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Milton Keynes City Council

The City of Milton Keynes: Involving stakeholders and communities in an historic bid

In June 2021, government announced a competition for city status across the United Kingdom, and its crown dependencies and overseas territories, to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Elizabeth II. The last competition was run in 2012.

For Milton Keynes, this would be its fourth bidding opportunity to become a city and it was agreed a different approach would be needed this time – one which involved as many stakeholders as possible, along with residents, and reflected on multiple aspects of local life including culture, faith, business, learning, and community.

The benefits of cooperation were twofold: not only did we source more fascinating, diverse, and authentic material in the bid than the Council could on its own (ensuring more voices were included), but we amplified support for the bid across everyone's networks and as such could maximise local pride in Milton Keynes' achievements regardless of whether the bid 'won or lost'.

Developing the bid through cooperation

The Council brought together more than 70 knowledgeable local people and organisations to create the bid, all gifting their time, including local figures who had played a role in Milton Keynes' development from the very beginning.



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Three working groups were established with people interested in heritage and culture; the built and natural environment; and diversity, volunteering and communities. The groups met regularly to shape the bid, but also separately explored their own networks and partnerships to develop themes, source evidence, and uncover unusual stories and memories – making sure a wide range of voices were included.

Bid material produced by each group was woven into a central narrative by the Council's communications team to become the formal application.

Alongside this, the Council ran a photo competition to involve residents in the bid, co-ordinated by the local tourism organisation. Local people were asked to send in a photograph of their favourite view or place in Milton Keynes. The competition was extremely popular and some of the photos submitted featured in the final bid itself.

A competition was also organised for schools to design 'a flag for MK' and from hundreds of entries, a design created by Thea Callaghan (age 12 at the time) showcasing Milton Keynes' natural spaces was chosen as the winner.



The bid submission

The bid set out key reasons for Milton Keynes to become a city, including:

- Being home to great diversity, with more than 140 languages spoken in its schools. Its population of nearly 300,000 people is noted for their willingness to serve and volunteer: per head, more citizens volunteer in MK than in any other place in the UK.
- This 'city in the forest' has more biodiversity today than in the agricultural land it replaced, with one of the highest amounts of green space per resident in the UK.

- A surprising amount of significant heritage: Wolverton is the home of the Royal Train, the world's oldest Shrove Tuesday pancake race takes place in Olney (where the hymn Amazing Grace was written), and Bletchley Park's amazing achievements during World War II.
- It's a trailblazing place of firsts and innovation, the base for 14,000 businesses, and a living laboratory for sustainable smart city projects, giving other cities a glimpse into the future.

[Read the bid in full here.](#)

Local dignitaries, the 'flag for MK' competition winner, and organisations who contributed to the bid gathered at MK Gallery in December 2021 to formally send the bid to Buckingham Palace. Representing MK's unique mix of heritage and innovation, the bid was covered in vellum produced by WG Cowley of Newport Pagnell - the last parchment and vellum works in the country, who still provide the vellum for declarations of royal births – and was sent in an autonomous delivery robot from Starship Technologies, the company which has been providing a grocery and hot food delivery service to MK residents since 2018, powered by zero-carbon electricity.



Leading a digital parade to celebrate city status

The result

Milton Keynes was successful in its bid to become a city, receiving formal 'letters patent' signed by Her Majesty The Queen in summer 2022.

Continuing the collaborative theme, Milton Keynes City Council worked with local charity MK Islamic Arts and Culture to stage a free event for local people to celebrate city status, to conclude the charity's City of Codes and Light Festival. Live performances were headlined by Eurovision star Sam Ryder; the city centre Church of Christ the Cornerstone featured a dazzling light display, street theatre companies led local people in a parade, and a laser show ended the evening. Thousands of local people attended the event.

Finally, in February 2023, His Majesty King Charles III visited Milton Keynes to formally recognise city status and meet many of the local groups involved in the bid, as well as schoolchildren who presented His Majesty with a replica of the letters patent that will be used as an educational resource in city schools.



His Majesty King Charles visits Milton Keynes to formally mark the honour of city status

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