

CONSERVATION & ARCHAEOLOGY IN MILTON KEYNES

September 2023

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

Work continues apace on the eastern flank of Milton Keynes in relation to a large mixed-use development to the east of the M1 between Milton Keynes and Newport Pagnell, known as MK East Strategic Urban Extension (MKESUE). A third phase of excavations is well underway with the focus on an intensive late Iron Age to Roman settlement complex to the east of the A509 Newport Road.

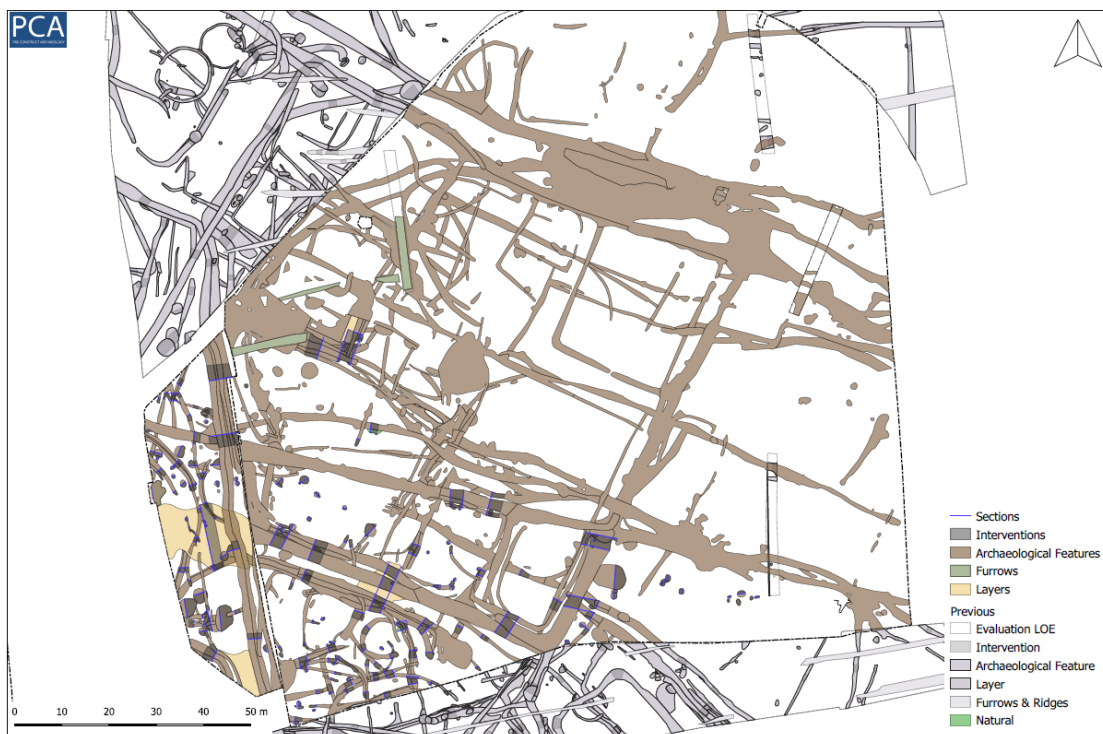


Image – working plan of MKE SUE Area 8

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT CASEWORK

Development consultations have led to at least one unexpected outcome and a useful Planning Inspectorate decision regarding non-designated heritage assets (NDHA):

The Grade II listed Old Bakehouse, High Street, North Crawley, was understood to be a much-altered C17th timber-framed house with later C19th alterations. Proposals to open up an attic space necessitated a specialist report on the roof structure, which appeared to be of an unusual vernacular arrangement (**image below**). The report confirmed the presence of smoke blackened timbers and the possibility of the

property containing the remains of a house of open hall layout with all probability of an appreciably earlier build date than the C17th.

A subsequent interim Historic England dendrochronological dating report describes the roof as 'comprising of three quite lightweight principal rafters with tie beam and collar trusses. The middle truss of the three also has queen posts, with slender curved braces from the queen posts to the collar. The trusses support single purlins to each pitch of the roof, the purlins in turn supporting a series of common rafters. There are slender curved braces from the feet of the principal rafters up to the purlins. All such timbers show some evidence of smoke-blackening'. The dendrochronological dating has so far proved inconclusive, but some further work remains to be completed and a full report into the findings is to be published in due course and will be made available.



Image – Roof structure, Old Bakehouse, N. Crawley

The Forester's Arms PH on Newport Road, New Bradwell was subject to proposals for demolition and redevelopment of the land for residential use. The building is not listed or located in a conservation area. The conservation advice, heeded by development management officers, that the Forester's Arms amounted to a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) forming part of the historic narrative of the town was challenged by the developers following the refusal of planning permission.

The conflicting conclusions regarding the heritage status of the Forester's Arms were robustly contested at a recent hearing. The inspector agreed that the Forester's is an NDHA and the appeal was dismissed. This decision is a potentially useful benchmark (assuming the existence of a 5-year housing land supply) for future debate on the

identification and fate of non-designated built assets. Appeal Ref: APP/Y0435/W/23/3319810

The proposal to develop an Aldi supermarket alongside Warrington Road to the north of Olney went to Planning Committee in early August and gained planning permission with unanimous support from Committee members. Archaeological excavations by Oxford Archaeology at the site in November 2022 unexpectedly uncovered a late Roman building containing a mosaic (**image below**) close to the road frontage. Though damaged in places by the collapse or demolition of the building, the mosaic was well-preserved and closely resemble one recorded (and also preserved *in situ*) at Great Staughton in Cambridgeshire in the 1950s.

