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Interviewed by: Roger Kitchen

Duration: 01:14:52

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Roger Kitchen: What I wanna do, to try and get a context of this, is to go back to...can you tell me a little bit about when you joined the Development Corporation and what your role was?

I got to Milton Keynes, 1st January 1971. So that was my first day there, I had been working previously at Richard Rogers. And then I left them, and gone on holiday, and came back in the beginning of '71, and joined the Development Corporation.

What was your job?

I was an architect, and I started off working in Wavendon town. Where there was a group of people doing a thing called the Industry Group. And, that's what I was doing.

Now how did you get this association with energy saving projects in Milton Keynes? How did that come about?

Me and other people were always playing around with alternative forms of energy, and so on. And...there was a group of people in the Open University who were doing the same thing. And we were sort of looking at primitive Windmills, that we could build ourselves, looking for solar power, so that we could make ourselves. Things...because we, that's where, that comes from previous life. And, with all that, we started to get a name, I suppose, for ourselves. And then along came the polytechnic of central London, who wanted to build a solar house. And previous to that, the previous year, the Arabs and the Israeli's had a big War. And at the end of an Oil War, and at the end of the War, the Israeli's won, but the Arab's decided that they would have oil embargo's on anybody who helped, helped Israel. And very soon, we had a fuel shortage. And, to the extent that we had to have ration books, were being handed out to people, on the expectation that you would have to, buy your petrol on, by ration. So, I got involved because I was, I had sort of got to be known as the person who was [unclear] about with alternative energy. So, that was my job, to help facilitate the polytechnic of central London with a solar house.

And that was the one at Bradville, wasn't it, yeah?

That's the one at Bradville, yes.

And then there were other things, weren't there, there was the solar court?

Yes, solar court came after that...and that was done by Dominic Michaelas. And it was, you know, it was very interesting. And these, when we say solar, we mean active solar water heating of the houses. As opposed to using solar heating to supply hot water for washing your hands and so on. Or, photoelectric forms, which gave you electricity.

By 1979, you had left the Corporation by then?

I think '79 or '80, I wouldn't swear it exactly. But yes.

Because you were working then...wasn't it called the Energy Conscious Design?

That's right. I got involved...we did, I think there was about half a dozen to a dozen projects by that time. By the time I left. Of various sorts and kinds. Pennyland had started. Which is a huge, at that time...was a huge estate compared with anything else we had done in alternative energy. There were 170 odd houses, and, which were monitored by the Open University, to see if they could form as we expected. And, that was very, very successful indeed. And even more successful was a small group of houses, which were built for sale, which were also monitored carefully, through great detail. And we learnt about, really how a house works. And it also gave the Development Corporation security. They felt comfortable about this stuff called low energy, and because we were very successful in the projects that we did.

And I think that was, kind of, in a way, the reason why they, the Corporation went on and got very involved in solar energy. I should take you back to about '74, when, when the Bradville Solar house started, it was a fantastic godsend to everybody because, particularly because of the Corporation. Because it was very very popular. They got a huge amount of favourable mail, they got huge numbers of reporting from people, because it was just about the only thing at that time that you could go out and take a picture of and say, you know, this will be the solution to the Arab's blocking our oil. And because here we have a house that gives us half the energy from the sun! And that was, you know, up until then, the Development Corporation had been involved in doing solar...really fending off the, the reputation of the concrete towers. And suddenly, they had something that was popular. And it continued to be popular. And so that then

provided, if you wish, a psychological baseline, and there was a practical baseline, you know, as well, which was that, of the projects we did, one was called Buy Insulation Cheap, which was getting people to insulate their own houses on the cheap, with cheap insulation. And was very successful. And also to insulate the Wavendon Tower, where the Corporation lived. And it met the, the payback for that was seven months. And Frank Henshaw, who was deputy general manager of the Corporation at that time. Was very, you know, was also a financial person, who was very very taken by those. And so it helped us sell on other things. So, if you wish, it provided the psychological and practical baseline of why the Development Corporation should get involved, in solar...in all forms of low energy. And they saw that potentially, there was business to be done. And they could attract companies and so on to Milton Keynes, on the basis of that.

(00:09:26)

So, you'd left the Corporation by the time that the Homeworld idea had started in the Corporation. Had you left by then?

It was right at that moment. I didn't know...I left for three days a week. I think I worked at the Development Corporation for two days a for a short time, I don't know...six months, nine months, something like that.

I had definitely left before Homeworld started because I had to make absolutely sure that my time, my work at the Development Corporation in no way compromised my work as a private consultant outside the Development Corporation. So, that was something that I did, and I'd left the Development Corporation deeply before Homeworld started, which was important to me because one of the houses there was something that in my new guise we were involved in and that was the BBC house.

Can you tell me how that all came about, how the BBC got involved, how Laing's got involved, how you got involved?

