

LIVING ARCHIVE MILTON KEYNES

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-27

Everybody has a story to tell,

The story of life in Milton Keynes

For everyone in Milton Keynes

OUR MISSION

To record, cherish and celebrate the lives of the people of the City & Borough of Milton Keynes.

OUR AIMS

From its inception, Living Archive has been driven by four fundamental aims:-

- To collect and archive the stories of Milton Keynes' past and present life.
- To share those stories in creative and educational ways.
- To encourage artists in all fields of creativity to use the archives as a source of inspiration.
- To increase community cohesion and pride-of-place.

Living Archive's goals and objectives to achieve these aims in 2025-27 are set out on pages four and five.

INTRODUCTION

Living Archive was founded in 1984 by Roger Kitchen, Roy Nevitt and Maggie Nevitt. They wanted to capture the history of the places that were becoming Milton Keynes and present it to the people coming to live there through the performing arts. They also wanted to oppose the view that 'new towns have no history' and show that 'everybody has a story to tell'. Those beliefs have been the guiding lights of Living Archive ever since, realised in the approach called 'documentary arts':

- Take inspiration from people's experiences;
- Record memories and research primary sources;
- Make the research accessible and usable;
- Create an output that is greater than the sum of the inputs; and
- Share the results with the community in ways that bring people together and cultivate a shared sense of pride.

Whilst the early days of large-scale theatre productions have sadly passed, the commitment to everybody's story and to creativity have remained as strong as ever. Living Archive goes out (and helps others to go out) to collect the stories that might otherwise be lost; it acts as a vault

for formal and informal collections of memories; it banks the archives of those who can no longer look after them; and it uses these resources to enthuse and inspire artists and communities throughout the city and beyond.

Living Archive receives no funding to maintain the archives it has already collected and rarely gets any financial support to process the donated material it receives. In these respects it is very much dependent on financial donations and the work of some very dedicated volunteers.

It does receive funding for specific and limited projects (or as a partner in larger projects) to capture the views of a particular community or locale, present the heritage of a location or activity, or produce (or help to produce) the results of such projects in new, creative ways.

This Strategic Plan sets out some key milestones Living Archive intends to reach in its funded and unfunded activities over the next two years. By achieving these targets, it intends to maintain its position at the forefront of local heritage and to find itself in April 2027 at least as secure as it is now.

2023-25 HIGHLIGHTS

The results of the 2023-25 Strategic Plan are shown in a graphic at Appendix ‘A’ on page six. In summary, of the 22 targets set, 17 were achieved completely, two were achieved partly and three were not achieved. Amongst these results and other initiatives that arose after the Plan was finalised, some of the highlights have been:-

- Creative Co-ordinator. The funding for and appointment of a Creative Co-ordinator enabled Living Archive to be proactive and reach out to new communities in ways that would not have been possible otherwise.
- Early Estates’ 50th Anniversaries. Living Archive held exhibitions, conducted interviews and produced films to help mark the 50th anniversaries of Fishermead, Fuller’s Slade and Greenleys.
- Pioneer Tales Revisited. In an update to the 1985 project, Living Archive interviewed and took portrait photos of 16 more recent cultural and community pioneers, and produced an exhibition at the Library with choral and dance performances at the launch.
- The Point. With the support of the developer, Living Archive held an exhibition and Down Memory Lane to mark the passing (as was then thought) of The Point. The Point was saved and a film recording memories of it was (re-edited and) released.
- The Milton Keynes Songbook II. A second tranche of songs written and performed by the Living Archive Band was collected and scored as a resource for schools and choirs.
- Heritage Open Days. 2023 was another record-breaking year with 210 events and an overall attendance of 20,644. In 2024 two of the biggest attractions did not participate (resulting in a lower overall attendance of 17,564); nevertheless the number of events reached a new peak of 244.
- MK Museum 50th Anniversary. As part of the anniversary project, Living Archive conducted six Down Memory Lane events and 80 interviews across a broad spectrum of the communities and interests in the City and presented some of the best of it in 30 digital stories.
- 40th Anniversary Celebration. In October 2024 Living Archive celebrated its 40th anniversary with two sold-out performances of words and music at Stantonbury Theatre. Performers included the Living Archive Band, choirs and Future Songwriters (with new songs inspired by the archives) in a celebration of Milton Keynes past and present.

2025-27 CONTEXT – CHALLENGES

- Tight funding constraints 1. Living Archive receives no funding to maintain its archives and process new archive items. It competes in a crowded field for project-based grants and that makes it difficult to support longer term initiatives (like the Creative Co-ordinator post).
- Tight funding constraints 2. The history and demographics of the small towns and villages that made up Milton Keynes are not, at the moment, attractive subjects for grant-providers, but they form the core of the archives and the majority of new archive donations.
- Cost of living. Comparatively high interest rates, high utility bills and recent high inflation mean that disposable income is low, increasing the risk associated with producing paid-for events.
- Key contacts moving on. Productive relationships built up over many years may be set back as key personnel change.
- Age 1. Not many younger people donate their time to Living Archive and there is evidence that heritage is a low priority when they spend their money.
- Age 2. The paid and unpaid staff of Living Archive are predominantly in the second half of their lives. Skills, experience and contacts will be lost as they move on. At the moment Living Archive is experiencing a particular shortage of audio-typist transcribers.