It is proposed to preserve the mosaic and building *in situ* beneath the car park of the supermarket and a scheme has been agreed for their careful reburial. Additional planning conditions will secure on site interpretation of the archaeology with provision for public outreach including 3 open days where the local community may view the remains prior to reburial in September, as well as provision for post-excavation analysis and publication of the findings.



Image - Olney mosaic (Oxford Archaeology)

HERITAGE AT RISK

The Milton Keynes City Council Heritage at Risk Register has been updated and the latest version was published online in February 2023. The scale of risk applied is that suggested by Historic England to provide uniform method of assessing and prioritising the buildings identified as at risk. Also published are the cases where

sites are no longer at-risk following actions by the Conservation Officers and by the Owners.

A new addition to the Heritage at Risk Register has been the barns at Two Mile Ash, a Non-designated Heritage Asset. These are rated as Category C: Slow Decay; No solution agreed. A further addition has been Whitehouse Farm, a Grade II Listed Building, which is also considered as Category C.

The scheduled monument of Magiovinium Roman town is on track for removal from the national Historic England Heritage at Risk register later this year. The area of the site which was at risk from ongoing arable cultivation has been in MKCC ownership since 2022, the land being transferred as a consequence of the adjacent Eaton Leys residential development. A scheme for the reversion of the arable fields making up the bulk of the Roman town to wildflower meadow is now underway with improved public access, site security, and interpretation to follow.

CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW PROGRAMME

The team continue to review our 27 Conservation Areas. Current reviews are Emberton, Ravenstone, Sherington and Weston Underwood, with consultation drafts available in the autumn. The completion of these documents will bring the number of areas reviewed to 16.

MK NEW TOWN HERITAGE REGISTER (LOCAL LIST)

In July the first Selection Panel met to consider a range of nominations to the register. The panel are formed of national and local experts across a range of interests and professions and had included Elaine Harwood, Historic England's post-war expert, until her sad and unexpected death in April. The nominations range from industrial buildings and entire residential grid squares through to local community artworks, the Selection Panel considers them against the adopted selection criteria.

The Panel will meet a further two times before the end of the year to consider the remainder of the first tranche of 160 assets. Work will then commence on the second tranche of around 80 nominations.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD (HER)

Progress continues with the HER Action Plan stemming from the recent full audit. Idox/Exegesis have recently completed enhancement work including the incorporation of data from the Bedford Borough NMP project into the HER.

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

After a 3-year hiatus MK Archaeology Day returns to the Central Library on Saturday 4th November this year. The day will feature talks including one on the Harpole Treasure from Northamptonshire plus excavations on the MKE SUE and Magiovinium / South Caldecotte. There will also be stands, displays and activities from a range of local archaeological groups.

The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Active Archaeology Group (BAS AAG) continue to excavate the Ha-Ha at Gt Linford but have also commenced a trench in the post-medieval landscape garden and manorial site in Stanton Low Country Park.



Image – Trench 1 at Stanton Low

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NEW TOWN HERITAGE

Due to the age of the New Town, many buildings are reaching an age where important decisions about their future are being made. Within CMK there have been a number of schemes that retain such buildings and repurpose them. These schemes usually involve conversion to residential and major upgrading of their thermal performance. This not only preserves buildings that are part of the unique story and heritage of Milton Keynes new town but also makes use of embodied carbon in these buildings. Some buildings have been adapted to host renewable energy features, such as the former Bus Station (listed GII), which prior to its statutory listing was fitted with solar photovoltaic panels, carried out in consultation with the original architect.

Station House, the principal building in the grouping of mirror glass buildings around Station Square, has undergone such a conversion. In this scheme the architect

persuaded the developer to expose the pocketed concrete ceilings and internal columns to give the scheme architectural emphasis inside and out. Tight planning control over changes to the existing mirror glass façades was exercised with some applications refused or amended. Consent has also been granted for two additional storeys. Given the local importance of the grouping of buildings, great care had to be given to its design. Saxon Court (**image below**) and Westminster House, a pair of early new town buildings on opposite sides of Saxon gate in CMK, have also had consent granted for residential conversions (from office) which include upwards extensions. The designs vary greatly from each other but demonstrate the range of solutions that exist for the re-use of such buildings.



Image – Saxon Court proposed roof extension

Netherfield is a residential grid square typical of the striking, minimal aesthetic of the early years of Milton Keynes. It is characterised by linear terraces that run the length of the grid square over undulating ground whilst maintaining a constant eaves, the result provides a range of one-, two- and three-storey housing. It had to be easy to construct quickly using unskilled and semi-skilled labour whilst responding to shortages in various building materials in the 1970's. Fast forward 40 years and the housing is poorly / not insulated and incredibly inefficient thermally. MKCC received government funding and is now retrofitting and upgrading 300 houses, around a third of the scheme. Current building regulations prohibit using the original materials and construction techniques, however significant endeavour has been made to maintain the scheme's rigour and aesthetic whilst providing considerable improvements in performance.

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