Right, okay. Most of this was done by my partner, David Tarrant and I asked David a few weeks ago and I said, "Well how did that happen?" and he said, they just came and asked us! And I have no idea who told, or asked Laing to do it. I was going, you know, a whole lot of other things before I got onto this and I never really found out, or even looked to find out how it happened but we did. Anyway, we were asked to be the architects. Laing had seen that it was an opportunity for promoting Laing housing, so that was why they were involved in it all. It was them, I think, who got the BBC involved, and the arrangement was that the Laing...I think, I am not sure how that worked, but the BBC put in a certain amount of money, a small amount of money and I think that covered our costs as architects and energy consultants.

So, the design, the actual design of the house was yours, was it? It wasn't a sort of off the peg, or two off the peg Laing houses slotted together with the extra bit of conservatory on it, it was the whole design was your group?

There are two parts to the design; the building itself and then the things inside the building and having sat down with the Laing design team and specified the things that we thought it had to do, it had to face south and of course, actually, south is sort of 45° pretty well angled to the rest of the road grid, and so that meant that the house had to sort of face...well, if you tried to face it too south it would not go with the roads, so you would have to have something that would act with the road; and it was on a corner site...so you had to check the roads pattern. And that meant that when Laing came up with the idea of two buildings slotted together, at an angle of 90° from each other, that was an attractive idea because then we could put the conservatory in the bit between the two buildings.

Yes, and so, in a sense it was a collaborative thing. You were telling the Laing designers what the, what the energy spec was, as it were, to actually make it go in?

Yes, in basis, that was the energy and also the shape of what the building had to be, and Laing came up and said, "Well, we'll use two of our standard bits and then we just have a linking bit and a conservatory and...how about that?" And we said, "Yeah, that sounds great! That's a good solution."

And you must appreciate that we started on Friday evening and by Monday we had to have the design done, so the time scale was extremely short and that was in principle the design was done in that time. And then the working drawings were another two weeks, or something like that. It was extremely quick.

But anyway, that's how the shape of the buildings came about ...I hope I've explained that [laughs]!

And then you had this particular Totem, this Fiat based on a Fiat engine and so on! So, how did all that come about?

Okay, that came about because of our knowledge of all the things that were around. I'd done a diagram showing where energy goes into a house and one of those areas where the...and how we could go back to the primary energy that was needed to... that flowed through the pipes and flowed through the electricity grid and so on and came to the house, and then how it was used in the house and where the waste points were. And I identified four places where you could take action. And one of those ones, a very big one, is that there is a huge amount of overdue wastage that comes out of the making electricity. At

that time, and still is in the older ways of doing it, there is a huge amount. For every 1 one unit of energy that you get down the electricity cable going to your house, you used to have to burn 3 units of coal in energy to get that, really. So, two thirds of the energy went up the power station chimneys and just heated birds and that was an incredible waste of energy.

Now a Totem engine stopped that happening because what happened is, you made inside your house a mini-power station, a little tiny one, based on a Fiat-Totem engine. It all fitted in a cube of about 1 cubic metre, a little engine, very well insulated and the engine turned the generator, which made your electricity, and the waste heat that comes out of it, just like in your car when the engine gets hot, but in this case that is captured and then through a heat exchanger, supplies heat that goes to the radiators of the house. So, you are capturing a lot of the otherwise wasted heat indoors and Totem was the name of the company which used a Fiat engine, 600cc, I think it was, a little tiny one and was quite enough, in fact, far too big to heat just one house. Or there was enough spare there to heat three, four or five houses, or supply three, four or five houses. It wasn't wasted, it was just the engine didn't run very often.

So, that was how the Totem engine came about but there was a whole lot of other things as well.

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When did you discover that then? How did you find out about the Totem engine? I had never even heard of that kind of thing. It sounds very cutting edge that, at the time...about forty years ago.

We were quite 'Jack-the-Lad' in those days, and we got about! We hear about those things! There were other things that the house had, for instance, that were new, a thing called double glazing! We all think that's all normal now. Of course, years ago, it wasn't very well known, and certainly not the one we used on Homeworld, it makes it much, much more efficient, which is a glazing, a coating on the inside of the glass that blocks out the cold and keeps the house warmer than conventional double glazing.

So, that is just one of the many things that we did. We did something with the controls, you know, we are all used button controls now but there were no button controls in those days! And we found one, and in fact, we encouraged them to make it, Texas Instruments, to make one. This was separate, this went with any engineer consultants, as it were, and we were did that as well. So, you could run the house in a much, much better way, in a much more economic way than, because you could tailor the heating to just when you wanted the heat instead of just having to switch it on for long periods.

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And you said that you had a in very, very short time to come up with things and do the work indoors, was everything you wanted accepted by Laing's, or was anything; "Oh! We can't do that! That's beyond us!"

No, I think they accepted the...I can't remember anything that they didn't accept and I mean, we were doing things, also, for instance, there's Valerie Singleton driving away in her all-electric vehicle, which was to become commonplace by the year 2000, because that's when the house was designed to be leading up to. Of course, it has taken a very, very much longer time for it all to happen than that.

