

INTERVIEW: NAOMI

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

NAOMI: No. That was an easy one.

INTERVIEWER: When did you arrive?

NAOMI: That would have been, let me think, 1997

INTERVIEWER: What was your first impression?

NAOMI:

When I first visited Milton Keynes, when ... long before I came to live up here, it was when I was visiting Milton Keynes to attend the post office Technical Training College, which was in between Wolverton and Stony Stratford and is no longer there's a housing estate now. So, I have the apprentice engineer, and I came up here for a residential course at this place. And my first impression of Milton Keynes was bewilderment because of all the roundabouts and I never, ever encountered such a place. The grid system was, you know, just shockingly bewildering because I was thinking 'just what is this place'? I became lost in a maze of a labyrinth of roundabouts. And of course, this is in the days before Sat-Nav. I thought this place is a nightmare and never, ever, ever want to come to this place ever, ever again.

And I never would have ever dreamed in my wildest dreams that I would actually one day actually be living because years later, I did come to live here just because I happened to meet my first husband who lived near Milton Keynes. He lived down the Leighton buzzard. Actually, he lived in between, Leighton Buzzard and Milton Keynes in a place called Stoke Hammond. That's where I lived when I was married to my first husband. But I never ever despite being equal distance from Leighton Buzzard and Milton Keynes, ever went to Milton Keynes, I always would go down towards Leighton buzzard, because I thought I don't want to go anywhere near that place. I'm just going to get lost in the

roundabouts. And what is the place anyway, all is as a shopping centre, you know, a shopping centre with housing estates around it, I don't want to go there. It's just a nothing place.

When I married my second husband, we were looking for somewhere to live. And I had a baby on the way. And we were just looking for somewhere. I suppose our main priority, our main consideration at that time was convenient. The price of the housing and, you know, proximity to school and convenience, it was near to this town centre. So, I found myself living in Bradwell common, which was the first estate in Milton Keynes that I actually lived. We stayed there for a few years.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find that it was cheaper housing?

NAOMI:

I think so. Yes. I think, I don't know. It just kind of fitted our needs at that time. So, I put aside all my reservations about living in Milton Keynes. It didn't seem to matter so much at that time. I suppose you have other priorities at that time in your life. So, it was okay, but I wasn't happy there.

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

NAOMI:

I suppose it's grown bigger. It's grown. I mean, it's a very rapidly expanding town. Apart from that, I don't really know how it's changed since I've lived here. I don't know, except that it's just got bigger. More and more estates have been built, more houses have been built. Apart from that, I don't really know.

INTERVIEWER: No exciting storytelling groups popped up?

NAOMI:

Yeah, um, what has changed for me personally, since I've been living here, do you mean?

INTERVIEWER: Well, you take all of these questions as you will.

NAOMI:

You mean, all this? Has my perception changed during that time?

Okay. Well, I mentioned that I wasn't happy in Bradwell common, I found that, I found it a very lonely existence. I think during the time for me having young children. I found it very, very isolating and lonely. I don't know whether ... I don't know why it was; maybe it's just me. It probably wasn't Milton Keynes' fault. But I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

That is a common thing most people go through with young children, though, isn't it?

NAOMI:

Yeah. I mean, you think they'd be more of a community of mums and meeting people at playgroup? So anyway, I just found that felt quite isolated and alone. And when we moved to Walnut Tree, it was kind of the same idea only not so bad. But I, but one, so I'm going off track, but I will come back. It's I don't know whether it was a Milton Keynes thing that there just didn't seem to be a very cohesive community. And I suppose that a lot of people that moved to Milton Keynes, they've moved away from their people, they have moved into Milton Keynes from somewhere else. So, there isn't that

