

Image: Hidden City Festival Credit Destination Milton Keynes



TOURISM STRATEGY FOR MILTON KEYNES

REPORT FOR MILTON KEYNES CITY COUNCIL & DESTINATION MILTON KEYNES

MARCH 2024

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Milton Keynes Tourism Strategy

VISION				
<i>Milton Keynes. At the forefront of doing things differently. Ours is a future which is sustainable, accessible and inclusive.</i>				
<i>The largest designed city in Europe, a cultural asset in its own right. Innovative in conception, it confounds expectations for those with the imagination and curiosity to visit.</i>	<i>It tells the story of Britain from war-time codebreakers to utopian 1960s urban planners to a modern 21st century city looking to the future.</i>	<i>Investment will transform and animate the public realm and create vibrant spaces. Green and blue spaces invite exploration. Historic villages encourage people to explore and linger. Culture is compelling and distinctive.</i>		
STRATEGY OBJECTIVES				
Build the positive reputation as the largest designed city in Europe internationally known for its modern heritage	Raise awareness, creating interest in visiting a place that must be seen and experienced first-hand	Convert awareness and interest into visits and spend by giving reasons to visit which inspire and inform	Make it easy for visitors to explore the whole borough. Create a positive impression to make visitors feel welcome	
TARGETS (2029) & KPIS				
Economic Impact: 10% over ROI	Visitor sentiment: 5% increase above baseline measures	Visitor satisfaction: 8% over net promoter baseline	Overnight visits: 5% increase above baseline	Trip volume rank: maintain 9 th (business) and up to 80 th (holiday)
CURRENT OFFER		CONSULTATION FINDINGS		
Signature experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Parks, Redways & Recreation ▶ Entertainment ▶ Shopping & Eating ▶ Culture & Heritage 	Supporting experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Accommodation ▶ Business Events ▶ Leisure Events 	Strengths to build on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Louder and prouder of city's story ▶ Make more of the 'unexpected' ▶ Geography and ease of access 	Things to fix: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Collaboration, partnership and 'big thinking' ▶ Image and reputation ▶ Improve arrival points 	Factor to support growth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Economic, net zero, planning policy ▶ Amplify civic pride and narrow gap between residents and visitors ▶ Making more of what already exists
MARKET FOCUS				
Primary: Active Families (children under 15)		Primary: Discretionary Business Event Organisers		Develop: Experience Seeking Mini-breakers (under 35s)
Maintain: Shoppers		Maintain: Non-discretionary business visitors		Maintain: Visiting friends & relatives
STRATEGIC APPROACH				
Branding	Destination Marketing	Destination Development	Destination Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Apply the place brand based on 'Design' ▶ True and distinctive...so own it ▶ Use 'designed for..' (in markets, products, experiences) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop brand assets ▶ Destination promotion ▶ Engagement & networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Events strategy and feasibility for the 'Story of Design' ▶ Visitor wayfinding & gateways ▶ Support existing experiences ▶ Encourage new experience pipeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sustainability & Accreditation ▶ Data & insights ▶ Business support ▶ Skills 	
MAKING IT HAPPEN				
The strategy needs sufficient, additional resources with investment from across the complex ecosystem of public, private and third sector organisations that make up the visitor economy.				
Action: actively participate in emerging Local Visitor Economy Partnership		Action: create a Culture, Tourism & Events Place Board		Action: establish a Milton Keynes Convention Bureau
DELIVERY PRINCIPLES				
▶ Joined up & working together		▶ Clear roles for partners		▶ Investment & resources to do the job
▶ Influence & representation		▶ Focused on biggest opportunities		▶ Align to LVEP and VisitEngland

1 INTRODUCTION

Ideally located at the centre of the north-south axis of Birmingham and London and east-west axis of Cambridge and Oxford, Milton Keynes is a successful, fast-growing borough with a strong economy, business investment and projected growth. With a robust and diverse economic base and limited presence as a visitor destination the obvious question is - why bother with tourism?

Well, there is of course the money that visitors spend locally – in excess of £500M¹. And the job opportunities for residents at all skill levels, in addition to the facilities and services that tourists spend supports, from shops to cultural venues. But perhaps the most compelling reason for investing in tourism is the contribution it can make to the image, profile and reputation of the place, and so counter and improve perceptions beyond the borough's boundaries. Those who live and work here know that Milton Keynes is a fantastic place to invest, do business, live and study, and tourism can reinforce this encouraging a reappraisal of Milton Keynes – through marketing and promotion and by attracting visits for a first-hand experience of the place.

Uniquely tourism has benefits way beyond its own sector with the capacity to contribute right across the economic, social, cultural and place making agendas. It can align with and contribute to the ambitions and priorities of the 2050 Strategy and deliver the city's USP and promise of 'design' through branding and marketing, and memorable experiences.

This Tourism Strategy recognises the opportunity tourism gives Milton Keynes and articulates the ambition. The approach is based on a realistic appraisal of where Milton Keynes is starting from, and the market potential. It identifies priorities for marketing, development and management which will release this potential, sustainably and inclusively. Tourism is a highly competitive business with prospective visitors literally having the choice of anywhere in the world. So, while the prize is clear, the effort taken to win it will require energy, focus and investment of resources – money and people – and a step change in commitment and collaboration within and across the private and public sectors.

7 Ambitions for Milton Keynes

- Strengthen what makes the place special
- Leading green and cultural city
- Everyone has a decent home
- Health and wellbeing
- Jobs for everyone
- Opportunities to learn
- Easier to travel – foot, bike, public transport

[Milton Keynes 2050 Strategy](#)

¹ 2019 spend in 2024 prices using Bank of England calculator.