But still, it was there. We saw that all electric cars was the way to go and also, believe it or not, there was a thing called a 'home office' that we had in the house, which was a concept that has only just become current, I think, and accepting that that is something that we were keen on having. And we were doing it because it reduced the amount of trips that people were making and therefore the amount of energy that would be used.

So, we were thinking about the house, not just something that you heated and lit but as something that you consumed, and that people consumed energy by other things that we could do by changing some of the things in the house.

So, you do all the design, you handed over and they got on and build it. In terms of the building process, did you visit the site as it was being built, or didn't have time to actually... ?

Yes, but we had an architect drawing up the plans because it required somebody to do the detailed work about, you know, the conservatory and so on, and you know, there is quite a lot of work being done there. That person went up to the site once or twice a week. I was going up there, to Milton Keynes at least every week and being interviewed, I think there was about six or seven programmes made of it all. It was very well documented by the 'Money Programme' people.

So, that was important for us, very important because we got a message out to a much greater number of people and we were very keen indeed to promoted the idea that we were using far too much energy and that we had to cut it down.

(00:23:47)

As a result of the work did you get a lot more work on the back of that with that pricking people's interest?

No, not at all. That was fascinating for us. We came to the end of it, it was a huge success in terms of the population, the public, they loved it! The numbers of people watching The Money Programme doubled, the audience rating numbers doubled

during the time of this going on. It was by far the most successful thing that they had ever had on any programme. So, it was very popular there. I listened, fly on the wall, being inside the house whilst people were coming visiting it during the exhibition. There were 140,000 people came to the exhibition and most of them saw the 'Money Programme house' because they'd seen it on television and wanted to see it in reality.

That was really good news and its...but no, it was not widely taken up and it's only taken in the last two or three months did I find out why...

And? ... so why?

It's in a book called, ... (this, can you read that?) And it's also on...can you read that?

Yes, Merchants of Doubt! ... Naomi or rescues, or Eric Conway. Yes, yes.

That's right. Is it showing the right way round?

Yes, it is, yes, it is!

Okay, fine! For me it's looking the wrong way round [laughs]. Okay, and it's also on a BBC podcast called 'Houses That Get us to Doubt Everything' And it's absolutely fascinating! It was about what dark stuff was going on and is still going on to stop people believing in climate change, and it has been very successful, as we know. It is now forty years and it is only now that we start to see a big ground swell moving towards accepting the fact that it's happening and that was done purely by very large businesses putting in huge amounts of money to trash climate change.

And as an example, just one example, the five major oil companies, that's Shell, BP, Total, Exxon, I can't remember the last one, have between them spent over a billion dollars since the Paris Conference COP24 or 23, and this is now COP26 in Glasgow. So, it is happening right now, and they continue to say it's not happening or if it's happening it's not very important! And they have been very successful!

(00:27:25)

But isn't it also, I mean, my son works for the National House Building Council and he despairs at the attitude of house builders, because they are not interested in the quality of their housing! I mean, how much extra would it cost to put solar panels on every new house that is facing in the right direction? Peanuts, you know! When you are selling a house for £300,000, it would cost, I don't know, £2,000 or £3,000! But they know that the people buying the houses, it is not a sales

point and so they are not...you know, insulation, all this kind of stuff, has been forced on them really by successive governments with building regs and so on. The house builders haven't done anything! They haven't progressed the kind of things that you were doing forty years ago!

No! And I feel that actually, we can't blame them because they're doing what we all do. We don't do things that the other people don't want us to do and unless the public want it people won't provide it. It is very simple. You can tweak it slightly if you wish on that but when you've got the amounts of money that have been spent, and it is truly shocking! That book tells us all about it and there is a BBC podcast that goes through much of the same ground, which is chillingly bad and I've got something just that came yesterday or the day before yesterday, about a city in America that started off with a very strong energy agenda and was trashed downwards! It is shocking what has been happening!

So, when people are told it's not important, or the scientists don't agree, or it's an interesting theory but there are other theories that show that it is all actually rubbish, all of that is enough to stop people doing things. And the great success where this was learnt was in the tobacco industry. Where tobacco and cancer were of concern. These people managed to rubbish that and for forty years they continued to smoke because we were told it's just an interesting thing and it's not proven!

And they used exactly, they called it "The way of Doing It", there was a series of covid information of how you played this game by the people who were doing it and they just borrowed the same mechanisms to trash climate change! And in fact, many of the people were the same people in both campaigns. But it doesn't surprise me now, but it surprised me at the time. I thought, why are people forgetting and not bothered? It comes through desire. You've got to have people, the people who pay the money, that's the householder, has got to have the desire to have this fact, and they don't have that desire. the reason they don't have the desire, I thought, was all sorts of reasons, you know, very reasonable reasons but not ones I liked, but then way back that's what it seemed to be, but now I see very clearly that there is a very good reason why it was done and it was because we were bamboozled! And we are being bamboozled, right now! It's there and the information is there!

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So, coming back to the whole Homeworld thing, is that although the house, the 'Money Programme' featured it, which was all about saving money and about what one could do with a house, in terms of you and your work and the work of the Energy

Conscious Design Group and so on, there wasn't a sort of a big step-up in people's demand for your services as a result?

