

Case Name: Cofferridge Close, High Street, Stony Stratford. Milton Keynes. Bucks.

Case Number: 468471

Background

We have been asked to assess Cofferridge Close, Stony Stratford for statutory listing. We have assessed the main block, comprising the shopping precinct and offices, fronting the High Street and, as a separate asset, 7-23 Silver Street and the covered entrance that form the southern boundary of the Close.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	1407948	7-23 Silver Street, including the covered entrance to Cofferridge Close, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes	Listing	Add to List
2	N/A	Cofferridge Close	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
26 October 2011	Full inspection

Context

We have been asked to assess Cofferridge Close for statutory listing following a planning application to demolish and redevelop the rear wing of the office block to provide a larger supermarket. The proposed development will also have an impact on the landscape and car park which were designed as an integral part of the original development. Where the criteria for listing apply, we have included the structure of the hard landscape in our assessment.

A planning application for the partial re-development of the shopping centre was submitted in January 2011. The current development proposals exclude 7-13 and 23 Silver Street which are largely separately owned. However, these were designed as part of the scheme and are therefore considered as part of this listing assessment, as a separate asset, 7-23 Silver Street.

Factual evidence submitted with the planning application and in response to the listing request was included in our consultation report. Opinion cited in the reports is considered in our discussion.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

At notification stage we received representations on behalf of the owner, as set out in The Statement in Response to Listing Request (CgMs, 24 October 2011). The report drew on the earlier Heritage Impact Assessment (CgMs, January 2011) which looked at Cofferridge Close in its setting. The Statement cited paragraphs from the Impact Assessment that in summary stated that Cofferridge Close's contribution to the conservation area lies primarily in the High Street elevation of the building that was developed by Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) in the 1970s. The report considered the building to be unremarkable, plain and utilitarian. It stated that the glimpsed views of Cofferridge Close, in part obscured by

trees and rear extensions and the small size of the coach arch, limit its visual impact on the conservation area (designated 1975).

The Statement in Response to Listing Request addressed the architectural and planning history of Milton Keynes and Cofferridge Close. It referred to the reasons for designation applied to the Shopping Building, acknowledging its contribution to the American-inspired town plan of central Milton Keynes and the rational, functional steel and glass structure of that building, influenced by the work of the architect Mies van der Rohe. The Statement took this further to consider Cofferridge Close in terms of Rayner Banham's definition of British New Brutalism, which was in turn influenced by continental and American theory, including the work of Mies van der Rohe. It concluded that the building has local interest 'through its association with the development of Milton Keynes and through its example of modern architecture', but that it does not merit statutory designation for reasons summarised below:

- * While Cofferridge Close is recognised for its early date within the development of the towns and villages surrounding Milton Keynes, it is not considered as one of the principal developments of the era and area;
- * Whilst of good reputation, the architect is not one of the most important architects of the modern movement and there are better examples of similar architecture in the area;
- * Impact of alteration and erosion of detail on the essence of the original masterplan and ethics of design;
- * That Cofferridge Close is not one of the most important elements of Milton Keynes and its environs, 'as it does not sit as a prime example and fore-runner of the architectural styles prevalent in the area or of Brutalism generally'.

We consulted the owners of the main shopping centre and offices through their planning consultant; the individual owners of the houses and flats at 7-23 Silver Street; the local authority; the HER and the applicant.

We received positive feedback on the thoroughness of the report. On a point of detail the owner's consultant added that alterations to the window boxes and removal of seating and signage affect the degree of intactness. Comments were received on the significance of the integrated plan of the buildings and landscape within the historic setting and on the plan and level of intactness of the houses at 7-23 Silver Street.

DISCUSSION

Cofferridge Close is assessed for statutory listing against the Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, March 2010) and the English Heritage Selection Guide: Commerce and Exchange Buildings (April 2011). The building must therefore be considered in terms of the architectural merits of the design seen in the choice of materials, structure, plan and function - how well a building fulfilled its original brief, technological innovation, intactness, rarity and historic interest, and, an important aspect of post-war public buildings, its setting.