continuity of generations? There isn't that extended sort of family, where you've got cousins or aunts or, you know, uncles and grandparents' sort of living nearby. So young families tend not to have their grandchildren that their grandparents, sorry, nearby. And so that it all seems a little bit of a sort of fragmented sort of community thing. And I haven't found there to be a great community spirit. Have my perceptions of it changed over the years? Not really No, I don't think it has. I mean, I'll tell you what has changed actually, is that during the time that we're having children, you're so focused on the practicalities, and the functionality of providing for them and you're focused on them and their upbringing and everything, and you don't think of wider issues. But I think since my children have grown up, and moved away, I have an empty nest now my two youngest are in Australia, but they will be back. But since they've gone, I found that some ... I've become more and more aware of being actually dissatisfied with where I'm living. Because I suppose other things start coming into focus and into view and I've actually been reminded of how, actually, I'm not ... of how unhappy I am about living and being in Milton Keynes and feeling as if I need to get out of the place. So, I suppose how my perception of it's changed for me is sort of an acceptance of a climatisation to it, through the years of having children. Now they've gone I've actually kind of been reminded that actually, this place doesn't fit me. It doesn't suit me. And I would rather I suppose you do as you get older, you kind of ... start to become more yourself again, and sort of revert to things that are more in tune with your own nature. And I was beginning to feel like Milton Keynes was a sort of item of clothing that, that I had to wear but didn't suit me. And that didn't sit well with me. It wasn't right. So, so that sense, my perception of my personal perception of it being in Milton Keynes has changed. Or, maybe it hasn't changed. It's just kind of gone back to how I felt originally. When I when I first came to Milton Keynes, and I thought, you know, this place just, you know, just doesn't seem right somehow doesn't seem like a proper town. You know, like the whole ... I'll tell you what, really ... the whole sort of beating heart of Milton Keynes is its shopping centre is this just like the whole point of Milton Keynes like its soul. People say that Milton Keynes is just soulless, and I've been thinking about this actually. I've been thinking what people actually mean when they say soulless. What do they actually mean? And I've been thinking about this, and I think maybe if something has a soul, there's something human about it. There's something related to the human spirit about it. And maybe that's what people

feel is missing about Milton Keynes that it is missing that sense. Something dehumanising about it in some way. And that's a really strong word. And I know that, and I can justify that if you need if you would want me to go into that. But um, it's like, for example, it's just like if Milton Keynes has got a soul is soul, it's the shopping centre. You know, that is like, the shopping centre is like a temple of consumerism, you know, and that seems to be the beating heart of Milton Keynes, there's no High Street. There's no proper town there. It's just shops, just High Street chain shops. And, um, and one of its saving graces, I actually thought was the tree that they preserved. In the bit, the new bit of the shopping centre, I thought, well, at least they've preserved the tree, but the tree died. And I thought that's kind of fitting. It's kind of symbolic for me that the tree died because it's always something, not life-enhancing about the place that caused the tree to die. And I thought that was quite symbolic. And what did they put there instead of the tree? They put the concrete cows there. And I thought how fitting indeed because the concrete cows to me is such an apt representation of Milton Keynes. They're concrete, they're ugly, and they're fake? Fake concrete cows, fake ugly, concrete cows, fake ugly, concrete town. So, I'm, I'm thinking that yeah, that is a fitting replacement for the tree. They had a tree there. The tree died, they put the concrete cows there. And I just thought it almost gives me some visceral, loathing of the place, you know? Because I thought this isn't ... it's there's something. I'm sorry, I'm going on. I'm going off on one a little bit here. I'm sorry. I've got I'm just going off on one. Okay. But I suppose that my perception of concrete is that maybe the underpasses and the bridges and the town centre all seems to be a load concrete and glass and it's all square. And it's just something that doesn't quite um. It's just surrounded ... by just housing estates separated by a grid system, with roundabouts at the intersections. And so you have all these little housing estates in between these roads, that are all sort of cut off from each other by these roads, which makes it kind of difficult for people to travel to sort of get from one place to the other without going down to these ... going down these paths or under the underpasses. And, and it just seems very sort of fragmented, you know, that you've got these little estates all sort of like separated or cut, sort of cut through with these roads, and I just don't think it works very well as a town. I don't mean to sort of be completely negative. I mean, there are aspects of Milton Keynes, which are, which are very good, you know, I mean, like, that it's brilliant for cycling. And there's a lot of ... because it's low density, there's a lot of

trees and greenery and parks, I suppose. And that's nice. I mean, it's nice for you know, I mean, it's been, it's been a good place to bring up children. I mean, they've been happy growing up here. And, and, you know, I mean, I'm know, there were a lot worse place to be. God, you know, I, I realised that. But of course, I suppose the downside, and there is a downside to low density. And that's, you know, you've got the issue of being very dependent on cars, you know, people who haven't got cars are very disadvantaged. And I don't think it's a great place for elderly people. Because there's not much, you know, within walking distance, as they will have to rely on public transport, which apparently isn't great. And it goes around the houses, and but my Mum has moved in with us recently. And she really hasn't been happy since she's lived with me. She feels very isolated and stuck there. You know, she misses just being able to hop on a bus and go into town, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Where was she living beforehand?

