynes,

but it is nonetheless significantly different... in that you've got the grid-squares, you've got an aspiration to provide facilities that you need near home. And you've got the background which assumes people can be nourished by non-local.

And consequently, you get some failing dysfunctional neighbourhoods which don't really work very well, In any respect. One way in which they don't work is picking up on the connection between these grid-square communities where they're separated by an unworkable amount of greenery. And, and if you're a young mum with a pushchair in the rain, wanting to go to the next grid-square because there isn't a shop on your grid-square, that can be quite a challenging. February six o'clock at night in the dark pushing through sleet, and freezing rain with your caterwauling six-year-old, five-year-old ,three-year-old, two-year-old. There are some elements that are not Arcadia, that is not this ideal type. We fall short of the ideal type in many respects. But the ideal type is wonderful.

Q4. What would make you proud to live in a place? (Do you experience some of these elements in living in Milton Keynes? What could improve your pride in living in Milton Keynes?)

MARK:

Well, I think I like a place that had lots of culture at a local level. One of the problems is culture tends to get commoditised and celebrity-based and global. Whereas I think something that has an awful lot going on locally, would make me proud, depends how extensive place is. And if we're talking about my street, my village and that level, it would be very local stuff. And it'd be great if there are things going on in the village. cultural things that can nurture and nourish folks, if you're looking more widely at some of the scale of Milton Keynes, with a quarter of a million and rising, soon going to be a third of a million and then within a lifetime is going to be half a million. The scale of their achievement must be much, much greater. I would be proud to feel like Bristol or Brighton. Milton Keynes is never going to feel like Bristol or Brighton because they're already there. They've got 400 years ahead of us and have all sorts of infrastructure that we don't. And so, if, I know you're not asking the question about Milton Keynes, but if Milton Keynes could come a bit more like Bristol and

Brighton in its cultural offer, then I would feel proud for it. I think I would also feel proud of a place if I felt that it was it had humanity and was caring and look out for the underdog. . . dealt with people who were to determine if you could see there was demonstrable, functional support being provided by fellow citizens to people. That would make me feel proud. And the overlap between the culture and the humanity is being a welcoming place that values and celebrates its cultural, (and everything else) diversity. And one of the things that is most disappointed me about Milton Keynes is when I've detected a reluctance to support that. There was some awful brouhaha when the Hindus wanted to start a set up a Hindu centre on the west of the borough. And there was just local outrage amongst the forces of darkness and drove them out. So, they had to find somewhere else to go to. And that's the antithesis of this third component. What would make me proud is a strong vibrancy of culture - a strong, caring, practical caring sentiment and welcoming approach to a wide range of difference, the exotic and unexpected. We need to be delighted by things we didn't expect would happen. But you have to resource it, and the Development Corporation were putting their money where their mouth was a. . . government money where their mouth was so that we're doing a whole lot of things like community development and cultural programs and things like that, which have just consistently declined. We're operating here with basically no support for local authority, which is deeply frustrating. But it is possible. You don't have to be reliant on public authorities. But my goodness, if they gave us a free building, like they, every other Arts Complex in the UK has started out with a building been given by their local authority. Just everywhere that we've had to do without here, just not to say we can't do it, we are doing it, but it is bloody hard work. It is a really difficult market. You put stuff on and Milton Keynes, you know how difficult it is to get audiences out. And it categorises everything. Stantonbury, has an amazing cultural program of stuff that's on this year, Lucy Cuthbertson has done a blinder and getting really interesting, quite challenging. left of centre stuff. I don't mean politically or just in terms of their cultural message. And the audiences, I mean, she's doing well, if she gets 40 people in the audience. Penny, my wife, when you know, yes, was a dancer. And having been a psychotherapist for the last 30 years has basically wound down her practice, and is getting into live art. It's almost but not quite performance art. And we're still not quite sure exactly what the ethos of performance art is. But if you look at some of the performance artists that are