7-23 Silver Street is additionally assessed against the English Heritage Selection Guide Domestic 4: The Modern House and Housing (April 2011). In assessing post-war houses particular attention is paid to innovative design and use of materials, to the plan form and the relationship of internal spaces and rooms within each unit and the plan and purpose of the scheme as a whole. Joinery, internal finishes and built-in furniture are often extensive and of high quality or invention. Buildings by architects of national importance may have an added significance. A high degree of intactness is expected of the exterior, while lack of alteration to the plan and principal spaces is also a key consideration when assessing such buildings for designation.

Low-rise housing developments, whether public or private (notably those by Span Developments Ltd), are very difficult to assess as their simple virtues are easily taken for granted. To meet the criteria for listing they have to survive reasonably intact, show special spatial imagination in the layout of roads and buildings, and in their hard landscaping and planting. Elevational treatments can be quite simple but they should be immaculately detailed.

The bar for post-war listing is set high and in both cases a high degree of intactness is required.

COFFERRIDGE CLOSE

The shopping arcade is not a new concept, developing from the covered market and from the purpose-built arcades of the 1810s and 1820s that survive for example in London, Bath and Hastings and in George Skipper's arcades in Norwich and Birmingham c1900.

The multi-functional post-war shopping centre, which is now common to the high street, differs from its predecessors in that it may often combine shops or a supermarket and offices, residential units and parking in one development; for example in the shops, car park and residential tower at Arlington House, Margate

(recently assessed for listing) by Russell Diplock. In Coventry and Plymouth, wholesale post-war rebuilding provided opportunities for commercial facilities - shops, offices, car parks - to be integrated within a renewed town plan while at Harlow and Stevenage and later Crawley and Runcorn new régimes were designed to overlay largely rural landscapes. Milton Keynes stands out from other new towns of its generation for the scale and ambition of the project, making it one of the most important exercises in town planning of the post-war years. Cofferridge Close is significant in that it was designed for an infill site, to house the MKDC offices, in one of the principal historic towns to be absorbed in the new town.

In its general ethos, Cofferridge Close echoes the clearly expressed and intensely rational Miesian tenets (referencing the work and style of the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1886-1969) at the heart of the new town plan that informed the design of the Shopping Building in Milton Keynes itself. While the centre of Milton Keynes was set out in a way that could be interpreted in terms of Rayner Banham's definition of the New Brutalism of the 1950s, Cofferridge Close provides a solution better suited to an existing historic town. Derek Walker regarded the project at Stony Stratford as one of regeneration of a largely derelict site, where the essence of Cofferridge Close lay in the careful choice of materials and breaking down of scale that helped to anchor the building and the newly formed MKDC in the existing built, economic and social framework. Tunley achieved this by using a precise, rhythmical bay structure and expressive, articulated elevations, clad in brick, setting the elevations behind colonnades where they were most prominent to break up the mass of the façades. This geometry of brick piers, parapet walls, cills and brick paving distinguishes walkways from car parks. Rather than imposing a new building on an already congested town centre, Walker developed a model to improve traffic flow, that addressed vehicular and pedestrian needs. As the Heritage Impact Assessment observed, the building is difficult to see because of its low profile and enclosed nature, factors which reinforced its integration within the town rather than its imposition. Entrances to the Close, which was historically an enclosed open space, are intentionally discreet preserving the important network of historic routes.

Because of its setting, Cofferridge Close differs from the streamlined American-inspired grid plan that contributes to the special interest of the Shopping Building. It stands out, too, from most contemporary shopping centres in the attention given to the aesthetics and the relationship of the development to its historic setting. This was, in part, achieved through soft landscaping that is now much reduced, but also through the continuation of the local tradition of street signage and the introduction of new public sculpture. Designation recognises the contribution of post-war public art to new or renewed urban landscapes; in this case a number of the hanging or wall-mounted signs and the fountain have been removed.