NAOMI:

In Enfield north London, which is where I was originally from, maybe, in fact, maybe that's why. Maybe that's partly why Milton Keynes doesn't really fit with me, maybe because I'm because of where I come from. On the edge of London, I always had London at my fingertips, and I would always when I was younger going into London, and maybe that maybe that's kind of why it doesn't suit me somehow. Because maybe if other people have come from similar places to Milton Keynes, it's that kind of culturally adapted to that's sort of place. Maybe it's just because ... it's the ... Yeah, I mean, but a lot of people are very happy here. And I'm aware of that. And I respect that, you know, it fits their needs, it suits their needs. And it did for me, you know, when, I was bringing up children, I was fine. I mean, it was, it was everything. It was convenient, you know, but then you start ... people want, if that's all people want, out of a place where they live is just the convenience of parking and shopping and schools, then, and if they're happy with that, that's fine, but maybe I'm just harder to please I don't know. I mean, it's just I would look for places you know.

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

NAOMI:

Well, I suppose it's a very radical design. Because you know, designed in the 60s, these radical architects with anti-establishment ideas. It's all part of the social revolution, throw out the old and bring in the new and they have these radical ideas of having a piece of Midwest America in the middle of England so it was a bold design project and I think that's what makes it unique, I suppose. And in a lot of ways it works, and it is a very successful town you know, you've got probably full employment, and it's easy you know, ease of access to everywhere through you know, there's not many problems with traffic. There is all these shops in the centre, you know.

Well, I suppose that there probably isn't anywhere else in the country where you have a road, a grid system, like Milton Keynes, so the grid, the grid system is unique as far as I'm aware. And the Yeah, the grid system.

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?)

NAOMI:

Okay, I was just touching on this in the previous question. But yeah. Well, a lot of people say that Milton Keynes has no soul and no culture. My perfect place would be ... I'd like to live near a town where there's a great sort of cohesive community, either town or village community where people kind do things together, where there's stuff going on. Where there are groups and or activities, things that people can join and get involved with; book clubs or choirs or, or storytelling clubs or, you know, open mics. Great places for live bands that live bands will play, interesting places and old places quirky places, places that are not just bland ... you know places interesting, independent shops and

cafes, little cafes where you can sit out perhaps on a nice day. Old Pubs, I'm describing stony aren't I. Lovely old pubs with a bit of history

We're moving because, we're moving up to near Towcester in a couple of weeks. We're moving up to a village called Whittlebury, but I would have actually liked to have lived in Stony. But I'll be just up the road. And, but, that's beside the point. And yeah, so yeah, the sort of town that Stony is really because everything that I've just described seems to be lacking in Milton Keynes.

INTERVIEWER: But Stony is part of Milton Keynes.

NAOMI:

Well, technically. Yes, yes, I'm in, I dare say there were, there were some estates on Milton Keynes that have more of that sort of thing going on than others. But in my experience of living in Milton Keynes, like for example, where I'm living now, there's nothing. And my next-door neighbours, when they first moved in, and we kind of invited them round, you know, we had to sort of ... when people came round, you know, we invited them, but they didn't want to know, and I don't really know anything about them. They don't know anything about us, they seem nice enough, we say hi to them when we go out, but we don't really know them. Same with any of the neighbours really apart from one. And I only know her because our children and her children were friendly, were mates when they were younger. And the only way I seem to sort of getting to know people is through having children of similar ages apart from that there's just nothing going on. There's nothing organised locally. I suppose the stuff going down at the local meeting hall. But I just don't feel that there's anything like that going on. And I know technically stony is part of Milton Keynes, but it doesn't feel like part of Milton Keynes. It feels like a whole different world. And it's the same with other older parts of Milton Keynes where there probably is more of a sort of a village-y or small-town sort of culture there. And sort of lifestyle, but in estates of Milton Keynes, I don't see it not in my experience anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Do you experience any of these elements here?

NAOMI:

The Elements I've listed as being in a place that I would love to be proud to live in. Let me think about that. No, not where I'm living at the moment, only in places like Stony or Newport Pagnell. Milton Keynes is like a whole different ... you've got these pockets of old, all the towns that Milton Keynes has engulfed as it expanded.

In fact, actually thinking about it one thing that is ... so that's not quite true when I said no, I don't see it in there, because you know, there were little places like Milton Keynes village and Woolston, Woolston is an amazing place. It's in the middle of Milton Keynes if you go there and it feels like you're in the middle... you're in the countryside. And there are little pockets of these older villages within the grid system which is really interesting. So and there are some lovely and little villages with lovely old buildings and cottages and lovely old pubs actually within the grid system so yeah, so that is true there are some elements of it that still exist that are still be made ... sort of preserved which is nice that's a good thing.

INTERVIEWER: What can be done to improve your pride?