2 MILTON KEYNES NOW

TOURISM PERFORMANCE

Our starting point is the 8m trips by UK visitors, who spend around £500M in Milton Keynes supporting more than 16,000 jobs. Within these headlines worth highlighting is²:

- ▶ **Day visitors dominate but staying visitors bring greater rewards** - 93% of trips are day visits, but the 7% of visitors that stay overnight account for 22% of all spending.
- ▶ **Staying visits have grown at a faster rate than England averages** – between 2014 and 2019 the national trend for overnight trips was flat but Milton Keynes saw a 50% uplift.
- ▶ **There are more business visitors than holiday takers** - business overnights comprise 38% of all domestic trips, followed by visiting friends and relatives (VFR) at 36% and holidays at 23%. This is markedly different to the all-England averages in which holidays make up 47% of all trips, VFR 36% and business 14%.
- ▶ **Milton Keynes is in the Top 10 English destinations for business visitors** – it is 9th of 326 English local authorities just behind Newcastle, Liverpool and Leeds. By comparison, the borough is 90th in the authority league table for holiday trips.
- ▶ **Average duration and spend by staying visitors is lower in Milton Keynes than the national average** – spend per trip is £195 compared to £235 although this can be explained by shorter average visit durations of 2.1 nights compared to the England average of 3.
- ▶ **Spend by day visitors is higher than the national average** – average spend per day is £52 compared to £45 in England, likely due to higher value business visitors.



² Sources: Great Britain Tourism Survey (Visit England/Visit Britain) and International Passenger Survey (Office for National Statistics) 2019 baseline; spend in 2024 prices.

VISITOR OFFER

With excellent access from the M1, just 50 miles from central London and on the west coast mainline, Milton Keynes is easy to reach by car and train. What it has to offer visitors can be organised into four categories:

- ▶ **Parks & Recreation** – 6000 acres of green space, 200 miles of cycle paths, waterways, fishing and watersports – many of which are free to use
- ▶ **Entertainment** – a range of attractions including Xscape, Gullivers Land, Red Bull Factory tour and the casino
- ▶ **Shopping & Eating** – centre:mk, Midsummer Place, 12th Street and the Hub plus destination pubs and an independent offer in the outlying villages and towns
- ▶ **Culture & Heritage** – Bletchley Park, the Gallery, Theatre and Museum, the Stables plus public art.

There are other significant attractions just beyond the boundary which add to the offer including Silverstone, Woburn Safari and Center Parcs.

A range of accommodation, business tourism facilities and a rich events programme underpin the visitor economy:

- ▶ There is plenty of **accommodation** made up of chain hotels and quality brands such as La Tour, a good selection of B&Bs and short term rentals in the surrounding area (circa 800 listings on AirBNB) and a number of campsites
- ▶ Venues suitable for **business events** include the Marshall Arena, Stadium MK, MK7 Red Bull Racing, the Theatre, Gallery and Stables and many of the business hotels
- ▶ **Events** include the International Festival, Lit Fest, concerts at the Bowl and Stadium MK, entertainment at the Marshall Arena, The Stables and Theatre, sports including the Marathon and MK Dons and varied programming across the Parks Trust such as India Day.



Pipeline Projects

There are a number of major developments that are at various stages of planning and development and which if brought forward would benefit Milton Keynes:

- ▶ Proposals for a theme park and resort at Stewartby, Bedfordshire by [Universal Destinations & Experiences](#) while located in a neighbouring authority, is sufficiently close to Milton Keynes to bring positive benefits including jobs and overnight stays
- ▶ There are ambitions for a new city centre music venue within the Council 'Strategy for 2050'. So far, a feasibility study has been undertaken
- ▶ Business case development by the Open University for a move to a city centre location and provision of 'face to face' education alongside distance learning would strengthen vitality in the centre with additional students and facilities for conferences and events.

In summary, Milton Keynes works well for families, offering varied year-round and wet weather experiences alongside assorted dining, accommodation and shopping; and its business tourism performance is particularly strong. But the green and blue spaces, the Redways and the public art, while valued by residents, are under-used by visitors and present an opportunity. The events programme presents a further opportunity although currently lacks strategic planning and the heritage offer, apart from one or two significant attractions is unlikely to have a wide draw.

SWOT

A summary of key findings from the research and consultation is shown here and these have informed the development of the strategy.

STRENGTHS

- Non-discretionary business tourism
- Above average day visitor spend
- Urban design story – a different kind of heritage
- Strong individual attractions (including nearby)
- Bletchley Park is unique, distinctive attraction
- Cluster of entertainment, eating out, culture, retail & accommodation in centre
- Cultural strategy and investment
- Event venues, facilities and spaces
- Great access - easy to get to – north/south connectivity
- Easy to get around (Redways, e-bikes, scooters, buses)
- EV infrastructure

OPPORTUNITIES

- Address ‘why visit’ rather than ‘what to do’
- Tourism supporting ‘live, work, study, invest’ ambitions
- Business tourism arising from economic growth
- Urban heritage – cultural offer
- Green and sustainable intentions
- Sustainable transport and movement part of the experience – car-free routes – mass transit plans
- Trails and itineraries (inc. Heritage Trail pilot)
- OU relocation
- City centre arena/conference venue
- E-W links strengthening
- Potential base for wider region offer (e.g. Silverstone)

WEAKNESSES

- Not a traditional destination – harder for visitors to understand
- Overall offer is less than sum of its parts – lack of joined up experience
- Place brand not coming through for visitors
- Tourism businesses aren’t shouting about the destination
- Staying visitor duration below average
- Great access = easy to leave
- Orientation and wayfinding hard for visitors
- Perception that hard to get around by public transport
- Redways under-used and hard to navigate for visitors
- Lack of presence in destination marketplace

THREATS

- Tourism not as important as other sectors
- Labour market competition
- Overlap in approach confusing visitors and ‘locals’
- Reliant on domestic tourism (flat growth over last decade)
- Lack of strong reasons to visit
- Proximity to London reducing opportunity for cultural events

CONSULTATION

Consultation through one-to-one and small group conversations and two workshops have helped us understand the views and perspectives of stakeholders. Contributors include representatives from tourism businesses, cultural and community organisations from across the district and beyond, transport providers, officers and councillors from across Milton Keynes City Council and adjacent county councils. We also ran a business survey to capture the views of tourism businesses and business owners from other related sectors. In total more than 100 people have contributed.