Oh yes! There was, that did grow, and it then moved on to this sort of thing which we did and, I'm just reading through it, I found this stuff...We advised the government on building regulations and the building regulations were improved and we advised on having a home energy rating system and that's been done; we looked at the environmental issues, not just the energy issues, and I have developed a thing called 'BREAM' or 'BREAAAM'. That went, and funnily enough, that has gone better than anything else that we'd done. And that was successful and that built business and then things like the Olympic Games came along and they needed to have an environmental plan and so you got involved in that and Ferrari even needed to have an environmental engine building factory and so, we worked with Ferrari on that, a whole raft of stuff that comes through and gradually it moved up the, by building regulation, moved up the minimum standards!

But, that was not something that the public generally took to, and it is still not there, although they say they are, they are supportive of it! I don't know if they are actually prepared to pay the actual bits of money unless they are forced to!

(00:34:05)

So, looking back on Homeworld as an exhibition and everything else, what kind of influence did it have on things? Do you think that because of it's success Energy World came out of that or was that something completely different, as it were?

No, I think it was definitely related. There was a big move of people, sorry, there was a great interest in all of this and in Milton Keynes itself we had the mechanisms to make things happen. One of the mechanisms we made is that all buildings had to perform a third better than the current building regulation standards. Now, that was because Milton Keynes owned all the land they could put something in the agreement that said that your house had to be a third better than the current building regulations. And that was accepted completely by all the house builders. They were quite happy to do it! So, for a long time, I don't know how long but, you know, ten years at least, maybe more! I don't know if it is still going.

Milton Keynes, you have to build 30% I think it was, about a third, about a 30% figure comes to mind! It had to be 30% better than the current building regulations. So, it had a real effect on Milton Keynes and as an example to other people. Also, there was a thing called the 'Energy Cost Index' that was developed as a result of the knowledge of what went on in Homeworld and that was used in Energy World and then was used for Milton Keynes in general. And eventually, that became something that

happened all over the country; and it was the computer-based energy calculation system, with standards.

And that became the Sat Breaking System eventually. And you know, that had been a good way of specifying things and now, its forty years when it should have taken ten years, but I think it is 2028 you won't be able to let your house out if it is in the bottom two levels standard. It has got to be in the top; it has got to be in A, B, C or D, I think; (not even sure it can be D, I think it might be A, B or C) before, its, you can't legally rent your house if it is in the bottom bit.

So, all these things needed time and effort and so on to be done. There was business for me and the organisation that I and two others ran, very successful, it was great! But it wasn't taking off at the rate that say in Germany it was.

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But Homeworld, you believe, was kind of a crucial focus for all that?

Yes, because it was successful! By successful we meant there was 140,000 people came to see it, it got very good publicity, Milton Keynes turned from a backward thing looking at concrete cows to forward things solving the nation's problems, and the Development Corporation, that fitted their reason for living really, was to make something that was of the now and then the future.

Was it, I mean the other thing was, as you said before, there was a Development Corporation; is it because it was a Development Corporation that could be very quick on its feet, and that wasn't under the power of politicians or anything else and it was able to do things like Homeworld?

Absolutely! It was fantastically agile! I can't think of an organisation that was more agile than the Development Corporation. We used to take our schemes in because you know, I was also an architect, you know, before I got very involved in the energy side, I was another architect, you could take a scheme in, I think it was Wednesday evening and by the following Wednesday it was evaluated, and it could bring the bulldozers in the next day! So, from submitting for permission to bulldozers on site in eight days - and that standard - that is fabulous! And it meant that the Corporation was very agile, or it could be if it was under good leadership you know, and Fred Roache I think was very, looking back on it, it was better than we were there, you know, when I think about what he achieved and the speed at which the speed happened...

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The other thing is, why do you think the builders, I mean, they originally set out when they originally touted for people to get involved they were after fifty houses, but I think they got thirty-

six in the end. Why do you think the building industry, and everything was keen to get involved? Because again, from their point of view, a pretty tight schedule, wasn't it?

Yes. But it was a fantastic place to publicise your buildings in; it was a sort of Daily Mail place only of real buildings. You could always sell the house after and they were obviously, the houses were sold. I haven't looked at the numbers but my guess is that it was a good way of spending your publicity money, if you wish, amongst other things.

Do you think that as a result of the Future Homes 2000, the one that you were involved in; do you think that had any effect on Laing's at all in the future?

Yes, there are elements in that. That was one of the first timber-framed houses in the country. There was a lot of things going on for, you know, there was a lot of new territory being covered and I think it gave them the conviction, if you like, of doing the right things. They used the same insulation, or better insulation even than on the Energy World with their houses. I think the only things that they didn't do, is they didn't have the Totem engine, which, quite frankly, we all reckoned was quite experimental, plus...not experimental, but needed groups of houses to make it valid financially.