The original Cofferridge Close design team addressed the issue of setting which was a critical component of successful post-war design. At Harlow New Town the acclaimed landscape architect Sylvia Crowe had been an important member of the design team. Whilst Cofferridge Close may not compare architecturally with the innovative Commonwealth Institute of the early 1960s (Grade II*) or Jellicoe's Civic Building in Plymouth (Grade II), the architects and planners in each case integrated the building with a reflective landscape that supported the building, and in the case of the Commonwealth Institute, physically rooted the building to its site. The landscapes at Plymouth and the Commonwealth Institute are among the few post-war examples included in the Register of Parks and Gardens. Although the landscape at Cofferridge Close is not being specifically considered for designation (and would not warrant a full assessment), post-war landscapes are particularly vulnerable and sensitive to change and Cofferridge Close is no exception.

Cofferridge Close is therefore an important development in post-war town planning that has strong significance for a number of reasons. It was the first major development by the newly-formed MKDC, where both Walker and Tunley gained a high reputation for their contribution to the plan and design of this nationally important new town. Designed by the development team, Cofferridge Close predates Walker's Shopping Building in Milton Keynes (Grade II) and while it differs from the town centre it is a product of the clear rational Miesian approach to design that is strongly expressed in the new town. Its function reflected the existing commercial nature of the site, its name honours the historic nomenclature, while the carefully planned integrated landscape was reference to the open character of the site. Unlike the often inappropriately scaled shopping centres which proliferated elsewhere, Cofferridge Close was designed to a precise, classically-informed modular rhythm that respects the scale of local buildings, using brick cladding in an expressive and inventive way that is appropriate to Stony Stratford.

Few civic and commercial buildings of this generation have thus far merited listing, and the high significance of Milton Keynes is recognised in the Grade II listed Shopping Building. The listing criteria look for a high level of intactness in buildings of this period. While the wider significance of Cofferridge Close is generally accepted and remains legible, its success also lies in the detail of the design. Although this is evident in the rear block and side elevations which are little altered, the loss of the central bays of the High Street colonnade has a marked impact on the building while the masking of the elevations behind the added steel frame structure

and altered shop fronts also detract from the original design. Secondary to the building but integral to the original landscape, raised beds and planters that screened the car park, some of the original brick paving that linked the vertical and horizontal surfaces and a proportion of the public art have been removed or replaced. However, whilst attrition of the designed landscape and hard surfaces associated with it certainly detracts from the original, carefully designed scheme which distinguished the development, the concept of the building within an enclosed but open space, where vehicular and pedestrian spaces were clearly defined, remains legible.

Cofferidge Close does not therefore meet the exacting criteria of intactness that is required to merit statutory listing but is recognised for its strong local interest as an important development in post-war town-planning that integrated the new town of Milton Keynes with the existing market town of Stony Stratford.

7-23 SILVER STREET

Although 7-23 Silver Street is being assessed separately, as it is a distinct structure to which specific listing criteria apply, it was designed as an integrated element of this important development, where the issues of sensitivity to the historic setting and appropriateness to new use considered for the commercial building are equally applicable. The terrace is a modern interpretation of the local vernacular tradition, achieved through an expressive use of brick that is particularly evident in the soffit of the covered entrance and in the use of vertical joints to define each unit of the houses. While the south elevation is treated as a continuous surface, divided into individual units compatible with the scale of the street, the flexible rear elevations which include small courtyard gardens and full width balconies as part of the usable floor space, are dependent on the open outlook to the north which in effect acts as an extended garden. The flexible inside-outside plan, which is characteristic of the tightly planned post-war house, is clearly legible, its survival evidence of a well thought out design. (The issue of thermal efficiency is not a consideration for listing.) Stairs, windows, doors, built-in fixture and fittings and original finishes survive well, demonstrating the high attention to detail given to the terrace. It incorporates the covered entrance to the site anchoring the buildings to their setting in a manner that is specific to this site, where the interplay of brick surfaces and the local tradition of street signage is successfully expressed. Architecturally the terrace is important as a little-altered example of the contribution of Wayland Tunley and the insight of Derek Walker to this early phase of the MKDC project, establishing the Milton Keynes Development Corporation in the existing historic market town of Stony Stratford.

