

MILTON KEYNES CASE STUDY: DUAL USE & JOINT PROVISION PROJECTS

(Source – Bryan ‘Griff’ Jones, former Assistant Director of Recreation, Milton Keynes Borough Council)

THE EARLY DAYS

There were originally two comprehensive schools in Milton Keynes. One was the combination of the old grammar school and an existing secondary school (Lord Grey) and a new school, Leon, on the Lakes estate to accommodate the influx of new students from the ‘London Overspill’ which had been negotiated, named Leon School.

Bletchley UDC had in the late 60's contributed 75% of the cost for a new Sports Hall and all weather dri pla floodlight area at Lord Grey, sharing the costs of the facilities 50/50 with the County Council and the UDC retaining the bookings on both sites and the income. In the case of Leon the UDC had contributed 25% towards the County Council's swimming pool costs and had shared the cost of the floodlight Dri Pla area 50/50 with the Development Corporation, with bookings and income from this area coming to the UDC. These arrangements continued into the latter part of the 1970's.

MORE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1970s

STANTONBURY

Three joint provision projects on school sites arose in the 1970s and 1980s. Stantonbury, Shenley and Woughton. Stantonbury was a housing, education and leisure campus – a community ‘village’, comprising three schools, a major leisure centre, a main resource centre, a theatre and a community activities centre. This was a scheme originated in the latter part of the existence of Bletchley UDC, Wolverton UDC and Newport Pagnell RDC, but driven by Bletchley UDC and from April 1974 by MK Borough and the County Council. The scheme was part of the development of the comprehensive school on the site, the first new one in MK. It consisted of a 25x12.5 pool, a four-badminton court hall, 4 squash courts, social area with a bar, full-size all-weather football pitch and 2 netball courts, all with floodlights.

The building capital financing was the same as in Nottinghamshire. The County Council contribution to equipping the centre was in the region of £10,000. MK BC spent £350,000 on equipping the centre, including portable, hydraulic basketball goals. These were used extensively by MK Basketball. A further £175,000 was spent on fitting out reception and the offices. The staff costs were borne by MK, which retained all income, and maintenance costs were split 60MK/40 BCC. The project also included a 200-seat theatre which staged some shows and on one occasion a Higgins v Davies snooker match, a complete sell out over 3 days. The management meetings were held in the Headmaster's office on a 6-weekly cycle. The school was represented by the Head and head of PE, with County representatives. MK BC was represented by the Centre Manager and Assistant Director of Recreation and a Finance Officer.

There was one other major scheme at that time. It was the provision of an athletics track but finding a suitable site was difficult and the management even more so. In the end, as a compromise, it was located on the Stantonbury site. This solved the management problem, and the compromise was that the site was only large enough for 6 lanes. However, all field events were catered for. It was opened by Sally Gunnell and it certainly set Olympic gold medalist Greg Rutherford on the right path.

WOUGHTON AND SHENLEY PROJECTS

There were two more joint provision projects. The first at Woughton, had a 20 x 7.5m pool, a large hall for concerts /exhibitions, 4 court sports hall and all-weather area and was part of the second Comprehensive to be built. The cost of the pool was shared on the same percentages as Stantonbury. MK BC staffed the centre and took the income.

The second centre at Shenley was on the site of what was the third comprehensive school. A leisure pool was proposed with wave machine, flumes etc. It was not attached to the school – the site was across an entrance road and for safety it was decided that the school would be linked to the Centre by a bridge. No one could decide who would pay for the bridge and along with other opposition, the scheme initially folded. With outside investment the scheme was eventually rekindled. The investors leased the property and the agreement in a nutshell was that their manager would have contact with Milton Keynes Recreation Department on a monthly basis. The Centre did not work well, with several management changes and limited repairs. Subsequently the pool closed, to be then destroyed by a mysterious fire. In its place now stands a small Sainsbury's.

All three schemes, while remaining operational, eventually reverted to management by the schools.

EDITORIAL NOTE:

In the 1970s and 1980s, Buckinghamshire County Council was party to several joint provision projects. Geographically the County included the Urban Districts that became Milton Keynes Borough when it was created in 1974 (Milton Keynes became a Unitary Authority in 1997).