I think the passive solar parts of it, you can't justify a conservatory of that type or a house but absolutely, I have been back over the recent few months, I have talked to virtually all the people who lived in that house, or were representative, partnering, I don't seem to talk to both of them. And they were fantastically, it was love of the building, they were saying that it was 'The best building I ever had been in', 'Best house I ever had.' I think two of them out of five said that. It had an overall very high contentment score; did you tell other people? Yes, 4.5 out of 5 again! So, it was very, very high scoring in terms of comfort and pleasure that people got, and the current owners are just the same as that.

And the conservatory was fantastic because it gave them outdoor, people virtually outdoor space but it didn't rain on them. So that if they had kids or someone, or if they had something that was lovely to [unclear], it really transformed the house. But it wasn't in the brochure, of the standard brochure, and so I think it didn't...there was not enough desire for it by itself to always have a conservatory.

(00:44:09)

And, you know, looking at that house, it was called 'Future 2000', you were building it sort of twenty years ahead of it's time, but looking at what's in that house, do modern houses, how do modern houses compare with what you were doing forty

years ago in terms of it's energy conservation, you know, all that kind of stuff?

Okay, well, first of all the standards that were set there were not achieved from building regulations for over twenty years. So, it took the building regulations itself to catch up, took twenty years to catch up with that. That brought you to the year 2000, so that was twenty years ahead of it's time but a whole lot of other things in the house, which just weren't around at that time, were there. For instance, there were low energy lights there, people had Tungsten bulbs; now they don't. So, that was an example of the things that were there.

Some of the things that didn't happen in twenty years are only just happening in forty years, like the home office. Okay, it's a very simple context; it was more complex then because cabling and wiring wasn't wireless in those days, so it was a bit more complex but still, it was there! But the idea that you didn't have to go to work every day in order to do work, that was an idea that we moted then and to the extent that we actually had, one of the rooms called the 'Home Office' and Nick Clerk, the BBC reporter takes you in and shows you how it all works. That is something that even after twenty years up to 2000 had not arrived in any way. And electric car, vehicle, that is still a very tiny proportion of all the cars you can get on the road. Although you can see, obviously, its going to be the destination for cars in the next twenty years.

So, it moves! What things did we...no to the Totem because we found other ways of making that energy that doesn't waste energy, and they are called wind turbines! And we had the idea in the past that wind turbines would be in or around the house; now obviously, we are building the wind turbines in huge numbers around the coast in the country! But the energy, you know, there is no wasted heat or energy, there is no coal burnt, you know, it's carbon neutral.

So, the principles are exactly the same, we got there by slightly different ways but we, we're there. All we need to do now, is to do every house like that!

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Brilliant! John, I can't see, is there anything else, no, I can't think of any more stories that, sorry, any other memories or anything else that you can think of?

Okay, technically, we knew how to do it forty years ago. It got better ways of doing it but even in forty years ago we could make the sort of savings that we could do to save the planet. The big question for me remains is, how do we stop the trashing happening again, because undoubtedly, if you're told time after time that things are uncertain and unsure, people stop worrying

about it and they say, “Oh well! Wait until the scientist can decide!”

We have got to stop that happening! That is our huge thing because then desire will increase and when desire increases people will demand those things and they will demand things like better regulation! Okay, at the moment partly people are where they are because regulations don't increase. The reason regulations don't increase is because they can't get it through parliament because a large number of people, like MPs, were saying if that's what my constituents want then it will go through parliament.

So, how do we stop the trashing? How do we stop the big companies from spending billions of pounds and stop trashing all these things? That is our big, big thing. That is probably the most important thing we can do!

(00:49:47)

But I wonder, that I think there's been a real change, or, or a real counter-balance to, as you say, to that big industry stuff. And there was also stuff there, there was – you know the Nigel Lawson stuff was – I think it was funded by some coal company wasn't it?

Yeah.

But the point is now, the BBC and people like Attenborough have – in the past Attenborough never did anything like this. And the BBC was kind of, you know, equivocal. And now there is, the BBC's attitude is 'There is a thing called, you know, Climate Change going on and anything else is, is, you know, you don't believe it kind of thing'. There, I think there is a, there is a, a bit of a twist, you know, when you get the BBC saying this, then perhaps, you know – right, you know, we had that ridiculous thing with Brexit where it had, you know, if you had a 'Remainer', you had to have a 'Leaver' whatever, you know, there was no kind of –

I agree. I agree. And, and, and, and now the BBC has publicly said, 'We don't always have to do that'. And that's a good, that's a good step forward. That we don't always have to have – 'fair' does not mean 'balanced'. You can, you can find – there are other ways of being fair. But if you say that, you know, if 99 people are on one side of the scale and one person is on the other, you don't say, 'Ah, well there's opposition therefore we've got to give them equal time'. BBC has now accepted that.

And the BBC is only just one organisation. A lot of people in the country, I'm surprised at, that don't really think very much of the BBC. And whether they're the same people who love Trump, or love Boris, or the, many other things, there are other, or don't go

to and have tertiary education – there's a whole series of reasons why people are... don't do it– maybe they're vaccine-suspicious as well. There's a, they're, there are various factors that sort of come together, but whether now, that's, that, sort of, kind of like fact. You can do the numbers on that and say that is.

