

Love Wolverton Public Art Plan

The Public Art Plan is not a list of how or what the public art should be but an approach to creating space to discuss and consider ideas. What is right for now and what might work in the future? time and reflection will guide decisions. A constant work in progress. The projects should help lead people through a time of change, the differences and similarities, regeneration and everything in between.

1. Introduction

Love Wolverton is a major project to redevelop the Agora Centre and car park in Wolverton, Milton Keynes. It obtained a resolution to grant full planning permission on 5th August 2021 and permission was formally granted on 22nd December 2021. Milton Keynes Council, working with developer TOWN, will be transforming and regenerating this important part of Wolverton.



This Public Art Plan (PAP) has been written to support the practical delivery and development of public art connected with the Love Wolverton scheme.

Initial consultations and meetings have informed this plan, which sets out some ideas and opportunities that will be more fully explored before developed and commissioned.

Definition of Public Art

Public Art in Milton Keynes engages people in different ways and contributes significantly to making different areas distinctive and desirable. Public Art can add soul, energy and dynamism, helping to make Milton Keynes an emotionally and visually stimulating place to live, work and visit.

Public art in Milton Keynes is also about inviting the skills, creativity and ideas of artist to connect people and place in a well-considered way

Most importantly recommends that new commissions should be:

- *Artist specific – engages an artist in the process and is artist led*
- *Place specific – connects with place and is specific to the location*
- *People specific - engages and considers people*

Artists are commissioned to respond to an artist's brief; they are asked to develop design ideas/concepts which consider how people will engage with particular places and spaces. Upon approval of concept designs, artists are commissioned, public art projects may include temporary or permanent commissions.

As explored in this Plan, Public Art is being explored in a broad and holistic manner which may manifest itself in many ways, for example shorter-term community events, digital platforms or long-term physical pieces.

Arts Projects and Community Activities Mandate

The Agora development is required by way of a S106 agreement to provide funding for Public Art. There is no further requirement to actually deliver arts projects beyond the supply of this funding, however Milton Keynes Council and TOWN recognise the power of arts activities to engage the community in both celebrating the delivery of the regeneration project and creating longer-term wider-reaching benefits for the town.

2. Location

Wolverton

Wolverton is located at the northern edge of Milton Keynes, it is one of the places in historic Buckinghamshire that went into the foundation of Milton Keynes in 1967.

Wolverton was founded in the early 19th century as a railway town, the railway company built over 200 houses for its workers along with schools, a church and also invited George McCorquodale to establish what became a substantial printing works in the town.

The town has evolved in many ways since its beginnings and has seen many changes, including the Agora building.

The Agora building was commissioned by Milton Keynes Development Corporation and opened in 1979, it sat in the middle between the town Square and Church Street. Originally designed and heralded as a revitalisation scheme for the area it brought other issues, it created a barrier and segregated areas of the town from each other.

Locally there has been much campaigning and pressure for many years for the building to be removed and the area redeveloped. In 2022, the demolition has begun, the Love Wolverton scheme takes forward a new design of housing and local amenities.

Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes was designated as a new town in 1967. It provides a unique urban environment with a strong sense of design and innovation, based on a grid road system mixed with large areas of green space.

Milton Keynes offers a rich mixture of popular culture and good access to the arts through its nationally recognised theatre and gallery programmes. Amongst its buildings and parks, it houses the UK's largest collection of contemporary sculpture, with over 200 works of art in public places.

3. Site features and key areas

The proposed development will reconnect Church Street and Buckingham Street, effectively continuing Radcliffe Street so that it reaches the Town Square. This will become a main artery through the town centre and is designed to prioritise pedestrian movement rather than vehicles.

The development provides new street frontage onto the Square and Church Street, with 9 commercial units expected to be occupied by a mixture of retail and food & beverage outlets, many of which are expected to be independent local traders. A small publicly-accessible garden area, accommodating 3 existing trees, will face onto Buckingham Street. There is also a community space due to be let to Future Wolverton who propose to focus the space on young people, enterprise and community workspace.

A 'back lane' runs west-east from the new stretch of Radcliffe Street up to St. George's Way, backing the houses on Buckingham Street and running adjacent to the Church. A series of courtyards associated with the development open onto this lane.

4. Concept development and process

An open meeting was held on the 26th April 2022 to explore the idea of public art as part of the new development. Wolverton has a large creative community and it is important that the public art plan is developed in collaboration with the community.

Key points from the meeting have informed this plan, including:

- Celebrate and utilise local talent
- Engage young people and build community ownership.
- Joined up approach – cohesion and cohesive
- Diversity needs to be reflected
- Ensure the new residents can get involved

At the meeting, participants were invited to share words that described Wolverton in 2022 and their aspirations for the future of the area. The word art on this page captures these views.

