

Open Forum 20

Transmission date: Thursday 31st May 1973 on Radio 3

Presenter: Jack Singleton

Contributor: Lord Campbell of Eskan

Jack Singleton:

At the moment the campus is just a whole lot of buildings going up and cedar trees and things like that. Now what's it going to look like when the new city is finished?

Lord Campbell:

I think it's going to look very like it looks now because it is I think in some way the best site in the new city. It is right on the Linear Park which runs from north to south in Milton Keynes so it won't be very heavily built round. It will look very much as it does now, and splendid buildings I think they are. It's got very good bones of trees and as you know, thanks to the energies of Jane Drew the architect, you're getting a lake there too.

Jack Singleton:

This will be the first new town with a university won't it?

Lord Campbell:

Yes it will. Yes it will, it's really very surprising when you think there's been all the new towns and all the new universities that never before the twain have met. And may I say that we are extremely proud of having The Open University at Milton Keynes. It's very, very exciting indeed.

Jack Singleton:

Tell us something about the city.

Lord Campbell:

Well it's going to take between fifteen and twenty years to build up to a population of a quarter of a million which incidentally is the biggest new town or new city previously planned in the western world. When we started there were forty thousand people living in the designated area, so two hundred and ten thousand people have to come in, houses have to be provided for them, jobs provided, roads, infra-structure, schools, hospitals, arts, recreation all have to go together for two hundred and ten thousand people coming in over, as I say from fifteen to twenty years. It will be a very open city, it will be built at low densities, about ten houses to the acre in the building schemes. There will be a lot of open spaces, the roads will be heavily landscaped with wide reservations of land beside them. The areas of employment will be very diffused indeed, even in the central area of Milton Keynes, what used to be called the city centre, I think the plane trees there will be the highest features in the landscape.

Jack Singleton:

And I noticed when I go to Walton Hall that there is a nursery for trees there. How many trees are you going to have altogether?

Lord Campbell:

I think we're going to have six million trees. We've already planted in the last two years, nearly two hundred thousand trees, and may I say that we're planting, except for these

London plane trees which we are going to have in the central area of Milton Keynes, all the trees will be forest trees indigenous to North Buckinghamshire. We're not going to bring in a lot of exotic flowering trees.

Jack Singleton:

Or geometric pines and things like that?

Lord Campbell:

No, no.

Jack Singleton:

To a certain extent you are keeping the tradition of the local villages?

Lord Campbell:

Yes we are. There are thirteen very attractive villages in the designated area. We had to decide either to swamp these with new building and ignore them or to treat them, as it were, as gems in the countryside and let them inspire the type of building round them so they can and in fact will be, as it were, aesthetic and social focuses for the new building and the new communities to come.

Jack Singleton:

And you're keeping that lovely street in, is it Stony Stratford?

Lord Campbell:

In Stony Stratford. Well of course we are not only keeping it I think we are reviving it because of course it was A5 and it was being spoilt by traffic and we are now by-passing it by a new A5 so that it will return to its pristine beauty as it was when Stony Stratford was a very lovely market town.

Jack Singleton:

There's always been a tradition in university cities between town and gown, sometimes they got on together, sometimes they fought as in your old university town of Oxford and the gutters have run with the blood of students against citizens. How do you envisage relationships of town and gown in Milton Keynes in The Open University?

Lord Campbell:

Well of course it won't be the usual relationship anyway to begin with because there won't be any undergraduates, there are only staff. From our point of view it's a great advantage to Milton Keynes to have these thousand members of The Open University staff forming with our own eight hundred staff at Milton Keynes, a professional and if I may say so, cultured nucleus which many new towns have lacked when they've started. I think some of the more reactionary members locally would say thank heaven we are getting a university without any students! But I can assure you that the staff at The Open University are already proving their intellectual vigour in their criticisms of the way we're planning the new city and this is very healthy, I think, for both of us.

Jack Singleton:

And there is a relationship already isn't there? I noticed that the local inhabitants are invited to some of the university functions?

Lord Campbell:

Oh yes. There's a lot of come and go between The Open University and the staff of the Development Corporation and the local citizens.

Jack Singleton:

Lord Campbell.