In addition to the points included above in the S.W.O.T. analysis, additional themes worth highlighting are:

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

- Be louder and prouder of the city’s unique story
- Make more of the ‘unexpected’ elements – green space, canal, lakes, Redways, villages, culture
- Geography – easy to get to for a lot of people and a great base for exploring (even if main reason to linger sits outside the boundary)

AREAS TO FIX

- More collaboration and partnership working to benefit the whole district – ‘big thinking’
- Image and reputation – ‘be more confident’
- Improving arrival points, the visitor welcome and orientation

FACTORS TO SUPPORT GROWTH

- Helpful policy environment around economic growth, culture, net zero, urban planning
- Recognising civic pride and providing opportunities to amplify - bridging the gap between tourism and residents
- Making much more of what already exists – joining up, informing, inspiring

3 LOOKING FORWARD

VISION

How many destinations can you say are unique? Well, it’s definitely true about Milton Keynes – the largest designed city in Europe, a cultural asset in its own right.

Innovative in conception, design, look and feel, it still confounds expectations for those with the imagination and curiosity to visit and explore.

A successful city, loved by those who live here, it has a growing reputation as a visitor destination offering entertainment, activities, culture and a deep dive into what might be called ‘modern heritage’. A place which tells the story of Britain from war time code breakers to utopian 1960s urban planners to a thoroughly contemporary 21st century city looking to the future. A future which is sustainable, accessible and inclusive. Milton Keynes is always at the forefront of doing things differently.

Investment in Central Milton Keynes has transformed and animated the public realm and created vibrant spaces where things happen. Our extensive green and blue spaces are well connected and invite exploration. Our historic villages encourage people to explore and linger. Our cultural experiences are compelling and distinctive. Our tourism businesses are thriving, providing quality jobs and career opportunities.

This success is down to ambition, vision and hard work. Cross-sector partnership and collaboration - led by Destination Milton Keynes – is working and is leading to significant investment in marketing and development. Tourism is now universally recognised as having an important role in the wider economy both directly and by making Milton Keynes an exciting place to live, work, invest and study as well as visit. And making sure everyone knows it.



Sustainable Accessible Inclusive Innovative

OBJECTIVES

To achieve this vision, we have four inter-related objectives moving from a starting point of improving image and perceptions of the place, through to raising awareness of Milton Keynes as a fantastic place to visit, then to conversion of awareness and interest into enjoyable trips and longer stays.

- ▶ **Objective 1:** help build the positive reputation of Milton Keynes as the largest designed city in Europe internationally known for our modern heritage
- ▶ **Objective 2:** raise awareness of Milton Keynes as a destination, creating interest in visiting a place that must be seen and experienced first-hand
- ▶ **Objective 3:** convert awareness and interest into visits and spend from our target markets by giving reasons to visit which inspire and inform
- ▶ **Objective 4:** make it easy for visitors to navigate and explore the whole of the borough, creating a positive impression at all touch points to make our visitors feel welcome and spread the word.



Image: MK Gallery credit Destination Milton Keynes

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Working towards this vision and these objectives over the five years of this strategy will require focused effort across a number of action areas.

These five areas are:

- ▶ **Market focus** – to identify and target the best prospect growth markets over the short and medium term
- ▶ **Branding** – to unify the message, and shift awareness and perceptions
- ▶ **Destination marketing** – to convert interest to visits
- ▶ **Destination development** – to attract, delight and satisfy visitors
- ▶ **Destination management** – to ensure everything is well run, and visitors’ trips are easy and seamless.



MAKING THE CASE

Unlocking Milton Keynes’ tourism potential will require resourcing. With a budget under £80,000 it is unrealistic to expect Destination Milton Keynes to deliver this strategy within existing resources. The Government (De Bois) review of 2021 highlighted the variation in budgets and funding sources across England’s destination management organisations (DMOs). The median income of DMOs is just under £200,000, and the mean income slightly over £400,000. Strikingly almost a third of DMOs have budgets over £500,000. Destination Milton Keynes falls well short of this.

The case for investing in the Milton Keynes visitor economy recognises the direct and indirect ways in which it can help meet outcomes key policy areas - helping make Milton Keynes a great place to not only visit, but to live, work, relocate, study and invest in too. A new model for funding support for the visitor economy is essential to achieve this. Lessons from other successful DMOs illustrate the importance of public and private funding, and of monitoring and reporting performance to justify this investment. Several examples of investment and results can be found in the table below.

DMO BEST PRACTICE		
<p>Visit Aberdeenshire Visit Aberdeenshire produce an annual report detailing the outcomes of all their activity (marketing, business development, insights and business services). This highlights over £3.4m of direct impacts from ‘owned’ channel marketing and £3.5m of successful conference bids. This supports investment by Aberdeenshire Council as well as Aberdeen City Council and the development agency Opportunity North East.</p>		
<p>Visit Belfast Belfast City Council provided over £2m to support Visit Belfast in 2023/24 and has a clear Funding Agreement in place with ambitious targets, robust monitoring and performance measurement. 450 businesses support and invest in Visit Belfast’s work. The activities of Visit Belfast achieve a direct impact of £125m and a stated ROI of 1:28 on an overall budget of £4.5m.</p>		<p>VisitBrighton With a budget of over £0.7m made up of almost equal contributions from business and the local authority, VisitBrighton publishes the impact of its work to maintain the support of over 500 business members. This includes direct impacts such as £40m of conference wins, 658 pieces of media coverage and 1.1 unique website users.</p>

TARGETS AND KPIS

The key measures for monitoring progress over the five years of the Strategy are listed in the table below. This will require baseline data - a new LVEP may be able to support data collection and insights.

