Keeping in mind Prime Minister Gordon Brown's stated goal of constructing three million new housing units in the UK by 2020, as well as a great amount of public debate about density (brought on by omnipresent discussion of climate change, the 2012 Olympics, and all the new, tall buildings planned for central London), it's all the more amazing to look back at the planning and construction of England's most famous New Town, Milton Keynes. "MK" is 40 years old this year. (Building Design features an excellent special section on the city's development.)

Brown's plan forecasts 40,000 new homes every year by 2016, mostly on surplus public land. The plan includes the development of five new carbon-neutral "eco-towns." While the form of these new towns is nebulous, it's fair to assume they will differ substantially from that of auto-centric Milton Keynes, a large-scale embodiment of postwar optimism and architectural experimentation, with decidedly mixed results.

Derek Walker, former chief architect of Milton Keynes, defends the design decisions made in the city's development:

MK was built for cars and that's fine. Do we want to go back to the bloody horse and carriage? No we don't. Listen, you design something for the public, not for an architectural critic and you don't design it for an urban dweller who is happy as a lark in a single bed flat in Brixton. We were designing for families. For every family the car is a heavy part of their aspirations. The development group asked people what they wanted and we've given them that.

Who wants to bring up a family in a 23-storey building with urine in the lifts? One of the reasons I wanted to do Milton Keynes was that I'd seen Yorkshire totally bloody destroyed, with lovely little towns like Rickmansworth, Dewsbury and Huddersfield ruined by high rise blocks. If you talk to any family - and we talked to every family that came here and we did a major household survey every year asking people what they wanted - 99% want this, they want suburbia. We've never had shortage of people wanting to come here. People came here because of the Open University and because it was an incredible location for distributive industry. At the 1972 exhibition at the Design Museum we signed up 70 employers. The show was largely just astroturf with models and on the basis of that people wanted to come because they saw nice simple dwellings and pleasant courtyard schemes. The city has been enormously successful commercially.

Perhaps what most completely describes the utopian aims of Milton Keynes' designers are the scenes shown in renderings created to promote the city's development by German architectural illustrator Helmut Jacoby in the 1970s. They're just staggering. Jacoby brought to life the "village centres" scattered through the "wobbly grid of 1 km squares" that would constitute the city. Take a look:

![Image of Milton Keynes](http://brandavenue.typepad.com/brand_avenue/2007/08/three-million.html)
Above: the vision for the central concourse of the unrealized Milton Keynes City Club; the wave pool in the aforementioned City Club; a view down a main boulevard in the new city; Queens Court in the city's central shopping district; and an aerial view of the city center, as it would look in 1990 (complete with helicopter).

I'm always amazed when "It's what people said they wanted, so that's what we built" is thrown out as a legitimate excuse. Hedonism as validation. That's capitalism in a nutshell, I suppose.

Okay, sure. But I'd argue that a lot less was known about the impact of the automobile (and there were many fewer of them) at the time of MK's construction. Nonetheless, I greatly admire the intent of the designers, and the renderings are just spectacular. I mean, wave pools and helicopters--there's just so much hope (however naive) there.

This is really a great imagination about construction. I hope add reality ingredient in it and it will come true.

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