NAOMI:

Let me think about that. I suppose there's nothing that can be done about the infrastructure of the, you know, what's actually built there? I suppose ... you know, I would probably have a music festival, a little Music Festival on the cricket pitch on the field and there's a big sort of like field near where I live, and it's just a huge expanse of just grass. And it just seems to be what you know, what would you

that space isn't being used to anything except for people just to take the dogs. Dogs run around on the field sometimes, and I think they have sports there the weekend, they have guys go and play football there, I think, the weekend but I thought there's so much more that you could do with that's that piece of land you know you could have ... even if it's just a boot sale or just like some kind of festival. Just something I don't really know I haven't really thought about it, but I mean I just think that it would be nice for there to be something thing, just for the local people to bring people together. There's just no music. There's nothing musical going on there at all. Unless you go out to the towns like Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Stony, there is nothing musical in the pubs.

Campbell park had a festival. We went there last summer. The International Festival. And it was just sad. There was hardly anyone there. It was just it just looks. It was just all a little bit dull and flat. There was someone singing in a tent. There were people sitting around listening, but there was hardly anyone there. And it was just we only stayed for about 15 minutes. So, there's nothing really going on here, so we went. It's really disappointing. I just thought 'was this the best that they can do?' You know? It just didn't. I mean, the fact that it was so poorly attended. I just don't know why. I just don't know why that would have been.

Maybe it's because we went during the day time. People were at work. Yeah. Yeah. I think it was a weekend because my son was with us and he works during the week. So, I think it was the weekend. But I remember a few years ago. There's a wonderful festival at Campbell Park. When it was the International Festival, they used to have years ago. I don't know if different people are organising it. And also, the other thing is that the, you know that big stage at Campbell park, that big stage. And it was just wasn't being used.

But I just thought it was a bit of a shame when we visited that festival last year. And there was a few stores and stuff going on.

But I did think it was a shame that the stage wasn't being used because the lovely arena. I mean, that's such a wonderful feature, isn't it at that stage in that arena. Where I remember all performances happening years ago when they used to have really good international festivals sitting on the sort of

tiered, like Hill goes up. There were lovely stalls all around, stalls to look around. Then, you know there's a lovely festival, but it was all empty. There's no one on stage, no one was there and just a shame, they're not using it.

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?

INTERVIEWER: Best?

NAOMI:

Let me think about that ... maybe because it's good for cycling, because of the redways are good. And I think that's another thing that I should have mentioned as being unique about Milton Keynes apart from the grid system, is the system of redways which are designed for ... as opposed to walking and cycling. And that's a nice feature. Although the downside of that is that, you know, to get from one part of Milton Keynes or the other, you've got to go under the roads, under the underpasses. And those underpasses are a bit grim. Concrete, probably creepy after dark, you know, creepy looking before it's dark, you know, in a lot of cases, but anyway. But yeah, I didn't mean to make it positive into a negative there. I'm just, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The most exciting

NAOMI:

Events like StonyLive! I just love it. That's just like one wonderful festival that just goes on all week, with stuff going on over place. And, and that's I just, I just love it. So exciting. And it's just so many wonderful things going on all over the place. And then you've got not just indoors, not just in the

venues, but outdoors as well. You know, a day of dance, the barn dance in the sort of the market square, which is wonderful. And then you got to put the folk on the greens and stuff going on outside as well as inside and wonderful events. So yeah. That's what excites me. Events like that.

INTERVIEWER: The hardest.

NAOMI:

I think, I suppose it in terms of sort of practicalities is a sort of town of convenience, isn't it Really? So, there's there isn't anything that's really sort of difficult to deal with as such. I mean, one of the major selling points of Milton Keynes is that it's convenient. But I mean, I suppose that one of the things I, I would find the hardest, it's a tricky one. I suppose having to drive everywhere. But the fact that you're so dependent on the car. But that's one of the disadvantages of low-density housing. And the way Milton Keynes is designed is that you're so dependent on a car to get every that then that doesn't really, I don't really, you know, that would be hard for other people. But honestly, I've got a car, so it doesn't bother me, it's more hard for my mum, my elderly mum, that's the thing that she would find ... that she finds hard, is that she hasn't really got much independence, she's more dependent on me to take her everywhere. You know, it would be easier and better for her than if we lived somewhere where she could walk, where there were places that she had easy ... that she could access easily by walking. So, I don't really find anything hard, difficult as such. I mean, I suppose that the lack of community

INTERVIEWER: Lacking?