So, there's a, a great suspicion of people who are, who are knowledgeable. To be knowledgeable is no longer satisfactory. You've got to have other characteristics too. And, and we have to learn how to approach the people who find, find the conventional routes of intelligent, educated people, who have learnt this through, learnt what they're saying to you through, you know, some hard reasoned work, reasoned and scientific work, why those people are not always believed. And the BBC represents one small, well, one, I don't know small, but anyway, it's not everybody. [Laughter]

No, no, you're right. You're right. Right, yeah.

And also, we've seen as we've been going along this last 40 years, we can see climate change coming on board, being looked at, done something done about, and then it goes away again. And it's happened three or four waves in, in that 40 years' time. And I'm not sure if it's the push-back from the, the, it is or other reasons, but there is – it's definitely there. I mean, we're on a high now and I think that's wonderful.

And it's the last high we're going to get I think, because we don't, won't, we won't have another chance now. You know, the next two or three years, if we don't, we don't commit ourselves very, very, very much indeed we're going to, we'll, we'll, we'll have lost it. And the numbers are – when we've lost it – are high. I mean, physically high. I've done calculations on it and sort of looked at how many people will die...during climate change. And for every one whose died of COVID, there'll be between two hundred and four hundred deaths, or people just not being produced. So the scale of it is somewhere between two and four hundred times what we're going through at the moment.

Wow. Wow.

Good. And we've got two or three years, I'd say, before we, we commit ourselves to a course that will stop that happening. Although it will be a good outcome. A good outcome is maybe the lot at the bottom of the two hundred, I have to say. But maybe we can do better than that. Let's hope so...

(00:55:05)

Well. Okay John. That is fantastic.

[Momentary break in recording]

(00:55:10)

Yeah, sorry, yeah. The, yeah, go on tell me. That's the Wavendon AFU.

The Wavendon AFU. That was the first thing that I did. I'd come out of, of, out of Richard Rogers. We used colour a lot. We used all those things. But the essential thing is that we were trying to – let's see if I can find it – we were trying to [Pause] – nah. Lost it. Yeah, I know where it is. Doesn't matter.

We were trying to, to do something with making, making buildings, employ buildings attractively. And the phrase that we used is that, 'They don't build like – ', 'They don't build things like this anymore'. And we, and it showed an old factory. And what we were trying to do is to make something in which you could work within three foot of the cladding on the inside and still feel comfortable. That it didn't feel un – cold, nasty, damp place to be in, with dirt and so on. That it was a nice clean place. And that, that stand – there was a series of buildings that were produced that did that. And there was a, a kit of parts, if you wish, that was built, designed by the Development Corporation to do that. And this P70 building was the first, if you wish, the prototypical of it all, or showing people that's what we're, that's what we're doing. And the idea that you could work in an industrial building with a, you know, doing things like drawings within three foot of the skin of the building was a lovely thing. Because you could then say to anybody; "Come to Milton Keynes and we can provide you with a building that is cheap and is lovely."

And that was the template for the AFU's basically?

That's it. It's exactly that. It was exactly that. It was the template for the Advanced Factory Units, yeah.

And all that varied them was the cladding or whatever. You know, it's –

That's right.

The actual structure –

Yeah. All that was, that was – and it, it was, it was great from all sorts, all sorts of reasons. But, anyway, that, that was, that worked extremely quickly. And again, had a really ridiculous timescale. I think we built it in four months. It was – maybe five. It was, you know, from, from dirt to, dirt to door it was four or five months. It was – and that included getting Planning Permission, getting Building Regulations permission. I can remember going up on Friday afternoon to Leicester, where, where Building Regulations were coming into the [unclear]. giving him the stuff and he said, 'What are you doing at this time of day coming in?'

I said, 'Jonathan', you know, we really needed it very, very quickly. And he said, 'Well, when do you want it?' And I said, 'Well, ideally, Monday'. And he '[mumbling sound] okay then, I'll do that'. [Laughter]

The 'yellow interior'. The –

'Yellow interior'.

Whose idea was that?

Well, one of mine of course. But heartily, heartily endorsed –

I bet Derek loved it.

Look what my last building was. I'll get it. [Pause] You see that?

Yes, yes. Oh my goodness.

[Laughter]

This is the Rogers Building which is the – there's another picture of it – coloured.

I see. I see. What, was this, was this for the one before you left, you say? The last –

That was the one before. This was the one I did before I came to Milton Keynes. And, and it was done with Richard Rogers. And has the odd – I have the odd pleasure of being probably the only architect whose, whose still alive who built a Grade Two Star building. [Laughter]

(01:00:04)

Listed building. Everyone else has long died, but I'm still here.

What that, what building there – the Rogers one? The one that you –

Yeah, got a Grade Two Star listed. [Laughter]

Wow. Wow, wow, wow. Well done. The other thing, the other thing that struck me and, when I was interviewing people like Stuart Moss crop and Christopher Woodward about the City Centre and the shopping building and everything, was that you were all flipping young, weren't you? Do you know, to get that opportunity to build these things. You were, you were very, you know, you were pretty young as a group of architects weren't you?