At the meeting on 26th April, attendees were invited to form a Public Arts Steering Group. Those who expressed an interest in forming the steering group are now meeting regularly and the group remains open for any locals who wish to join. The Arts Group will shape, in collaboration with Milton Keynes Council and TOWN, how the available funding is spent on arts and community activities moving forward.



Wolverton now



Wolverton future

5. Aims and Objectives

The following overarching aims and objectives have been agreed by the steering group:

Aim – to celebrate the creative talent of Wolverton through the redevelopment of the Agora and the creation of temporary and permanent public artworks.

Objectives

- To celebrate the creative talent of Wolverton.
- To provide opportunities that draw upon and utilise local skills, knowledge and ideas in creative outcomes and outputs.
- To integrate artworks within the overall development which connects people with place.
- To ensure the diversity of the community is represented.
- To empower young people to inform and influence creative projects.
- To ensure that the new residents can engage and understand the creative projects.
- Connecting new residents with the existing community through creative projects.
- Supporting the process of change through art projects.

The above aims and objectives will inform a range of opportunities and ideas for public art projects which can take place at any stage of the development, as and when funding is secured.

6. Potential projects and themes (in order of priority)

- A. Skills register**
- B. Creative communications – Newsletter**
- C. Youth led project – Offset project**
- D. Written words**
- E. Gatherings**
- F. Street names and signs**
- G. Feature artworks – larger commissions**

The projects and themes listed are potential streams of public art to be explored in Wolverton. These are further detailed below with opportunities to expand on these in discussions with the local community. They are in order of priority for delivery but they are not exclusive to each other, there are overlaps in opportunities which may lead to projects being combined.

A. Skills register

To develop a register and online resource of the creative talent and skills in the Wolverton area. The register will be used by the Love Wolverton Public Art Steering Group to inform project briefs and will remain for the community to access for future projects after the Love Wolverton scheme has completed.



Homebaked - Jeanne van Heeswijk Liverpool Opportunity:

Opportunity:

- To hold a creative event for the community of Wolverton, inviting a snapshot of creative talent to demonstrate their work, share their ideas and hold talks and workshops. The aim of the event will be to promote and launch the development of the register.
- Connect with the Community Improvement District (CID) and the proposed event in early 2023.

- To develop a social enterprise which showcases and supports the production of local products and creativity.
- To create a shop front or space in the Square -may connected with other partner ambitions/shared space.

Considerations:

- The content of the register – what questions are needed?
- What platform?
- How the register is hosted for the long-term ambition and legacy
- GDPR compliance
- How is it kept up to date and relevant – annual review?
- How it is promoted – marketing
- How people become listed on the register – self listing?

Potential budget costs:

Circa £3,000 - £10,000 depending on scale of output, hosting, platform etc.

B. Creative communications – newspaper

The history of printing in Wolverton suggests an opportunity to re-establish a printed and creative communications tool to openly share ideas and updates. These being McCorquodale’s Printing Works was based in Wolverton (primarily thought to employ the daughters of the men working in the Railway Works). Secondly, The People’s Press, set up by Roger Kitchen as part of the Living Archive, providing residents the opportunity to publish and share their stories and experiences.

This new publication, printed and regular intervals, could act as a mechanism for cultural conversations and possible connections.

A dedicated space to sharing the public art ambitions but also promoting the existing activity of creatives in the area, opportunities to be involved in upcoming projects, space for the skills register, profiles/interviews with creatives, space for sharing newly commissioned works too by writers, poets, illustrators, designers etc.



Rabbits Road Press



MK Gallery – City Club

Opportunity:

- To create regular information updates
- To invite content from the wider creative community
- To reflect heritage in a contemporary way
- Potential for both physical and digital interface
- Collaboration with MK Museum and their print room/display

Considerations:

- Interaction with WGTC regular newsletters
- Print run and distribution

Potential budget costs:

TBC

C. Youth led project – Offset Projects

Future Wolverton invited Offset Projects to engage young people in the area in a conversation about the idea of a youth led space. Key finding from this work could be used to harness the ideas and aspirations of

young people further and engage them in helping to develop and deliver a youth led public art project.

Opportunity:

With the support of Offset Projects, we could explore:

- Inviting and supporting young people representation on the Love Wolverton Public Art Steering Group
- Provide some funding to enable a group of young people to develop, lead a public art commission/project/activity in Wolverton. Potentially the Written Words project. (Could build upon the Fuelled by Youth programme)
- Explore and understand the possibilities and practicalities of leadership in relation to their skill sets.
- Engaging young people in the public art communications plan so it is developed and considers bespoke and targeted communications with young people from all backgrounds.



Seating - Silo in collaboration with Wealdstone Youth Group.

Considerations:

- Time and resources required to ensure the input of young people is meaningful and integral to future ideas.
- Engaging Offset Projects to support young people/mentor them as active participants in the steering group or commissioning group.

- How we keep momentum with the young people when the funding is in the future.