NAOMI:

Yeah, um, yeah, I think that there is a lack of community spirit really. Like, and I think one of the places, one of the reasons I want to live to the sort of places that we're moving, shortly going to be moving to is because there is a real sense of ... sort of, like, there is a more of a sense of community in the village, and I think that's true, maybe for village life, perhaps the village life, in general, in a village, there is more of a community, everyone seems to know each other and look out for each other and help each other out. You know, there were these little sort of community Facebook pages where people sort of borrow things, you know, advise each other and you know, if you need a plumber, someone will know a plumber and stuff like that, there may be something like that, there may be stuff like that in Milton Keynes as well. So that's probably not something that is unique to, that's probably may not be something that's lacking in Milton Keynes actually. Maybe I'm doing it a disservice there. But my experience of it is that there isn't the same sense of, you know, coming out of your house and, and maybe walking down the street and meeting somebody you know. Or chatting to your neighbour, or, you know, opportunities to kind of just casually meet people and see people you know, or, you know, and that's one of the things that my mum is really, really missed, from where she lived in Enfield. I know she lived in a long time and she's had neighbours for 40 years or whatever, she's known for years, but she really misses that being able to just go out and feeling as if there are people around that know you and care about you. And we just say Hi and have a chat with you, and I do feel not only for my mum's only for a short time has a chance to get to know anyone really, hoping she will when we move. But I feel that even for me having lived there for years, I just don't feel as if it ... just doesn't seem to work. The whole setup just doesn't seem to be conducive to people to that sort of sense of community. There's not really any local events. There's not really any sort of like come ... opportunities for people to sort of just meet and chat or get together or just socialise or do things together. You know, there's no events, stuff like that, you know, or clubs or, you know, stuff that I've mentioned before like just sort of opportunities for people to get together and do stuff that they enjoy together or whatever. Sorry, I just wanted to add for elderly people as well. It doesn't seem to be a good setup for elderly people as well which is one of the reasons I want to get out for my mum that just doesn't seem to be anything going on for elderly people in Milton Keynes I have to drive all the way out to Aspey Guise to a lunch club. There's just nothing going on locally as at all.

INTERVIEWER: In your opinion what element of Milton Keynes is most culturally rich

NAOMI:

The surrounding towns like Stony Stratford and Newport Pagnell, possibly Wolverton - possibly to a slightly lesser degree. There seems to be slightly more going on up in the north of Milton Keynes than the South. But culturally rich yeah there seems to be you know much much more going on in the surrounding older towns. The new part of Milton Keynes doesn't seem to be set up for it at all. I mean that there's some. Obviously, there is stuff in the centre; there is a theatre. Sorry, I should mention the theatre. There is a theatre, and there is an art gallery. So, it's in the centre of Milton Keynes apart from that I'm not really aware of anything else much culturally going on in the centre of Milton Keynes.

INTERVIEWER: Significant for its heritage

NAOMI:

Well, yeah, I suppose that would be the first thing I would have said is Bletchley Park, which is some fascinating place, amazing place and wonderful that it has been preserved. So that's a very important aspect of Milton Keynes heritage. And there are intangible ... in terms of intangible heritage, I suppose that some aspect of that is what you're working on with the stories. Which is why what you're doing is so wonderful and important because you're bringing these stories, you know, bringing these stories out, drawing them out and putting them out there. So, the stories, the stories that I suppose are coming out of the place that ... places that have history of Milton Keynes. The old places, the older parts of Milton Keynes, some of which are very rich source of wonderful stories as you know, as you're finding. And apart from that, there's the older towns themselves I suppose and the sort of the buildings, the architecture and heritage ... there is a museum, a museum of agricultural or something.

[Addition by email the following day] When you asked me about what I considered to be part of MK's heritage, I made a very serious omission - I forgot to mention The Stables! How could I have forgotten The Stables! Which is currently under threat of being engulfed in housing estates. Actually, just about to sign the Save The Stables petition

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?

NAOMI:

no. I don't think there is. There is nothing unique to Milton Keynes which aided any particular achievements or enabled me to anything that I wouldn't otherwise have done anywhere else. So, I think the answer to that question is no.

INTERVIEWER: Has it aided any failures?

NAOMI:

Has it actually hindered me from ... in some ways? Very difficult question because it's hard to know. I've got nothing to compare it with. So, we don't really know whether it's hindered me for anything I can't really say that that's it. I suppose. Yeah, thinking about it. Living where we are now is ... we chose to live in the place we are now ... one of the big selling points was because it was near three schools. And within walking distance of three schools you had Walton high up the road and Terrence gate and Heron shore right next to the house. So, it has been very convenient in terms of I've never, you know, I mean, I've never driven my children to school. Women have, people, drive their children to school, you know, just up the road. We've always been within walking distance within easy walking distance of schools, and right through my children from they started to the time they left. So, in terms of that, convenience, proximity to schools. It's been convenient, you know, saved me a lot of

hassle over the years as well. And it's been I think, I suppose I wouldn't have met my present husband if I hadn't been living in Milton Keynes. Okay, so I don't know that really counts because this is where it was where I met my husband.