You're quite right and so were you. Now –

I know, but I wasn't building things –

I know. But, but, but, it's, I, I, I've likened it to, to the same conditions as NASA, you know, the National American Space Agency. The National Aeronautical, okay. They, they – the average age of NASA was really low, 25, 30, something like that. And so it was in Milton Keynes too. Why was that? Well, NASA had, wasn't regarded as going anywhere. It was just this crazy idea that we'll go to the moon. But the major stuff, where all the test pilots went was to sort out these, these beautiful planes that they were producing, the fighters and so on. And that's where there was an, a, a career.

It wasn't a career to be had in Milton Keynes really because it was, it had an, it had a, an end to it. It was 17 years I think in, then it got to 19, or maybe it was 19 and got up to 21 eventually. But it had a, it had a, a, a physical, you know, time-limit on it. So it was attracting people who were saying, you know, looking, going, 'Oh, I'll, I'll have a go here and then I'll move on'. And that produced a kind of 'Let's do it', thing, 'Because we're not going to be here for very long'. And, if tapped correctly, and I think it, it was a, it went very well. I think the combination of Jock Campbell, who was an interesting guy, very interesting guy, and, and Fred Roche. They, it got it, they used that, and it was a spirit of – well basically, local authorities were sort of, the spirit was, 'No, now what's the question?' and what Milton Keynes was, was more like, 'Yes, now what's the question?'.

And it was a sort of, 'Let's do it' sort of thing. And, and it, it was very strong indeed. I'm sure you saw it yourself and, and, and it was learning. You remember the, the, the stuff, the social work was going and finding out for instance that, you know, did people object to having grid-squares and, you know, big roads round them. And they found out much to their surprise that people liked to have grid-squares with roads round them because it kept those, those other 'Bloodnokkers' out from the other, next, from the next village if you wish. Things like that. So we learnt, we learnt things as we went along, very quickly. So that, I think that combination of being young and led well and not having a feeling that we had a career – it encouraged people to say 'Yes' rather than 'No'. And that's great. I don't know of anywhere else in the UK that did it. Do you?

No. I tell you, I wish I'd had, I wish I'd had this interview with you about three years ago now, I think it must be. We did, I don't know, have you seen the film that I made?

No.

Oh, well I'll send you the link because it's –

Will you please.

It's called 'Make No Little Plans' and what happened was – it's basically interviewing some of the key figures who were around in the early days. And you would have been one of them if we'd got round to you. Lee Shostak and I did it and Lee's, Lee's writing a book all about everything. And he approached me just, he said, 'I've just sold the business and can I have – I, I'm writing this book that I meant to write when I first came to Milton Keynes'. 'Cos he came as a PhD student until Fred got hold of him and made him Development Director and what-have-you – Director of, yeah, Planning. And I said, 'Well – '. He said, 'Can I have access to what's in the Living Archive archive?'. I said, 'Well, yeah, but the deal is: we're just about to do a project. How about you and I get together. I'll film it, you inter-, you, you do most of the interviews'. And we've done, we've collected about 80-or-so hours of stuff.

(01:05:11)

And I made a film. It's called 'Make No Little Plans' and it's about those first ten years. And I'm supposed to have done during lockdown, I'm working on Part Two, which is 1979 to '92. Which is, which is here, is going to be called, a subtitle's going to be called, 'Here Comes Maggie' because it's about how the Corporation had to change. Basically, didn't it? From where it was this kind of almost like socialist utopia to being, you know, now it's Maggie's in and, you know, it had to respond to the market. And in a way this Homeworld was one of the first steps on this, getting the private housebuilders engaged much more because no more rental housing and so on.

But, yeah, I'll send you the link. And I think you'll be – I mean a, a lot of this spirit you were talking about is in there. But the way you said it, I wish, I wish I'd had – 'cos I would have used that. [Laughter]

That's very kind of you. Stephen Fuller made it, made a very good – do you know Stephen?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah, well, he made the same –

I haven't seen him for years.

You know. At the beginning, the, the Development Corporation was a bunch of cowboys going over the, the, the, the, going over the, the, their ranges. Okay. And, and the whole of Milton Keynes was their range. And then, gradually, in came the sheep-farmers and started putting up fences and saying, 'No, this is my bit, this is my little bit'. And it became something where, during that process – and that you could broadly could talk about moving from Fred to Frank Henshaw. You know, no, the numbers became much more important. The big view got

lost by the small – gradually absorbed into small detail. And, and it, the agility definitely was, declined. But it was, but that process of, of, of it moving was something which was, for me, not very good, you know.

But I, I, anyway, I was, I was off doing other things by then, you know – this, this business that I did which got, you know – there's a lot of people who got trained in our, in our offices and are around in, all around the world today. I sold it eventually to a company which is 60,000 people around the world. And it, and they provide the sustainable information and help and care for the, for them and their clients. So it's a, it's had, it's had a good effect on, on, you know. I, I, I must say, I've been very lucky.