putting stuff on in London, where you put on something really weird, quite challenging, and you advertise, you'll get an audience. There will be people who will come to the most unusual things. Try and do that in Milton Keynes, and you'll get three people. And that's depressing because that just discourages people from trying. There are also other constraints that in the live art feel there's an awful lot of nakedness and different ways of presenting stuff. And I think that would be outraged and Milton Keynes if there was naked with the closest that we've ever got to that here. Well there was one year where we suddenly wised up to the fact that there were a dozen body painters, different operators involved Independently. there were about 12 different body painters doing things and actually some of the National and indeed international events but then never did anything collectively and they never did anything in Milton Keynes to speak of. There were occasional individual things, but we did a mingle down at old brook. Two years ago, three years ago where we had two body artists and a model and throughout the mingle, the model was being painted into an absolutely gorgeous creature. Sometime after that was Bodies in Motion where we had two dancers, two musicians and a storyteller. And there wasn't any nudity in that production. Okay, the bodies were clothed, simply because we have this sensitivity about the Milton Keynes audiences. Shock horror, what happens if there's a Muslim in the audience, and you'll offend people? And that's no way to, to promote a vibrant culture. I think we've done four events in all that have had a bit of body painting in. And the one you were involved with was a hybrid between painting, music, story, and dance. So, they weren't actually body paint models. They were Effie and Helen, who are respectively my favourite dancer and my favourite choreographer in Milton Keynes. So, we were blessed. . . And my favourite storyteller! And my favourite, not quite my favourite musicians, but they worked really well. Those two, so there were Jausme and Nicole Collarbone? But that's so I mean, we got a small audience for all of those. So, it's characteristic of Milton Keynes as an audience not being up for stuff, not really being prepared to take audience risks. What I don't know is whether my view, about how hard it is to get our audiences out in Milton Keynes is actually one of our myths. And there's something about if we all believe that we've got that experience, then it is hard. It's sort of then self-fulfilling. one lesson may be emphasising the importance of getting the medium and the mechanism right. And it's not just a question of doing the conventional thing. It requires you going in at the outset and knowing what the answer is. In other

words, that could be a group of Morris dancers, or it could be someone who makes sandwiches for some organisation. there might be some nugget of connectivity, that that could get 20 people into a room. Because you're plugging into a live network. And if you're plugging into null networks, you aren't going to get anybody, and different places will have a different serendipitous network that you need to divine ahead of time? What's going to be the network for that neighbour?

Q5. In your opinion, what element of Milton Keynes is: The best. The most exciting. The hardest. Lacking. The most culturally significant. The richest in heritage?

MARK:

The best thing in Milton Keynes is the pioneering spirit of those who have a pioneering spirit. It's not necessarily the pioneering spirit of city leaders, because not all city leaders have necessarily got that pioneering spirit. But I think somebody like Winkelman captures an energy and a go getting-ness that is necessary to any place that wants to make a mark. It's quite hard to find, but when you find it. It's the best.

INTERVIEWER: The most exciting element?

MARK:

I would say that the most exciting is the rapidly diversifying community because that embeds change embeds the unexpected, embeds the difference. So, all this possibility, it embeds possibility.

INTERVIEWER: The hardest?

MARK:

The hardest thing about Milton Keynes is the inertia in some quarters. The reluctance to move with

the times, change the plan, accept new people. It's a real disappointment. Inherently and essentially.

I'm a champion of Milton Keynes as being the best possible place in in the UK. And so, it hurts to sit

to have it revealed that actually there are forces of darkness and conservatism and inertia.

INTERVIEWER: Lacking?

MARK:

deeply ingrained culture - layer upon layer upon layer of cultural channels and cultural opportunity.

INTERVIEWER: The most culturally significant?

MARK:

Oddly I think I'd probably say its built form, because of the things that I've talked about earlier - about

whether neighbourhoods work.   So, it's built form is defining various other things. I don't think the

built form in itself is important, but I think it is a deterministic quality to it. Which means we are then

lumbered with certain places that are disadvantaged, certain places that are absolutely wonderful. And

this is probably betraying my professional background as a town planner. In fact, the degree I did is

engineering with social studies. So that doesn't make me a social engineer. I don't know what would.