Target Measure	Rationale	How to Measure	Target by 2029
1. Economic Impact	Economic impact derived from visitor spend will lead to increased prosperity, profitable businesses and jobs.	Annual Economic Impact Study	10% over rate of inflation vs baseline
2. Visitor Sentiment	Tracking progress around perceptions, attitudes and propensity to visit from actual and potential visitors will help understand visibility as a destination as well as informing marketing planning and experience development.	Omnibus Survey ³	5% across key measures vs baseline
3. Visitor satisfaction	To track changes in how likely visitors are to recommend Milton Keynes	Net Promoter Score ⁴	8% over baseline
4. High value (overnight) visitors	An increase in the proportion of people staying overnight means more higher value visitors.	Annual Economic Impact Study	5 percentage point increase vs the baseline
5. Trip Volume (Rank)	Improve rank position for holiday trips among domestic overnight visitors and maintain position for Business Visits	GB Tourism Survey (VisitBritain)	Maintain 9 th for business visits and move above 80 th for holiday visits

³ Purchase space in nationally run commercial survey with questions to establish a baseline around visitor sentiment and to track progress over time

⁴ Run an annual visitor database survey with a Net Promoter Score question included

4 MAKING IT HAPPEN

No one body is responsible for the visitor economy; it is made up of a complex web of public, private and third sector organisations. To ensure tourism in Milton Keynes is marketed and managed in a way that will attract and delight visitors and bring benefits to local communities all these different organisations have to work collaboratively.

A DMO - adequately resourced – provides the glue bringing different strands of activity together, while representing the interests of visitors in policy and investment decisions. A DMO also needs sufficient influence to bring businesses and local communities along.

In addition, with the changes taking place nationally and regionally as a result of the De Bois review of DMOs and the roll-out of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs), Milton Keynes should align itself with emerging national structures, policy and possibly funding.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Greater coherence and new structures to manage tourism in Milton Keynes will be essential to make the most of the opportunities identified in this strategy including:

- ▶ Active participation in discussions for an emerging regional **LVEP**, to align with national policy and take advantage of plans for new projects eg Universal Resort.
- ▶ Creation of a high level **'Culture, Tourism & Events Place Board'** to bring strategic partners together, to monitor strategy progress, identify resources and align to the wider policy environment.
- ▶ Establishing **Milton Keynes Convention Bureau** to make the most of opportunities presented by Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE).

Delivery Principles for Milton Keynes Strategy:

- Joined up and working together
- Clear roles for all partners and stakeholders
- Investment and resources to do the job
- Influence to represent and guide visitors and business
- Focused on the biggest opportunities
- Align to the emerging LVEP and VisitEngland priorities

The roles and responsibilities for all the players in Milton Keynes' visitor economy are illustrated here.



RESOURCING

While Destination Milton Keynes is an independent organisation, there is significant potential from closer alignment with both Milton Keynes City Council and MyMK Business Improvement District (BID) with benefits for the outcomes sought by each of these organisations. Consideration should be given to establishing and formalising new ways of working that brings these organisations closer together.

Destination Milton Keynes is not currently sufficiently resourced to implement this Strategy - a new model is needed to secure funding from different sources. In most destinations a mixture of local authority funding/grant, business investment, membership and commercial income funds the activity of the DMO and in most cases each of these funding streams helps leverage support from the other.

A priority for the proposed Place Board is to identify investment for the DMO. As illustrated earlier many DMOs covering a similar area and with an ambitious strategy would operate with a budget of more than £500,000. So, it is not unreasonable to propose that a minimum annual budget of £200,000 is required to drive forward the actions in this Strategy.

In the action plans for each priority area following, suggested timescales and lead organisation and partners are set out. In many cases the lead is Milton Keynes City Council or Destination Milton Keynes as the DMO.

An indication of resources required to implement each action is also included. Where no budget is required 'staff time' is included within the resources column. For many of the actions staff time from the council/DMK will be needed. In some instances staff time from partners and stakeholder organisations will also be necessary.

Where spend is required an indication of level of likely budget is given (£ = £25K; ££ = £25K- £100K; £££ = >£100K).

5 MARKET FOCUS

The selection of target markets takes account of the growth potential and best fit with the wider strategic aims. The objective is to focus on those markets most likely to visit, extend their stay (ideally overnight), explore the whole borough and spend more in the process. Narrowing the focus onto best prospects allows for efficient spend, targeted activity and maximum impact.

Based on the current offer, market trends and drawing on Visit England segmentation, two primary markets have been selected for immediate targeting, and one development market for targeting over the medium term. In addition, there are three current markets which are significant for Milton Keynes and are important to look after and maintain, primarily through ongoing destination development and management.

Primary Markets

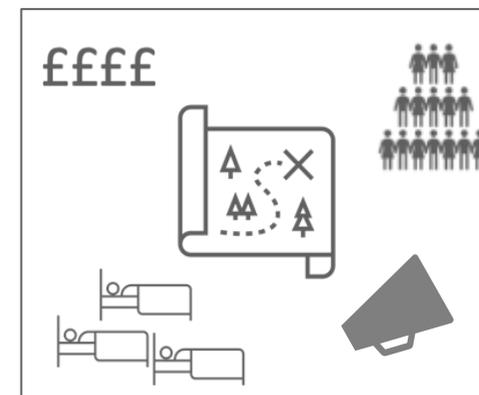
- ▶ **Active Families** – with children aged from five up to early teens. Based on VisitEngland ‘Fuss Free’ and ‘Aspirational’ Families segments.
- ▶ **Discretionary Business Event Organisers** – professional and corporate organisers arranging discretionary business meetings and conferences (ie which can take place at any location rather than specific corporate premises).

Development Market

- ▶ **Experience Seeking Mini-breakers** – under 35s travelling in couples or groups of friends without children, motivated by events and cultural activities and social experiences. Based on Visit England ‘Free & Easy Mini-Breakers’.