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

NAOMI:

I would call it that the city of convenience probably. Shop till you drop. Spend! Spend! Spend!

With an image of the shopping centre.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that is a good representation of all of Milton Keynes?

NAOMI:

Yeah, yeah. I suppose that I'm conjuring up there is what I see as the essence of Milton Keynes. But I don't see any of the surrounding towns such as Stony as really ... I can't, I just don't see them as, I know they are technically part of Milton Keynes, but I don't they don't feel like they're part of Milton Keynes because Milton Keynes is got very much its own character and the outline towns have got their own character. But they are all part of this, you know. I just don't think Stony as part of Milton Keynes. I think there is Milton Keynes and there's Stony. You know, like two separate entities entirely for me, even though they are geographically technically all Milton Keynes. So, what else can I say about it? I suppose, you know, one thing you would sell about it is the low-density aspects of it and the parks? Yeah, lots of parks. And there are paths. Lots of open space, you know, which is nice for children, I suppose. So, if I was first presenting an image of Milton Keynes, I would say the

greenness aspect of it you know that there's quite a lot of things paths, and parks and trees and things, I don't know. The lakes, oh I actually find Caldecott lake really depressing, though.

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

NAOMI:

Okay. Okay, I'm thinking of two, am I allowed two answers? Okay well, I will say it anyway. If Milton Keynes was a person, the sort of person that would be the sort of person that actually really likes living in Milton Keynes, and most of the people you've interviewed have said, probably said yeah I love Milton Keynes, it's a great place and I'm really happy here. So, I suppose a Milton Keynes. If Milton Keynes was a person that would be that kind of person, the sort of person that loves living here, and they would probably be the sort of people for whom convenience is enough for them. They're not particularly interested in maybe the sort of stuff that I might be interested in with that, that you know, like um ... I'm struggling here because I don't want to seem sort of as if I'm sort of stereotyping people or being very disparaging to people. Forget that. Forget I said that. And I'll just say I'm just kind of just thinking out loud.

It would probably be the sort of person that ... no. Milton Keynes as a person. It would be like probably a woman who sort of likes shopping and who wears the very sort of, sort of um, probably clothes from next. Whose got a lot of shoes and handbags. Who, you know, goes to the nail bar and has her nails done every week. And whose husband watches Sky Sports.

INTERVIEWER:

She is having a 50th birthday party. What sort of birthday party would she have?

NAOMI:

50th birthday party? Probably with her mates around TGI Fridays and having all the sort of mates.

INTERVIEWER: She's invited you to this party would you go

NAOMI: If she was my mate, yeah, I would go.

INTERVIEWER: What would you give her?

NAOMI:

Milton Keynes woman? Oh, these questions are hard. A voucher for ... a voucher for next or something. I suppose Yeah.

For people to have that impetus for that to be that motivation. And that, yeah, let's do this. You've got to connect with other like-minded people. And if there isn't that sort of social cohesion in the first place, there might be someone up the other end of the estate that might have the same idea, but unless you actually know the people and meet them, it's never gonna happen.

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?

NAOMI:

God that could be my house, where I live now! (see the AFUs being built). What year was this?

INTERVIEWER: 1973.

NAOMI: Interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Had you seen any of the 'origin' videos before

NAOMI:

No, I hadn't. It's interesting. It's some ... it kind of makes me think of rabbit hutches. You know. It's, it's like, it's just like, you get a rabbit, like in the same way that guy's got, you know, people you've got give this rabbit a nice place to live. So that the rabbit will be happy. So, what does the rabbit need? It needs shelter. And it needs food. And it needs a house to run around in, I mean a piece of land around, a run. So, it can so you get a nice hutch. You build a nice hutch and put some nice straw in it. You know, you give it some food and give it a run to run around in. And so, what's not to like about that? The rabbit should be happy. It's got everything it needs. It's got some. Its food is very conveniently there. It's got a little bit of land to run around. So, it's, it should be a happy rabbit. But is it a happy rabbit? I don't know. Maybe some rabbits might think that's great. You know, they've got everything they need. It's all very convenient. And they're happy, very happy rabbits, but there are other rabbits for them, something is missing, there might have been quite sure what it is. But then there might be something that they feel is quite relevant then.