And so, this idea of physical determinism we are getting the place because of how It was built, getting

the community which is defined very substantially by what was put on the ground and the blessed grid

roads with their unrestricted mobility for private car owners reinforces one of the forces of darkness.

And we really ought to be doing better than that.

INTERVIEWER: The richest in heritage?

MARK:

Probably... Well, I think there are potentially three, possibly four components of that.

-        I think the pre-New Town village structure is a really strong theme, which is overwhelming as the defining force within the rural area. But within the new town area, it's actually a startling relief from all this new stuff that you get this old stuff as well. So that is clearly one.

-        A second is the fact that it was designed as an Arcadian community in 1970, and the master plan, the impact of that is culturally significant because you get what was built. And that in itself defines the experience.

-        And then the two other things that I would say are culturally significant: The number three, I would say is Bletchley Park, because of its globally important role, and it happens to be in Milton Keynes, pre-New Town. But the implications of Bletchley Park are so important in terms of wartime experience and the evolution of computers and everything that defines 21st-century society. I think Bletchley Park is extraordinary. And it's not a surprise that it gets on radio four shows on a roughly weekly basis.

And then the fourth cultural Lodestone, I would say, was MK Dons and getting a football club here. And it's a new, an entirely different sort of model from what was originally planned, and it's grabbing a great big presence on top: "Look, you can have 30,000 people in one place, and look back, and all will be shouting for MK Dons". They might even get promoted this year, who knows they can get someone near where they should be. So, I think that's another the fourth element of cultural significance. So, I've not been very deterministic on that. I've given you too many choices.

Q6. Has Milton Keynes played a part in helping you gain any achievements which you might not have been successful in if you lived elsewhere? Has it aided any failures?

MARK:

Yeah, I'm not sure I would have been a local authority chief executive. If I'd been somewhere else, I might have been, but I think it was because it was Milton Keynes that matched my particular energies and enthusiasms, that I was able to pitch for something which might not have worked somewhere else. But there's no way of being sure about that. Sliding doors, you go down the route you go down; you don't go down all the other routes. You can't be sure, but I think that there was a particular alignment between the amount of energy that I brought to what I wanted to do and the fact that there were opportunities at a particular moment that allowed me to do that. So, circumstances have conspired so that I have been able to do some quite interesting and challenging things here. It's quite hard work, this [arts central], so it's not something I wish on anybody else.

Q7. If you were in charge of advertising Milton Keynes what view/image and/or tag line would you give it?

MARK:

If I was in charge of it, in other words, trying to take it somewhere? Or if you rather than just saying what is an accurate representation, if I would go with what we actually something along the lines of what we actually did when we were doing that, which would have been like 15 years ago, we had a number of people in to look at the brand and the offer. And I can't remember exactly what we said. But it was something about Milton Keynes is a place that thinks differently and embraces evolution. And if that's not wishful thinking, I don't know what is. But I would still abide by that. I think that's, that fits my world view of what Milton Keynes should be doing. It should be this impatient, tireless, adolescent, young adult. It should have self-awareness or awareness of possibility. And the

recognition that the world is changing rapidly, and therefore, the solutions to the problems of the world will be changing as rapidly as the world is changing.

Q8. If Milton Keynes was a person could you describe them and the type of 50th party they might have?

MARK:

Yep. A curious but hesitant, young adult, not quite believing what the possibilities are, and not realising quite how to make them happen. But recognising that there is something that's going to happen. It's not evident. What the possibilities are because people are very aware of constraints. And so, the thing I'm, there are a number of myths about Milton Keynes, which may be true myths don't have to be untrue. But they're sort of in there has been a story about the place. We've talked about it being so hard to get audiences out in Milton Keynes. There's another one, which is that politicians are some sort of non-rational tribe who don't seriously grasp the future and do their proper job. Not talking about Brexit, now, but could be. I'm talking about, where is Milton Keynes going and who's, who's got an overview and who's got the ambition? So, it's young adult, Milton Keynes, a young adult, not yet with the self-confidence that it needs to have. It's curious. But it's, it's hesitant.

