

Five reasons to love Milton Keynes

The city is 50 years old - here are five reasons to love the much-maligned new town. For 45 more, head to theguardian.com/cities

1 Concrete cows

Among the city's 220 works of public art is a 1978 sculpture by Canadian artist Liz Leyh consisting of three cows and three calves, roughly half life-size and so, you'd think, confusing to wandering livestock. In 2002, concrete cow pats appeared beneath the sculpture.

2 It's a mystic portal to a higher realm

Midsummer Boulevard is so called because the sun rises at its east end on the summer solstice. This was no accident; in the trippy early 70s, architects consulted Greenwich observatory to obtain the exact angle required at their latitude in Buckinghamshire and then persuaded engineers to shift Milton Keynes' grid of roads a few degrees.

3 Without MK there would have been no OK Computer

In 1970, Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth set up the Stables, music venue in the grounds of their home in the village of Wavendon near Milton Keynes. The couple also established the National Youth Music Camps at the Stables, one of whose alumni is Radiohead's Thom Yorke. It's

an exaggeration to say without Milton Keynes there would have been no OK Computer, but let's say it anyway.

4 It defeated the Nazis

Just as some find it hard to suspend their disbelief long enough to accept that Kate Winslet and Benedict Cumberbatch were our last line of geek defence against Nazi coding whizzes, so others find it impossible to believe that Milton Keynes was at the epicentre of Britain's intelligence community. But it is nonetheless true. The world's first semi-programmable electronic computer, Colossus, was built at Bletchley Park. The Enigma code was cracked there, too, during the second world war, an intellectual feat considered to have shortened the war by two years.

5 It's a model for new cities worldwide

The International New Town conference, to be held in June in Milton Keynes, features seminars from city planners. Developments in India and China have been based on the MK formula. According to the blurb: "A city that started as the dream of politicians and planners in the late 1960s is now home to almost 270,000 residents and 11,000 businesses, and is a cultural artefact in its own right."

Stuart Jeffries



BACK TO THE FUTURE



If you were born in 1940 - like Ringo Starr, say - then when you were 17, it was a very good year. At least according to researchers at Warwick University, who reckon that 1957 was the happiest year of the 20th century. Bad news for those who hate tin baths. Great news for those currently doing their utmost to take Britain back to the 50s.

Stuart Jeffries



Moo town: an aerial view
of Milton Keynes; and
(bottom) one of the 1978
concrete cow sculptures