If there is any kind of community in Walnut Tree, I'm not aware of it. And I'm certainly not involved in it. And I just didn't think of it as being something that's in the culture of that area or in the wider you know, area of Milton Keynes but I mean I'm sure that there are some estates where there's more community going on, but I don't see it where I am.

It kind of made me think of rabbit hutches and there was something else, but I've forgotten what it was sorry, I was gonna say something else I forgot what it was. Let me think for a moment, um, I was going to mention that there's a kind of aesthetic aspect to it as well.

And there's one thing I'm really interested in at the moment is the relatively new sort of area of study that is environmental psychology and it's kind of about the more sort of aesthetic impact on people on their wellbeing, a sense of wellbeing. And I think a new town such as Milton Keynes doesn't have those elements. I don't know how to describe it. This is quite a tricky subject doesn't have the sort of elements in sort of environment that are kind of ... promote a sort of emotional and mental wellbeing. But that's a whole other subject. And that's not in the scope of this study. But it is something that I'm interested in. And I think I think that's why a lot of people find a new house, and new housing estates quite ugly, because I call them Lego houses. Because of the way they evoke the sense of service. That's what gives it character, and that's, that's, that's one of the essences.

In Milton Keynes, you just got the bog-standard chain street stores. Whereas, you know, in London or Enfield where I was, you know, there's so much more variety of more interesting places, not just shops, but just places in general. Just interesting. Different places, you know, rather than just your bog-standard. You know, not just shops, but places to eat and stuff like that.

They listed all the different things that are what people need, they need a doctors. Yeah, they need a shop, they need a community house. It's like, it's almost like sort of listing the ingredients for a cake. If you're going to bake a cake and you're looking at all the ingredients that you need. And I wanted to just quote to you from this book. It called environmental psychology. I just thought ... I know it's not probably strictly within the scope of this study, but I just thought you'd find interesting anyway. And they say ...

'beloved environments require a degree of complexity, depth and variety that takes time to grow. And over time, we begin to find patterns in this complexity, such as the gently varying height of bluebells, the tidal ornamentation to the shoreline, the land shape form of wind-sculpted trees, we find this type of ordered complexity in converted buildings and places around the world. In the age of offices, parks,

high risers, and 10 Lane highways, we tend to see less and less of it. Throughout history, certain societies regimes have put greater value in order and control, while others have grown in more complex organic shapes. Like a messy room, too much complexity can be disorientating, but as we've seen with sterile institutional buildings, too much order is boring, depriving us of the sensory stimulation that we thrive on. Ordered complexity requires patterns such as; symmetry, rotation, scale and nesting, kind of patterns we find in practice.'

So, they're talking about the service static nature of our environment that contributes to our sort of a sense of rightness, you know, it's kind of chimes with sort of how we are as humans in some way. And they actually mentioned Milton Keynes here.

'That combined with the latest model of traffic planning efficiency based on the US grid system with roundabouts at the intersection and three-lane roads inspired by la sene Alessa, and a big shopping mall in this centre, they took inspiration from many places like different ideas from different places, didn't they. And the combination of these disparate ideas bears as much resemblance to an organic, cohesive place as a crazy golf course does. It lacks dynamism because it's so low density, and it loses a sense of place, identity because of the sameness of the grid system. Despite its success, Milton Keynes doesn't have a reputation as a great place.'

It says in this book,

'as with the Corbusier's contemporary city, that we know which architecture, the Garden City seems to tick all the items on the list that should make for good housing, greenery, light, air, shopping opportunities, wholesome houses, and safe roads. But creating places that people feel attached to and identify with is more complicated than putting together the ingredients for a cake. You also have to bake the cake; place has to feel like home.'

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?)

NAOMI:

I think it probably does. I mean, I think the fact that the vast majority of the people are happy to live here. And I suppose if they weren't, they'd be doing what I'm doing a moving out, that or they wouldn't have gone to live there in the first place. But some, but I think yes, I think I think the people that I most of the people that I know, and probably the vast majority of people you meet that live in Milton Keynes are more than happy to live in Milton Keynes, and they seem to you know that they're, they like it, it's fine. And it's always the people that move out of Milton Keynes that say. I hate Milton Keynes.

INTERVIEWER: Good reputation, externally?

NAOMI:

No, I don't. No. I don't think most people that don't live in Milton Keynes. They think oh no Milton Keynes I wouldn't want to live there. Don't want to go there.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think you have this reputation?

NAOMI: Historically, or now?

INTERVIEWER: Well, either? I mean, what why do you think externally there?