INTERVIEWER:

So, the next part of this question is usually I say, once you've got the idea of the person is, what type of 50th birthday party with they have, but we're contemplating it being a young adult. So, in this sense, what type of 18th, 21st party would they have?

MARK:

Well, I think they are going to be inviting younger family members into the party. But they're also going to be inviting people they met at uni from the big city, and folk who could bring possibility into a much more immediate range. So, there would be something where people were performing to each other and at each other and with each other. And the range of things that were being performed would, in some cases be really important, be incredible stuff from the big city. And some of it would be really a little bit naff, but you're giving encouragement to the young family members. So, they can be used to rubbing shoulders with people from the bigger world. So, it's, it's building a bridge between the domestic and the modest on the one hand, and the worldly and metropolitan on the other.

INTERVIEWER:

And what sort of gift might you give this? Young adolescent, celebrate?

MARK:

A drum set!

Q9. Please watch this clip from the BFI archives, 8 mins (https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-milton-keynes-a-village-city-1973-online). It shows the early days of Milton Keynes. Does this evoke any memories or thoughts you are comfortable sharing?

MARK:

Maybe what he [Fred Roche] was saying [about forgetting about the development corporation as quickly as possible and for the people to develop the city], I don't know whether that's really what he would believe. And equally, he said it's about the people, not the plan. I understand that theoretical position, but I don't think people who make places on this scale would really believe that actually is a

throwaway. I was sceptical whether people who develop places on that scale really say they are so marginal to it. I think he was producing a master plan. A master plan is there to divine a world. What struck me most about those images was how much countryside there was, because I never knew that countryside. I only ever saw it when it was such a big strident fact on the ground - when you saw it as Milton Keynes a big place. When I came, it was less than 200,000 population, but it was still a big place. So, I missed completely the fact that it was countryside with trees and foxes and farm buildings occasionally and just all that mowing, there is still a lot of mowing but on a far smaller scale, and there would have been before. And a huge amount of money.

Q 10. Do you think Milton Keynes has a good reputation a. Internally with its residents, b. Externally with the rest of the country? (Why do you think it has this reputation? How does that make you feel? What could improve it?)

MARK:

Yeah, I think I'm of the view that people who come here regard it as being a very well-kept secret that local people are content with their lot. Okay, they may grumble about things, and they're clearly resisting change. But change happens and change is actually relentless along the way. And if you compare to attitudes, 20 years ago, or 10 years ago, I think you'd see people who were okay with the changes, and they'd sort of internalise them. Milton Keynes does move very rapidly. And for all the people who are resisting movement, maybe they're resisting or seem to be resisting because change is taking place so rapidly. And therefore, they do catch up. In due course, the impression that Milton Keynes people have of the place is helped very much by the view of the residents being people who've chosen to come here comparatively recently. So we go back to the point about the old people, other pioneers, and the younger people who are born here and don't have any aspiration to shift. Then there's a continual stream of new people moving here - 2000 homes a year - and a number of them will be drawing people in from outside to achieve the 5000 population increase a year. And I'm guessing about half of that would be natural increase and half of that would be people coming in from

outside. That's a big influence, a big influx of people who are choosing to come to Milton Keynes because they like what they see, what MK promises. And they come here and, once they're here, they, for the most part, will reinforce their decision, they'll want to think well of the place. Yeah, a generation down - down the way - they might be disillusioned about something in their life that didn't happen that way.   The people who just arrived are still going to be in the full flush of their decision, and they want it to be the right decision. So, I believe because there's such a fluid population, that generally the people's contentment with Milton Keynes will continue.

INTERVIEWER:

And do you think Milton Keynes has a good reputation externally with the rest of the country?