Maintenance Markets

- ▶ **Shoppers** – attracted by Milton Keynes’s strong retail offer, looking for a great shopping experience, food & drink.
- ▶ **Non-discretionary Business Travellers** – those attending corporate meetings held by Milton Keynes businesses; day and overnight stays.
- ▶ **Visiting Friends & Relatives** – day trips and outings to attractions, retail and eating and drinking outlets by residents and their visitors.



The table on the next page goes into more detail on the growth markets providing a pen portrait, the reasons why they have been prioritised and a sense of what the opportunity is.

As a companion piece to this Tourism Strategy a **Destination Marketing Plan** has been produced which sets out the propositions, messaging and channels to pursue in targeting the priority markets and the role of destination marketing with regard to maintenance markets.

It should be noted that these are not the only the only types of visitors who will come to Milton Keynes – and equally a specific business may target other segments which are a closer fit with what they offer. Rather these market segments are those which are most promising for Milton Keynes as a whole and will help deliver the vision and objectives set out earlier.

Key Market Trends

- Cost of living crisis – appeal of close-to-home destinations
- Activity, health and wellbeing – making the most of the outdoors
- Appeal of places with a distinctive local culture and way of life
- Need for a coherent and visible approach to tackling climate challenges
- Accelerating use of digital – for visitor experiences and business operation

Key Specific Drivers for Milton Keynes

- Index highly on families among population – family market now, young people into labour force in longer term
- Convenient location and access
- Large population catchment – 8M within an hour’s drive
- New developments & investment – place, business, leisure
- Healthy business growth and new business formation
- Competitive value – business venues, weekend accommodation

SEGMENT	WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WANT	RATIONALE	WHAT'S THE OPPORTUNITY?
<p>Active Families (Primary Market)</p>  <p>Photo: Photo by Ben Wicks on Unsplash</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families with school-aged children 5-14 from within 2 hr travel time Day trips & short breaks Town & city breaks – but also attracted to active outdoors. Family-friendly activities: entertainment, culture & events. Cost/value important but willing to spend on treats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will spend on activities to keep children happy. May convert from a day visit to overnight given enough to do. Active on social media – easy to reach; engage as advocates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing the number of (repeat) visits from families and multi-generational families which include grandparents & groups of friends. Capitalising on visiting friends & relatives. More overnights via family-friendly accommodation and weekend and holiday period deals
<p>Discretionary Business Event Organisers (Primary Market)</p>  <p>Photo by LinkedIn Sales Solutions on Unsplash</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-discretionary business meetings/events Primarily domestic/UK Driven by local business and economic sectoral strengths Corporate meetings and events National Associations (non-profit, trade and technical, professional, sporting) Access, location, price, capacity, physical appearance are main factors affecting choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High value Accessibility from key locations – London, Birmingham, Oxford, Cambridge Opportunities to showcase the area, encourage revisits, consider relocation Make use of venues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalises on Milton Keynes' wider economic success underpinning corporate activity Extending stays to overnight Social programmes for conferences provide opportunity to widen experience. Year-round visits
<p>Experience Seeking Mini-Breakers (Development Market)</p>  <p>Photo by Becca Tapert on Unsplash</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically, below 35 and travelling without children. City breaks 'Only here' experiences – arts & culture, events, hands-on learning. Trips packed with activities – daytime & evening. Quality, varied & safe night-time offer. Public transport & digital connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent travellers who spend on unique experiences Active on social media – advocacy & user-generated content (UGC) Actively support local independent businesses. Champions for sustainability & inclusivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception change – cultivating advocacy from a highly online & engaged audience. Culture and events programme Repeat visits More overnights – weekends and year round Enhanced reputation for sustainability & inclusivity through advocacy from this segment.

6 BRANDING & DESTINATION MARKETING



BRANDING

Milton Keynes City Council – through a design and consultative process - has developed a place brand. This includes a logo of the name ‘Milton Keynes’, the proposition ‘*Better by Design*’, visualisation (colour palette, fonts etc) and a place narrative (or ‘manifesto’). The rationale and assets can be found in the [Style Guidelines](#).

To date the use of the place brand has been limited to inward investment and certain city occasions such as the city award status in 2022. The city council is developing plans to roll out the use of the brand over the coming months, both in promotional activity and on the ground, eg in boundary signs.

The intention for the place brand is for it to be used across different sectors and purposes. However, it is clear from our consultation that there is a lack of knowledge about the place brand and how it is being used and uncertainty about its application and relevance for the visitor economy. There are however considerable advantages to aligning place and destination branding and marketing resulting in consistency of positioning, messaging and cut through.