Yeah, well, I, I came three – you came in January '71. I came in April '71.

Yes. Yes.

And I left in about the same time – I left just before you. I left '78. So I think that – and you left in like '79. We, we did have, we were there during the glory years I think. [Laughter]

Yeah. We were. We were. We –

Yes. And as soon as the, as soon as there was a bit of trouble, got out!

[Laughter]

Oh dear. It really –

It's fantastic that you've done – the, the ways that you did the, the stuff with, with 'All Change' and stuff like that –

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

You know. Well done. I have to say –

Yeah.

What, what a fantastic concept, but made into reality, and how that gave such a huge boost to the, to the, to, to people feeling rooted in Milton Keynes. It's, it's truly was amazing and –

Yeah, yeah. Well, saying so, it was. I mean I've had, I've been very, very lucky. I've had a fantastic life really. A real, you know, really, really good time; really wonderful. Yeah. And then now at this point, I love, you know, oral history. And interviewing people is my passion. And being able to do all this and – not get paid for it now, but it's, you know – having had that kind of thing, it was, it was –

I mean I'm, I'm, I'm RSW as well – 'Retired Still Working'.

Yes.

But not necessarily being paid anything. And that's fine, that's fine. I've, I'll have been made very well at other times of my life. And I have no grumbles at all about that.

Yeah.

(01:09:59)

I've been very lucky. So – But, I mean, Milton Keynes was fantastic when you, you know – I would, I would love, I would love that same spirit to be regenerated today. And, and I don't see it in, in Britain at the moment. I don't know where I do see it, but I don't see it in Britain. Do you see it here?

No. I, it's funny, you know, 'cos I had, I'd hoped that one of the effects of this pandemic would be the kind of reappraisal of where we go in the future and how we live in the future. You know, where you had after – during the Second World War, with the Beveridge report, and you end up with the National Health Service, the New Towns Act. You know, things like that, that really –

Yeah.

That, you know, a vision for the future that would – and, you know, after all this suffering we gonna make a better world. And I had hoped that that would be one of the things that, that is gonna come out of this pandemic. But, you know. And it's interesting, we've done 80 interviews with people. We did a thing called 'Lockdown Lives', where we started interviewing people in May last year. And in those early interviews, because lockdown was fairly fresh, people were talking about, you know, how it, you know, things are going to be different. One of the things, obviously, was, was this working-from-home. You know, having more time to listen to the birds and the bees in the garden and whatever else, you know. Walking and doing, and, and just saying, you know, about the inequalities that had been shown up and all this kind of thing. But as, as it's gone on, the latter interviews haven't touched that. You know, it's because, you know, you, you had – it was almost as those they had these initial thoughts at the beginning about it – made you, because you know, you were furloughed, or, you know, made to work-from-home, and it was a real sort of step-change. But, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm not optimistic unfortunately. I'm the world's great optimist normally. But I'm not amazingly optimistic about things are going to be that much different.

I mean, at the time we were in Milton Keynes the, the feeling was that Britain was the, you know, the – it wasn't the time of,

of, of Blair, but it was, nevertheless, it was, it was 'Cool Britannia'. It was, you know, we, we, we were out to change things and the old world would, would, would gone and all the other things. And one felt, 'Oh, right, okay, fine' and, and were part of that. At the moment I just feel, you know, with all that stuff about Harry and Meghan, that it's happening is, it's a, you know, what, what's behind it, you know, the bullying, the, the desire to keep old, old ways going irrespective of their effects on other people. It's a – not, not seeing that the, the future is, is an opportunity; seeing it as a threat to people. None of that was in the – I thought we'd all got through that period, but we haven't; we just suppressed it – and Brexit was a suppression. It was sort of opening up that bloody box and out it pours, all this suppressed hatred and everything else it seems to me.

Yeah, yeah. Not, it's not, yeah, not, not good times.

Does that make sense to you?

Yeah. Well, as I say, I, well I, I mean, I find it amazing that they, that they get all upset about an American coming in whose got, who, who, who has got a different, slightly different colour skin and is lively and, and, and is very, very appealing to the public. You know, when they, when they went on their Australian tours, all this kind of thing. And, you know, they, they, they sort of, they get all their devices raised up against her and everything, and yet they manage to sort of still tolerate a paedophile in, amongst them, amongst them all.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

You know. And no one says anything about that. You know, it's just unbelievable, unbelievable.

When we go back and look at what, at what, what, what – though, about who likes them, it's the young people.

Yes.

There's a huge number of people, young people like them, and not many old people like them.

Well that is – I find that depressing that I'm, I'm –

So do I.

That I'm, I'm over sixty. I'm senior to someone who thinks they're awful. [Laughter]

That's why I said, that's why I said, you know, where do you got to?

Yeah.

Anyway. It's, it's another, another conversation.

Right. Okay. You're brilliant. Well, thank you John.

Lovely, lovely to talk with you.

Thank you. And I –

(01:14:52)

[Interview Ends]