MARK:

I think it's getting better. But I mean, I think we've moved on from Milton Keynes being the butt of every joke, to now Milton Keynes being the butt of maybe a quarter of all the jokes. And that's a significant improvement. There was not a day, not a week that went by when you didn't see some gratuitous pejorative reference to Milton Keynes. In some whether it's some interview or some theatrical presentation with a line that is pejorative and deprecating of Milton Keynes, it's still out there. But I think Milton Keynes being such a successful place in so many ways, it's definitely getting the upper hand, particularly in the cultural sphere. Having seen the opening of the gallery, where you got quite a lot of people up from London, having a look at what Milton Keynes can offer. And that did feel a potentially mould-breaking moment where a few more people will suddenly see that there may be more than just roundabouts and concrete cows in the city.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it has such a poor reputation?

MARK:

Because it was created artificially in people's views, created so rapidly. And it would have achieved positive things so quickly. Compared to other places which move more glacially Milton Keynes was able because of its provenance it was able to basically come in with a solution within a 10th of the time that other places would normally take to make things happen. So, I think it's partly that the campaigns promoting Milton Keynes were so biased towards Milton Keynes compared to all other places. The image of rush hour, and Milton Keynes being whatever it is with bikes passing over a busy canal bridge. It was doing down, denigrating so many other places, virtually every other place. People would have resented that invidious comparison. So, there's a little bit of comeuppance; they need to say "look, this is the bubble and the balloon has burst." It hasn't burst. But I think a lot of people have wanted to say "Can't be. That must have failed". So that's fuelled people's incredulity that it could be living up to the promise. And there are in reality, a number of respects in which it doesn't achieve what the idyllic aspirations early on. And so, I think people feel vindicated that yes, they always have this scepticism. They really didn't believe it could happen. It was never going to be; it's too good to be true. And that all conspires to produce critical dismissal of Milton Keynes as being not really a serious this place. And I think that each decade we survived that point of view is untenable. And I think the fact that we're still here, and we're feted still (I don't mean fetid) fated as being a place that is generating more jobs, building more houses, doing more in different ways. Even being a smart city. Well, I think that last one may be a hollow aspiration at the moment. They should be trying to do something real rather than digital stuff; getting a real university would help. But they've been pursuing a virtual University for so long that we just lost at least 20 years. They have missed the boat, but if they'd been doing it 20 years ago seriously, or 30 years ago, they would have got the funding, and they would have built it.

INTERVIEWER: How does it make you feel this sort of image that is externally propagated?

MARK:

It's guided my existence for the last 20 years, because of the job I had. When I was responsible for how Milton Keynes was seen, at least I thought I was responsible for how Milton Keynes was seen actually other people were responsible, but I had a significant part to play. So, I saw it as being a challenge that needs to be overcome; a truth that needs to be uncovered; a wrong that needs to be righted. So, it was quite invigorating, empowering, to say, "Look, we are the underdog, we're going to win out". The danger, of course, if we do then lose this driving force that's keeping us going, we're no longer a delinquent with a, you know, a solution for the world's problems. How do we then keep going? One of the critical things for Milton Keynes, at around the turn of the century, was to embrace the next generation. The next phase of growth, going from being a place of 250,000 population that Fred Roche was mentioning in that film, to being a place that is now conceived as becoming 500,000. Way bigger than anything ever envisaged in Fred Roche`s time. Keeping the door open for new stuff coming in makes it possible to always be at the cutting edge and always do better than everyone else. At some point, we'll stop growing, at which point there will be a problem. But maybe by then when we have 200 years of embedded infrastructure that can take over and run and there'll be somebody else that is wearing the mantle of newness and the pressure will be slightly reduced.

Q 11. Do you know any stories, jokes, or urban myths about Milton Keynes? Can you share them?

MARK:

Where we've touched on a few of the myths about the building game, they're not really stories in the entertaining way but the idea that politicians are a bunch of self-serving non-rational losers.

Well, I think from our stories saved by the interim about myths. Well, there were the things like that, and I'm sure other people will flag up the myth that we have roundabouts because the designs of their coffee cup on the maps, which is I'm sure totally untrue. But I mean, it's a good little aside. There are some facile myths like it's a concrete place because it's even its cows are concrete when that goes

totally against the reality of greenery. A lot of the myths, a lot of the facts about Milton Keynes are so improbable that, that they could be myths: 25 million trees planted is an absurd number of trees. And all right, they weren't trees; they were saplings, or whips, just tiny things. But it's an awfully big number of anything to be, to be planted.