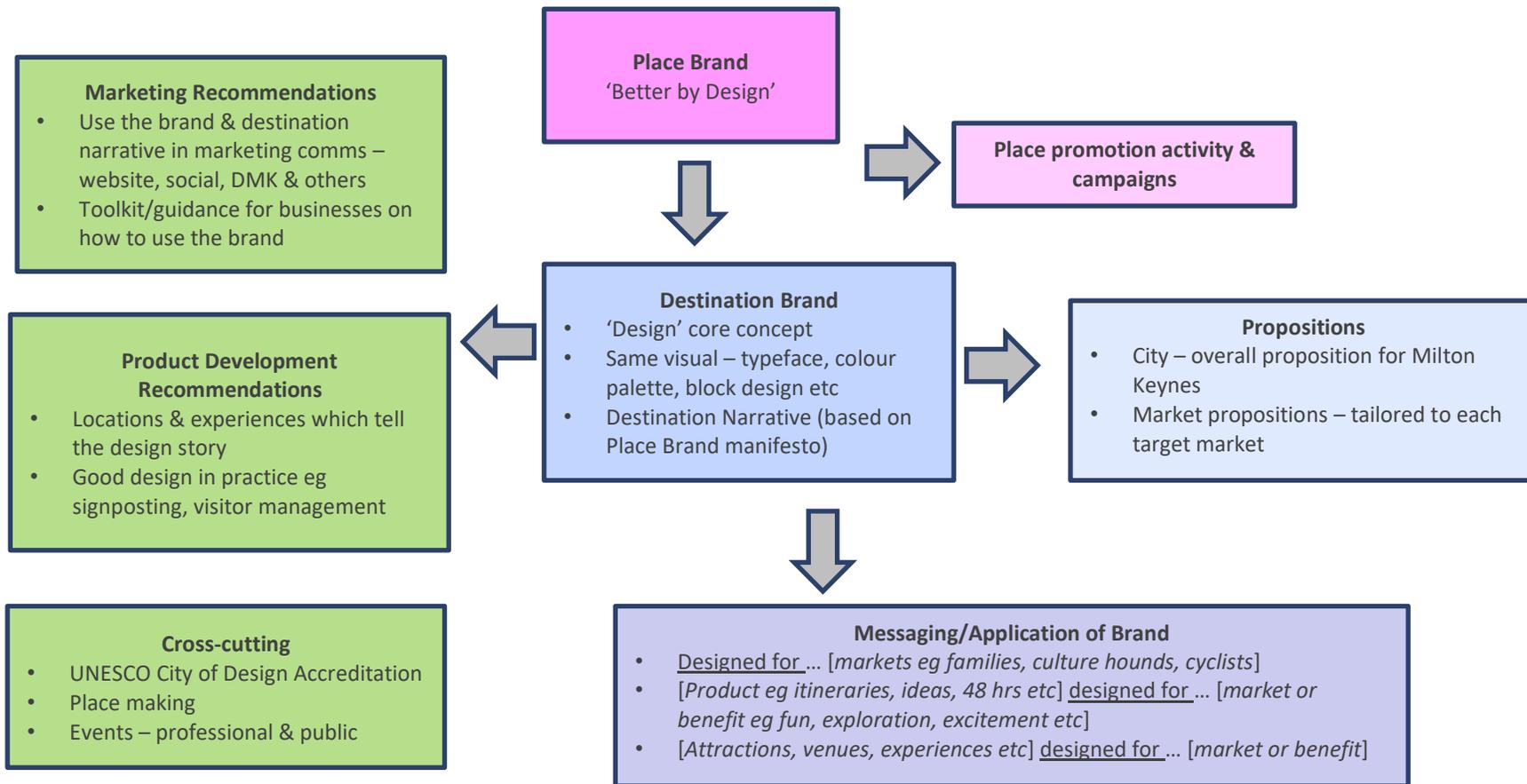
The foundation of the place brand is the concept of ‘design’ – this is a fundamental truth about Milton Keynes and is distinctive in setting it apart from other places. It is certainly flexible enough to use across sectors, propositions and channels. The concept of ‘design’ works as much for Milton Keynes as a destination as it does for it as a place – it’s all in the interpretation and application.

‘*Design*’ is both true and distinctive – so own it. There is certainly work to be done to apply it and in persuading others, but the concept and marketing assets provide a sound starting point. One word of caution; ‘*better*’ is a riskier claim so a safer approach would be to use this sparingly. The basis for

applying the brand to the destination proposition is to use ‘**designed for**’. So, this could be ‘*designed for*’ a specific market segment such as families, or for a benefit; experiences or attractions could be ‘*designed for*’ – and so on. Some examples are given in the box here.

- Examples of using ‘designed for...’**
- Milton Keynes – *designed* to inspire
 - A festival *designed for* music lovers
 - A weekend *designed for* families
 - Venues *designed for* meetings
 - Places *designed to* surprise
 - Trails *designed for* cyclists

The schematic below shows how the approach to destination branding based on the place brand would work and the implications for implementation.



DESTINATION MARKETING

The overall aim of destination marketing for Milton Keynes is to shift perceptions, invite consideration, attract visits and maximise the value of visits.

Destination marketing is led by Destination Milton Keynes but, even with greater resources, a DMO can only ever have a small share of voice in what is a highly competitive tourism marketplace. To give Milton Keynes a louder and more effective voice will need the destination message to be taken up by businesses and providers of services and experiences for tourists with forensic targeting of the priority market segments. In addition to its own marketing activities Destination Milton Keynes can support this amplification by influencing and advising businesses and providing practical resources to encourage consistent positioning and messaging. Over time this consistency – and alignment with other place marketing activity – will cut through.

There are three priority action areas for branding and marketing Milton Keynes:

- ▶ Production of brand assets for the destination brand
- ▶ Destination promotion
- ▶ Engagement and partnership



BRANDING & MARKETING PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES
PRIORITY 1: DESTINATION BRAND ASSETS Using the place brand assets develop a suite of destination assets for visitor marketing by the DMO and tourism businesses.	1. Commission a destination narrative based on the place narrative (or manifesto) which captures what is special and compelling about Milton Keynes as place to visit.	2024	DMK	£
	2. Produce a toolkit of resources for tourism businesses using the destination brand – guidelines, how to use ‘designed for’, images, example copy etc; and roll out to business via online webinars and live events	2025 onwards	DMK Tourism businesses & providers	££