NAOMI:

Is this perception? Yeah, it's, I think it's just a sort of, it's got a, I think maybe not so much. Now. I think probably more so in the past people were, you know, very disparaging about Milton Keynes. I mean, I know, if I ever went anywhere else in the country, and you tell people you're Milton Keynes, the first thing that comes into the head is our concrete cows. You know, and that happened to me a few times on a number of different occasions in different places you tell someone you're from Milton Keynes, and they say are concrete cows. Yeah, concrete cows and roundabout.

INTERVIEWER: How did that make you feel?

NAOMI:

Embarrassed to live in Milton Keynes. It's it because you could sense that they're just like, it's a bit of a joke place, you know. And when my daughter is now in Australia, she's now in Australia. She told me that she told people from the UK that she was from Milton Keynes and ha-ha sort of concrete cow. So, it's happening to her as well, even the next generation down. So there is a sense of there being, you know, that it's not held in very high esteem at all, it's just a bunch of roundabouts with a shopping centre in the middle, which is kind of my perception of it when I came to live here, you know, initially. When I first encountered Milton Keynes. But yeah, but the people who actually live here, they would very robustly defend Milton Keynes, they would say no Milton Keynes is a great place to live, you know, and then they're very, you know, ready to defend it because they're more than happy to live here.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think could improve its reputation externally?

NAOMI:

That's a very difficult one. You mean nationally, or internationally.

I forgot to mention the OU [Open University] actually. The OU is some something that puts up MK on the map? Doesn't it. What would it ...? How could it be improved? I don't know. Maybe? It would be interesting if someone did a documentary maybe all the new towns to compare. That would be a really interesting subject of the documentary if somebody could actually look at the history behind all the new towns that sprang up after the war to rehouse the Londoners, the slum clearances in London. And you know, all the Garden Cities being set up. And it will be really interesting for someone to do a study on comparing how the new towns have fared ... and I think it would be really interesting to compare that to how Milton Keynes has fared since. You know, compared to some of the other new towns which haven't fared so well, because I think compared to some of the other new towns like Stevenage, Telford maybe, which really, really haven't worked, but I think they were earlier new towns. But I think Milton Keynes tried to learn from the mistakes that were made in those earlier new towns.

So, I think maybe, for people to actually be made aware of that compared to a lot of the other new towns that were built probably a little bit earlier on Milton Keynes has actually done pretty damn well. And it's a thriving town. Thriving expanding town. People seem to like, ... people like living here, it seems to provide all their needs. And even though it wouldn't be my choice, a place to live, you know, most people are more than happy to live here. And then and like you say, there are people who are trying to fill those gaps and, and, you know, put right, the things that people feel are lacking, you know, culturally and, you know, there are people actually working on that. And that's, that's brilliant. That, you know, that people are doing that. And so, I think compared to a lot of the other new towns, Milton Keynes is actually doing pretty well, and that maybe that does need to be celebrated. I shouldn't be being too negative about it. Maybe we should actually be looking at the positive ways in which Milton Keynes has actually thrived in a lot of ways since it was built. And, just maybe compare it to the other new towns, and maybe people would see it in a fresh light and think that you know, it's not just such a sort of horrible 60s experiment that went wrong, you know, so yeah.

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

NAOMI:

Only the ones that you've told. So, um, so I can't say. No, I don't. I certainly don't know anything you wouldn't know, or I would have told you. So, I'm afraid I don't know. And, of course, not being a native to this area, having moved to this area, you know, in my mid-20s. You know, so I'm not actually from, I haven't got any family or anything, anyone living from this area, so I'm not native to this area. So, no.

NAOMI

Date: 14/6/2019

Location: Office Space, York House Centre, Stony Stratford

Observation: Naomi, whilst friendly and open in demeanour, arrived at the interview with an agenda. She had brought notes, quotes and books to reference in her effort to support the poor image of Milton Keynes. This made the interview difficult at times and it took some coaxing to pull answers. What became evident in the interview is that Naomi's own journey since arriving in Milton Keynes had not gone well and somewhere this had been related to the opportunities available in the area. Ironically, this shows a strong sense of place, connecting personal experience to location, as Naomi has tied her own story in with her experience of Milton Keynes.

Despite being in the area 21 years it would appear from her answers that she has not looked past the negative rhetoric surrounding Milton Keynes, often referring to elements of that myth. Where some of the questions often received similar answers from other interviewees highlighting the open spaces and arts & heritage festivals, Naomi only saw the lack of these things noting concrete and a lack of things to do. She focused mainly on the shopping centre as Milton Keynes and refused to consider the older parts (like Stony Stratford) as part of Milton Keynes. Whereas many other interviewees celebrated the blend of old and new, Naomi had separated it choosing to only see the new as Milton Keynes.

It was transcribed verbatim and few edits were made during the member check.