Oh, there were two I know exactly the provenance of that. When we were trying to promote Milton Keynes as being an amazing place, we were looking for artificial soundbites. So that originated with me, there are two things that we absolutely researched and said, "Look, can we concoct some factoid about Milton Keynes?" One of them was "more shoreline than Jersey". And the other one was "more bridges than Venice". Because we bent the rules a little bit and the number of bridges in Venice - all bridges. Many of the bridges in Milton Keynes are culverts. They're the somewhat pedestrian underpasses; they`re all sorts of bridge structures that put our total of bridges above that of Venice. But I mean, that was a very cynical aspiration to get a sound bite that people would remember. More shoreline than Jersey even though Jersey shore is. . . squiggly. We've got an awful lot of brooks and rivers and creeks and lakes. So, though that was cynical and deliberate in terms of presenting, we weren't even trying to disprove anything. We were just trying to be memorable. A lot of the things are proving or disproving. 125 roundabouts, I think it's more than 125 now. So those aren't myths, but they`re diversions. "More biodiversity than the agricultural land it replaced". I think that was that arose out of a Development Corporation study. There's a really important mythology around the point. And, you know, the fact that it's "the first multiplex in the UK", and it's where a whole generation of young - the Pioneer children - used to gravitate, which is why they're defending it. So, so avidly.

One of the things I've written down was Three Curly Wurlies. So, all the stuff that Scribbo (Lee Scriven) does, and what Scribbo celebrates in his films, is all to do with that. And the Point features strongly there, and his experience of growing up as an adolescent, as a boy. But it's in Milton Keynes and is all part of "The Cultural City".

I think The Bus Station might also have been that through what was a tortured interlude when The Bus Station was occupied by Make a Difference and all of that difficult governance stuff.

Two other things: there are some individuals who I think are really imbued with mythology. Bill Billings is one of those people, and Pete Winkelman is another, I've also written down Sean Hennessy whom I never knew, who was I think the Arts Development Officer at MK Council who did an awful lot making things happen. (I don't know for sure if he was the Council or the Development Corporation. I think he was the council - don't think he was the county).

There's another MK story: that Bucks County Council couldn't wait for the new town to be designated because it would get rid of all the left-leaning proletarian rabble up in Milton Keynes. I don't know how true that is or whether it's someone's analysis, or whether it's just a good story.

Jim Marshall was ironically significant in that same time scale. Even Wilton Hall so I guess a lot of these are associated with the sorts of places that you would go to.

When I was a rock musician between tours and gigs, I used to hire myself out as a roadie and I roadied for a band called Candy Bus in the late 60s, and they toured in various rather despicable dance hall type places. The Pond Rosa club somewhere in Yorkshire. They also did gigs in Wilton hall run by a series of gangsters, whose name I can't remember. Another character who's a rather shady gangster character is Stephen Thomas who used to run Oceania and a company, Luminar, that had 350 other nightclubs across the world, including Beijing. He's a rather despicable sort of individual, but he is an acquaintance of mine. But he was a very big figure and is now organising other things.

MARK

Date: 2/4/2019

Location: Arts Gateway, Café area, Kiln Farm

Observation: The interview was a difficult process as building works were going on all around but Mark had to remain on call so we could not remove to quitter locations. The interview was interrupted a few times as Mark had to attend to work related issues.

Mark is enthusiastic about the arts and Milton Keynes but his general demeaner was professional and formal. Due to his background in marketing for Milton Keynes his answers were mainly based upon his knowledge and experience even in those designed to be more creative.

Throughout the interview he made his own notes on his answers and referred to pre-pared sheet where he had noted some elements he wanted to ensure were discussed.

The verbatim transcription only had a few alternations during the member check, mainly giving clarity to the discussion.