<p>PRIORITY 2: DESTINATION PROMOTION</p> <p>There is a substantial job to be done in increasing Milton Keynes’ presence in the marketplace to drive visits as well as tackling image and perceptions. These efforts should be targeted on the growth markets using appropriate messaging, channels and approaches as detailed in the Marketing Plan companion piece to this Strategy.</p> <p>For each of the growth and maintenance target markets set out in chapter 5 a compelling proposition – ‘what’s the offer’- tailored to needs, desires, motivations and behaviours of the specific segment is required.</p>	1. Secure resources and implement Marketing Plan ; monitor and review annually.	2024 onwards	DMK	££
	2. Produce a proposition for each target market with tailored copy, showcase of experiences and appropriate images to bring it to life.	2024-25 onwards	DMK Tourism businesses & providers	£ or Staff time
	3. Redevelop DMK’s owned channels (web and social) in line with the propositions and destination narrative. Provide platform for advocates. Disseminate to businesses eg include in the toolkit of resources (see above) for businesses & providers.	2024-25	DMK	Staff time
	4. Develop menu of ‘marketing opportunities’ for tourism businesses to buy into for joint campaigns/promotional activity.	2025 onwards	DMK Tourism businesses & providers	Staff time
<p>PRIORITY 3: ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIP</p> <p>To extend reach, increase share of voice in the marketplace and secure alignment and consistency in marketing the destination will require buy-in from tourism businesses and providers.</p>	1. Disseminate information , data & insights on target markets and new marketing strategy, with how to reach, messaging etc via the toolkit (above) and at networking events.	2024 onwards	DMK Tourism businesses & providers	Staff time
	2. Promote and facilitate collaborative working – joint-working with DMK and among businesses eg cross promotion and amplification on social media and in-destination on-selling/referrals, special offers & deals.	2025 onwards	DMK Tourism businesses & providers	Staff time
	3. Facilitate collaboration between destination partners and other sectors/key businesses with an interest in place promotion.	2024 onwards	MKCC DMK Businesses	Staff time

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: CONFIDENT BRANDING	BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: APPLYING A PLACE BRAND
<p>Rotterdam</p>  <p>Rotterdam brands and promotes itself as a City of Architecture, promoting the city’s progressive urban planning and architecture, rebuilt after bombing of WW2.</p> <p>Their branding highlights innovation, sustainability and cultural diversity as themes that work alongside architecture – not necessarily immediately about a tourism offer but clearly differentiating Rotterdam conveying a strong sense of place. Guides and tours further bring the built environment to life.</p> <p>Rotterdam has also invested in an ambitious cultural and events programme. It presents as a confident, contemporary, cultural city.</p>	<p>Salisbury</p>  <p>The Salisbury ‘Traditional Original’ place brand proposition lies at the heart of place making initiatives and visitor marketing. It has created a distinctive proposition for the city amongst heritage destinations, with ‘originality’ offsetting heritage.</p> <p>The brand proposition is clearly articulated on the Experience Salisbury website and an extensive toolkit helps partners not only to ensure their marketing is on brand, but aims to guide product and experience development in the destination. The narratives are used by VisitWiltshire, Salisbury BID and by tourism partners. A Place Partnership comprising of public and private sector players across tourism, industry, inward investment and large employers collectively influences the development of the city’s offer in line with the positioning.</p> <p>The visitor website highlights and curates content which showcases the positioning and appeals to target segments with lots of content designed to upweight the ‘original’ aspect of the positioning. The site is managed by Salisbury BID and is a good example of a destination site that manages to appeal to visitors and residents; with a ‘Live’ in Salisbury section and ‘deals and offers’ appearing separately to the main visitor content.</p>

7 DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT



The focus for destination development in Milton Keynes is to transform the experience by building on what already exists and to get the fundamentals of the destination right. Unlocking the potential of events and culture, telling the Milton Keynes unique story of design and helping visitors navigate the destination has the potential to attract visitors and transform their experience.

Events and culture provide reasons to visit and can help change the perception of a destination. They are also great ways to animate a destination, across different times of the year and day.

Yours is a story of ‘Design’. The creation of Europe’s largest planned settlement is fascinating. It encompasses what has been built but also the stories of the people that have made Milton Keynes what it is. But that story is hard to uncover as a visitor even though it exists all around. It should be brought to the fore, told in an imaginative way that reflects the inspiration for Milton Keynes origins and its ambitions for the future.

While Milton Keynes is easy to understand for those that live and work here, for visitors the city can be confusing to understand and navigate. There is a need therefore for a wayfinding approach that helps those unfamiliar to easily work out where they want to go and how to get there. Trails and signs should encourage exploration and are an opportunity to share the best that Milton Keynes has to offer including the green and blue spaces and existing attractions. Applying innovative and imaginative design principles to this approach will demonstrate the delivery of Milton Keynes’ ‘design’ USP in practice.

Milton Keynes and the surrounding area has several pipeline projects which, if brought forward, could have a significant impact on your visitor economy. Proposals for a Universal Studios Park, city centre arena and relocation of the Open University would support the growth of the visitor economy.

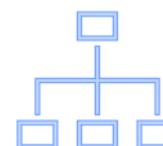
And to create those great first and last impressions will require attractive gateways and a welcome for visitors (rail and road) with information to aid onward travel, great modal choice and the opportunity to experience ‘future’ travel options that they might not have experienced elsewhere.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES
<p>PRIORITY 1: TRANSFORMING THE EXPERIENCE</p> <p>The focus for a step change in what Milton Keynes offers visitors is primarily around events, telling Milton Keynes’ story more effectively and compellingly and through joining up, orientating and interpreting encourage exploration and create original experiences.</p> <p>Each element will require consideration and planning, with feasibility studies, securing funding streams and phased implementation to follow in the medium to longer term.</p>	1. Commission an Events Strategy for Milton Keynes. Identify the 2-4 Signature Events; 5-10 Anchor Events and 20+ Local Events to support and develop an events calendar. Develop clear guidelines for event organisers.	2024/2025	MKCC, MyMK BID, Venues & Organisers	££
	2. Undertake a feasibility study to explore the potential for a significant new visitor experience which tells the Milton Keynes story of design. The study should consider a standalone experience alongside ways in which the story could be incorporated into existing attractions/facilities, in particular plans for Milton Keynes Museum.	2026-2028	MKCC	££
	3. Deliver a visitor wayfinding strategy and plan. Using physical and digital tools which demonstrate ‘great design’, align recommendation to borough mobility plans and investment. Develop arts, sculpture and heritage trails to encourage visitors to navigate around and beyond the city centre.	2026 - 2029	MKCC	£££
<p>PRIORITY 2: DESTINATION FUNDAMENTALS</p> <p>Tailoring entry points and travel options to visitors is key, building on the current and planned infrastructure.</p> <p>Equally, supporting current attractions and projects in the pipeline will take full advantage of what already exists.</p>	1. Audit and develop improvement plans for major gateways (stations, car parks). Align recommendations to planned transport investment. Support continuing provision of a city centre shuttle for visitors.	2024-2028	MKCC, DMK, MyMK BID	££
	2. Support the growth and development of existing experiences and attractions in line with the market potential identified in this Strategy.	Ongoing	MKCC, DMK	£
	3. Encourage pipeline projects ensuring that their potential to bring benefits in visits, employment and investment is maximised and that the development aligns to this Strategy.	Ongoing	MKCC, DMK, Investors	£