Potential budget costs:

TBC

D. Written words – poem, story....

To invite a wordsmith to develop a bespoke poem, story, or piece of text through their engagement with the community - gathering words, text, comments and stories that explore the identity of Wolverton and the passing of the Agora.

Opportunity:

- To engrave the text into the paving/granite that marks out the footprint of the old Agora building in the new development
- To provide the text to all artists who work on other projects as background information
- To create signs/posters that place the text into the public realm – both temporary and permanent installations
- To be overlaid onto time-lapse photos of demolition and construction

Considerations:

- The best time period to undertake the work
- How the text will be used now and long term



Ian McMillan's poem "Talking to Somebody about the Jewellery Quarter",
Birmingham

Potential budget costs:

Circa £1,000 - £3,000 depending on levels of engagement. This costing excludes its use of the text after creation, additional budget can be made available for this.

E. Gatherings

The word Agora means gathering place or assembly, although the ambitions of the original Agora may not have run smoothly the aspiration to enable and facilitate gathering, sharing, meeting and being social are important to make healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities. Taking the concept of gathering as a starting point for commissioning could lead to many outputs and outcomes for the public realm.

Opportunity:

- Programme a series of happening that give people the opportunity to gather and share ideas and creativity – this could be linked with the skills register and social enterprise idea.
- Youth led space – a place to gather and meet.
- Identify the places and spaces that already exist, what makes them a place to gather and what might make them better?
- Creating space to gather in, around, nearby.
- Bring the existing community together with the new residents.

Considerations:

- The groups that already gather and why.
- Scale and impact – small to large interventions.
- Differing needs of groups, ages, accessibility.

Potential budget costs:

TBC

F. Street names and signs

To commission artist designed signs or visuals that give the new streets character and distinctiveness – making places different and interesting.



Mark Titchner - Luton

Opportunity:

- Inform the street names
- Visual identity and agreed palette/style

Considerations:

- Ability to influence street infrastructure
- How this is maintained or affected if elements are damaged and replaced
- MKC official street naming process (inc. statutory consultee process)

Potential budget costs:

TBC

G. Feature artworks – larger commissions

To create a focal point within the area that acts as a marker of time and place and also connects the new with the existing communities.

Opportunity:

- Large scale project.
- Engages artist to connect people with place.

- Brings the new residents together with the existing community.

Considerations:

- Positioning within the development
- Requirements for plinths or utility connections that may need to be provided by main contractor

Potential budget costs:

TBC

7. Budget and timescales

The Love Wolverton Public Art is funded through S106 and additional developer contributions. This collaborative approach demonstrates a commitment to creating exciting projects and interesting spaces within this distinctive development.

The public art budget will be managed by Milton Keynes Council and monitored by the Steering Group. Further match funding may be sought as the project progresses to broaden impact and commissioning opportunities.

Project delivery budgets will need to include all associated costs in delivering the commissions including artist fees, materials, equipment, licenses, permissions, installation, project management, ongoing care and maintenance. The budget table indicates the anticipated income and current suggested allocations for the commissioning themes.

Funding stream	Value
S106 (wider Wolverton)	£3,600
Developer additional contribution	£30,000
S106 Agora redevelopment	£150,000

S106 contributions will need to be requested and secured through Milton Keynes Council's process, until this is approved they are not available for spend. The S106 relating to the Agora redevelopment is outlined in the legal agreement as payable to MKC upon occupation.

Project timeline

The outcomes of the Public Art Plan are to coincide and complement the developments timeline which is currently in its demolition phase and will commence construction in Spring 2023. The development is then expected to be occupied from Autumn 2024 where much of the public arts projects we envisage will have been realized and/or on-going as part of the long-term benefits that will serve the local community.

8. Process and management

Project Management

The Love Wolverton public art project plan will be managed by Milton Keynes Council with support from the steering group and TOWN.

Steering Group

Members of the community have volunteered to be part of a steering group to help develop and deliver the public art plan. They will help inform the projects, select artists and monitor progress.

Project Evaluation

This process is significant across each phase, and it is important that the artists in each theme collaborate fully with an evaluator. It is recommended that this takes place at the outset of each phase and is not undertaken once the project is completed.

Maintenance:

For each commission a contribution for maintenance and care will be set aside and where applicable transferred to the owner or custodian of the art works. This allocation will need to be reviewed as the project

ideas and artwork designs are presented to make sure it is an appropriate sum. The works will have a defined minimum life expectancy and the artists will provide care and maintenance plans for each artwork and scheme. It is important that artworks can be maintained easily and at low cost.

Planning

The planning requirements are yet to be determined as it will be based on what projects are taken forward. Where planning is required an 8-12 week decision period will be included in the delivery programme.

Report devised and written by:
Milton Keynes Council, TOWN and the Love Wolverton Public Art
Steering Group