CONTEXT – OPPORTUNITIES

- Passage of time. As the early ‘settlers’ and institutions pass significant milestones, so archive donations and requests for commemorative projects are expected to increase.
- Core skills. Living Archive has a strong local reputation as the go-to partner for project management, oral history and interview skills in heritage projects.
- Heritage Open Days. Living Archive has a national reputation as the local organiser of this annual event.
- MK City Plan 2050. The plan extols Milton Keynes’ ‘rich heritage’ and recognises the importance of culture and heritage in producing ‘characterful, vibrant places’.
- City Archive. The proposal envisages a role for Living Archive and may bear fruit in the near-future in terms of archive storage.
- Senior staff. The senior paid and volunteer staff have decades of experience in the sector and invaluable networks of contacts.
- The Archives. Living Archive has a great and growing resource of digital images, audio records, video interviews, and docu-dramas. It continues to capture the lived experience of what will be history for future generations and to be a resource for historians, genealogists and the simply curious.

GOALS 2025-27

Living Archive's goals and milestones are the practical application of its Aims. They represent, at the time of being set, the most effective steps towards fulfilling its Mission for the next two years. The contingency of grant awards and the often unexpected nature of archive donations mean that some targets may be adjusted. Nevertheless, over the next two years, Living Archive will seek to:-

Goal 1. Collect and preserve the stories of Milton Keynes life past and present

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have:

- Catalogued and published at least four new collections.
- Completed the digitisation of at least half of the extensive Wolverton Works Collection.
- Published a selection of images from the Wolverton Works Collection in the online Archive to celebrate Railway 200.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Catalogued and published at least another four new collections.
- Completed the digitisation of the extensive Wolverton Works Collection.
- Completed the digitisation of the extensive MK Citizen archive.

Goal 2. Share these stories in ways that are creative and informative

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have:

- Brought our work with Young and Future Songwriters to culmination in an album of new songs.
- Produced a creative event for Railway 200 based on the Wolverton Works Collection.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Worked with new and existing partners to produce a performance event based on the Archive for a paying audience.

Goal 3. Enable all communities to give a voice to their heritage and experiences

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have

- Worked with AHA-MK and MK Q:alliance to record the experiences of MK's LGBTQ+ community and facilitated an event to present the results.
- Worked with Bradwell Windmill to display its heritage and capture the views of its communities.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Worked with Milton Keynes Canals to display its heritage and capture the views of its communities.

Goal 4. Encourage artists to use the Archive to inspire their creativity

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have

- Worked with The Stables to enable Young Songwriters to produce songs based on the Archive.
- Brought our work with Young and Future Songwriters to culmination in an album of new songs.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Worked with new and existing partners to produce a performance event based on the archives for a paying audience.

Goal 5. Increase community cohesion and pride of place

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have:

- Made the 2025 Heritage Open Days a bigger and better series of events than ever before.
- Conducted an initiative to attract 18-45 years olds to volunteer with Living Archive.
- Provided informative and entertaining archive material for the Look Again website.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Made the 2026 Heritage Open Days an even bigger and better series of events.
- Initiated or been a partner in at least two new projects involving hard-to-reach communities.

Goal 6. Secure sources of non-project funding to expand the base of operations

By 31 March 2026 Living Archive will have:

- Increased income from the sales of books, images and DVDs at events, from the Online Shop and from Redbubble.
- Offered for sale an album of new songs inspired by the archive.
- Assessed other suitable online marketplaces in which to offer products for sale.
- Carried out an initiative to increase the number and size of financial donations.

By 31 March 2027 Living Archive will have:

- Increased income from the sales of books, images and DVDs at events, from the Online Shop and other online marketplaces.
- Produced a performance event for a paying audience.
- Assessed the potential of a paid-for membership scheme.

PERFORMANCE BY QUARTER AGAINST 2023-25 STRATEGIC PLAN

APPENDIX 'A'

	2023-24				2024-25			
	June	Sep	Dec	Mar	June	Sep	Dec	Mar
1. To collect & preserve the stories of Milton Keynes life past & present								
1.1 Catalogue & publish at least 4 new collections								
1.2 Complete the digitisation of selected images from more than 45,000 negatives in the Bletchley Gazette Collection								
1.3 Catalogue and publish at least another 4 new collections								
1.4 Work in partnership with the Council Planning & Environment Department to present visitor information at the Blue Lagoon project								
2. To share these stories in ways that are creative and informative								
2.1 Bring to a public audience at least two of the projects being developed by the Creative Co-ordinator								
2.2 Soft-launch Milton Keynes Songbook II and supporting materials								
2.3 Engage with many partners to develop a large performance/installation to celebrate Living Archive's 40th anniversary in 2024								
2.4 Perform/exhibit to a wide audience the 40th anniversary celebration and record it in a lasting form for posterity								
3. To enable all communities to give a voice to their heritage and experiences								
3.1 Revisit the 1985 Pioneer Lives project to capture the experiences of more recent arrivals								
3.2 Work with AHA-MK and MK Q:Alliance to record the experiences of MK's LGBTQ+ community & facilitate an event to share the results								
3.3 Engage with all communities to bring their voices into the 40th anniversary celebration in 2024								
4. To encourage artists to use the Archive to inspire their creativity								
4.1 Engage with community leaders to reach out to local artists								
4.2 Work with schools to produce creative outputs based on Archive materials								
4.3 Create a track record of facilitating new work by local artists								
5. To increase community cohesion and pride of place								
5.1 Make the 2023 Heritage Open Days a bigger and better series of events than ever before								
5.2 Bring creative groups from many communities together in planning the 40th anniversary celebration in 2024								
5.3 Make the 2024 Heritage Open Days an even bigger and better series of events								
5.4 Create a lasting (virtual or real) monument to the togetherness of communities in Milton Keynes through the 40th anniversary celebration								
6. To secure sources of non-project funding to expand the base of operations								
6.1 Obtain funding for a further year of the Creative Co-ordinator post								
6.2 Increase income from the sales of books and CDs and from the Redbubble marketplace								
6.3 Trial some form of paid-for access to selected collections in the non-public archive								
6.4 Develop a paid-for virtual or real exhibition or performance								