8 DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Good destination management ensures the conditions for a successful visitor economy with a balanced approach to address the needs of visitors, communities, businesses and the environment. Visitors won't come because of these activities but failure to manage them is likely to result in lower levels of visitor satisfaction and a negative impact on reputation.

There are four destination management priorities:



- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Business Support
- ▶ Data & Insights
- ▶ Skills

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES
PRIORITY 1: SUSTAINABILITY Tourism generates significant impacts from travel and the consumption of experiences and accommodation. Milton Keynes visitor economy should ensure works collectively to reduce the use of resources which contribute to carbon impacts and supports biodiversity.	1. Sign up to the Glasgow Declaration (or similar) as a commitment at the destination level to change. Encourage sign up and adoption of industry accreditation schemes e.g. Green Tourism and support changes that reduce waste, conserve energy, support biodiversity and local supply chains.	2026-2028	DMK, MKCC Businesses	£
PRIORITY 2: DATA AND INSIGHTS It is important to have clear baselines and a mechanism for monitoring impact and performance. Likewise evidence that improves understanding of visitors in Milton Keynes is vital to shape experiences and guide	1. Commission an annual Economic Impact Study to monitor destination performance.	2025 onwards	DMK	£

marketing. Well-interpreted insights should be published on business support portals and made available to stakeholders.	2. Undertake periodic visitor (and non-visitor) surveys to understand who they are, their behaviour when visiting, perceptions and barriers to visiting.	2025 then biennially	DMK	£
	3. Purchase periodic insights and data to build up a coherent picture of your audiences. This can include mobile mapping and footfall data or accommodation sector performance.	Periodic	DMK	£
<p>PRIORITY 3: BUSINESS SUPPORT</p> <p>Great destinations are built on the experiences provided by businesses. Providing them with tools and insights which can help them plan and align their own activity to the wider destination strategy is critical. Digital portals can also signpost to wider sector support, advice and information on your markets and activity such as campaigns, PR., accessibility or sustainability.</p>	1. Create an online portal and business advice hub which actively promotes and signposts to the proposed marketing toolkit, insights and data, sustainability and accessibility toolkits, information on training, events and webinars from local providers, the emerging LVEP and VisitEngland.	2026-2029	DMK, MKCC, MyMK Bid Businesses	£
	2. Facilitate collaboration across the sector through network events with all tourism business and providers - for updates, data & knowledge sharing, promoting opportunities & good practice, encourage partnership activity and extend membership.	2024 onwards	DMK Tourism Businesses & providers	Staff time
<p>PRIORITY 4: SKILLS</p> <p>The visitor economy suffers from skills shortages exacerbated by pressure in the labour market from other sectors. But tourism can offer a great career and entry points at all skill levels. There is a need to overcome reputation problems that persist in the sector and advocate the benefits of working in tourism.</p>	1. Integrate tourism business with relevant courses in further and higher education in Milton Keynes to provide practical insights for students. Promote and grow apprenticeship opportunities and support schools' careers information with business involvement and partnership.	Ongoing	MKCC, DMK Businesses	£

9 CONCLUSION

Milton Keynes is a unique place, with a unique story to tell and a unique experience to offer visitors. It is not a typical destination – but therein lies its strength. From a tourism perspective it is better to confidently claim distinctiveness than be a poorer version of everywhere else. The Tourism Strategy sets out how it can go about this.

But Milton Keynes is facing a cross roads when it comes to tourism. There is no doubting the opportunity is there to take a step change integrating tourism and the visitor economy into the strategic priorities for developing Milton Keynes over the next five years and beyond. It will however take effort, energy and resources. This is a considerable challenge given the demands on the public sector and businesses. It will require imagination, creativity and new ways of working – all things that Milton Keynes has demonstrated in the past and can do so in the future.



Image: credit Destination Milton Keynes

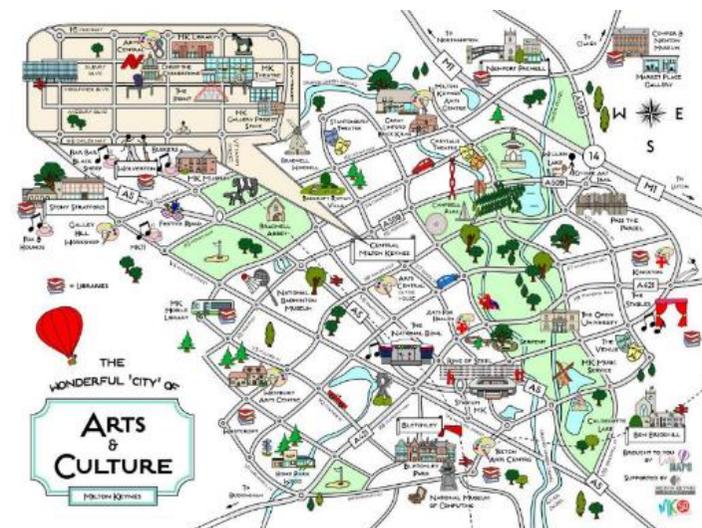




Image: Bletchley Park credit Destination Milton Keynes

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