

Chapter Four | Affordable and High-Quality Homes

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In 1967, government decided to build Milton Keynes to meet the urgent housing crisis in the south east of England. As the largest new town, the government saw the city as a project of national importance. Fifty years later, the National Infrastructure Commission recommended that Milton Keynes should again be a “project of national significance” at the heart of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. The government agreed.

Initially, most of the homes in the city were built in large

social housing estates to very tight budgets. Some of these homes were subsequently bought by their tenants and, in due course, offered for private rent. From the mid-1980s onwards, private house developers built mainly for owner occupation and, today, first-time buyers are offered more opportunities here than anywhere else in the UK. Yet, rents and house prices are far less affordable, relative to incomes, than in the past. We face very severe shortages of affordable housing.

Our Strategy to 2050 highlights the importance of meeting this challenge. We will aim to achieve a very significant increase in the supply of ‘truly affordable homes’ particularly council housing, and we will provide a much wider choice of tenures and types of housing. And we will improve the quality of our existing council homes and homes in the private sector. Many of the estates built in the 1970s are now in need of substantial investment to ensure that the homes meet

modern standards. We have already been working closely with the communities on the Lakes Estate and Fullers Slade; but there is much more to do right across the city.

We will learn from this experience in our approach to regeneration and enable our residents to gain further skills and access good jobs as well as investing in the quality of homes – these are the keys to improving life chances, reducing poverty and enabling people to live healthier, happier lives.



Affordable homes for all

Fifty years ago, Milton Keynes was established as an ambitious national project to meet the urgent housing crisis in the south east of England.

The **1970 Plan for Milton Keynes** highlighted the importance of having different types and tenures of homes at all levels of affordability so the city could become a place that all sorts of people could call home.

We are good at growing – as a new town, that is what we are designed for. However, we know a consequence of our economic success has been the rising unaffordability of housing as the supply of new homes has not always kept up with demand. More households are now homeless or in temporary accommodation and the quality of life for many residents is being impacted.

Our founding vision of MK as a place where everyone can find a home and thrive is increasingly under threat. The pressure on our housing market may increase as people seek to relocate from London to places like Milton Keynes in search of homes with more space as they work remotely and commute less due to COVID-19.

We also know that some of our existing homes and neighbourhoods need investment. Living in poor housing conditions has a serious impact on mental and physical health but many people live in homes that do not meet decent standards. As well as providing new affordable homes for those who need them, we need to make sure today's homes are healthy places to live.

Getting the right mix

To be successful, our ambitious plans for economic growth must be matched by building enough homes for our expanding workforce and the families of our existing residents. And for that growth to work for everyone, we must address our affordability crisis through providing more homes to meet the diverse needs of our residents.

The **1970 Plan for Milton Keynes** aimed for at least half of the households in the new city to own their home. It was felt then that too many council houses and too few homes for sale on the open market would restrict people's housing choices. Today the risks are very different. Most homes are now built by the private sector and because



of government restrictions, very few by the council for rent. And through 'right to buy', many council-built homes are now in the private sector. This means we don't have enough decent homes for social and affordable rent, private rent or purchase at prices that many of our residents can afford.

Increasing the supply of affordable options

We have a council policy that requires affordable homes to be built as part of new housing developments but the definition of 'affordable' is based against market values rather than income levels so may not be genuinely affordable for many. Affordable homes are often built by housing developers, transferred to housing associations and then rented to households on waiting lists or sold with a discount through schemes like 'Help to Buy' or on a shared-ownership basis.

They are an important part of the solution and we will continue to require affordable homes to be built as part of new housing schemes. We will also encourage other housing providers, which could include community land trusts or co-housing co-operatives, to increase





housebuilding programme we will aim for 15% of the overall housing stock to be council-owned.

Regeneration and our existing homes

Many of our existing homes and estates, including some of the earliest areas built as part of the New Town, need major investment to bring them up to a decent standard for our residents. Improving these areas is not just about 'bricks and mortar' - it must also be about improving access to good jobs and skills that are equally important in improving life chances and addressing poverty.

Our recent proposals at Netherfield and the Lakes Estate included a significant proportion of the properties to be available for rent from the council, including all 66 units at Cripps Lodge. We have also invested in 70 modular homes in Fishermead for homeless families.

Today, around 10% of our households live in council-owned homes. Increasing the number of council homes in the city will help us to be an affordable place for all our people, so through our

of homes, including more self- and custom-build homes and new affordable opportunities. We wish to see a wider variety of designs that reflect the changes in the diversity, aged, composition and lifestyle preferences of our communities than the relatively standard homes built in recent years and we will encourage more small- and medium-sized housebuilders as one way of increasing innovation. We will also continue to be green housing pioneer and a trailblazer for testing new technologies and designs that help to create healthy, affordable homes for our residents.

In future, more of us will live alone or as couples without children, rather than in traditional family groups, so we will need to adapt. Places with good access to retail, leisure and culture that are close to places of work and well-served by public transit are popular with young professionals and will be important to many of the students who attend MKU, our new university.

Student accommodation will be provided as part of MKU's city centre site and we are developing a framework for CMK which will also consider how to house a growing student population.

A major part of our Strategy is to improve the quality of our existing council homes. Major investment is planned alongside our wider regeneration and renewal plans. Homes in the private sector must also be of a higher standard and we will monitor their condition and take enforcement action against rogue landlords where improvements are not made.

Widening our range of homes

As we grow, we will encourage a wider variety of types and tenures

Urban living is becoming more popular with older people who wish to live as part of a wider community. As well as developments designed for the over-55s we will need homes within mixed communities that are suitable for our older residents.

Homes must be built to Lifetime Homes standards and be adaptable to changing needs so that people can age without leaving them should their health or mobility decline. Modular homes that are built section-by-section in a factory before being put together on site may be especially adaptable.

We also want to see bungalows and homes with space to adapt for wheelchair accessibility. And more dwellings that are adaptable to be multi-generational will be required as it will be common for two or more adult generations to live together.

We also need our homes and communities to be designed to help to meet our ambition to be a Dementia Friendly City.

This includes measures such as good lighting, reducing excess noise and improving wayfinding. These 'universal design' principles are

features that make a better living environment for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend of more people working from home so designs that allow one or more people to work or study from home will be important.

People have appreciated having access to private outdoor space during lockdown, so as well as new houses with gardens we want to see apartments that have a balcony or access to a shared garden or terrace for all residents. And

because of the impact that living in poor quality places can have on health, we will resist unsuitable conversions of office and other buildings into homes and ensure that all new homes meet minimum space standards.