The terrace straddles the divide between small scale public housing and private houses and housing. In housing terms it is a continuation of the tradition set by Span housing in Greenwich in the late 1950s comparable in scale with the recently listed terrace 2,4,6 Foxes Dale (Grade II). It bears comparison with the infill developments, by, for example the London Borough of Camden under Neave Brown, of the 1970s, where the unusually high quality of local authority public housing is recognised by listing of the Branch Hill and Dunboyne Rd estates (Grade II) and the Grade II* listed Alexandra Road estate. The use of high quality brickwork and inventive planning to create sympathetically scaled housing also compares with the work of Darbourne and Darke whose highly acclaimed and influential Lillington Gardens estate in Pimlico, is listed at Grade II* and Grade II, and private, infill site, house at 25 Montpelier Row, Twickenham is listed at Grade II. This is a much smaller scale of project than some of these examples, but it is equally successful in civic and context terms, as well as being an elegant and carefully designed housing project in this historic town, where the relationship with the pioneering new town is also clear.

Given its thoughtful design, legible plan and good detailing 7-23 Silver Street, Stony Stratford, including the covered entrance to Cofferidge Close, is recommended for listing at Grade II.

CONCLUSION

Having considered all the available evidence Cofferidge Close does not meet the criteria for listing. 7-23 Silver Street are recommended at Grade II.

Cofferidge Close, Stony Stratford: the main commercial building is not recommended for designation for the following principal reason:

* Intactness: the loss of the central bays of the significant High Street frontage detracts from this otherwise important development in post-war town-planning that integrated the new town of Milton Keynes with the historic market town of Stony Stratford.

7-23 Silver Street, Stony Stratford: including the covered entrance to Cofferidge Close, is recommended for designation for the following principal reasons:

* Architectural interest: a skilfully designed and integrated terrace of town houses which survive as an early phase of the significant post-war contributions of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, under architects Wayland Tunley and Derek Walker.

- * Planning interest: flexibly-planned town houses that form the southern boundary and integrated covered entrance to the contemporary shopping centre; their enclosed courtyard gardens and first floor principal living space with balconies respond to the open green space, historically an orchard, of the wider development;
- * Materials: expressive use of brick, a modern interpretation of the local vernacular tradition;
- * Degree of survival: high level of intactness of plan form, original materials, fixtures and fittings;
- * Historic interest: an integral part of Cofferridge Close, a commercial and residential development, set within a carefully-designed landscape that reflected the historic use of the site. It was the first phase of development by the well-known Milton Keynes Development Corporation, establishing it in the existing historic market town of Stony Stratford.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. This is an important development by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation which sensitively regenerated a large site behind the High Street in Stony Stratford. 7-23 Silver Street merits listing at Grade II for the quality and thoughtfulness of its design and is also largely intact. Regrettably this is no longer the case for Cofferridge Close which does not meet the criteria for listing. Nonetheless it has strong local interest, and the open aspect of the close is an important component of the setting of 7-23 Silver Street given the integrated nature of the design of the whole, and thus positively contributes to the conservation area.
Veronica Fiorato, 11th April 2012

Annex 1

List Entry

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: 7-23 Silver Street, including the covered entrance to Cofferridge Close, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes

List Entry Number: 1407948

Location

7-23 Silver Street, including the covered entrance to Cofferridge Close, Stony Stratford, MK11 1JS

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Milton Keynes	Unitary Authority	Stony Stratford

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed:

Date of most recent amendment:

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy Number: Not applicable to this List entry.

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description

Summary of Building

Terrace of five town houses and four flats that incorporates the southern vehicular entrance to Cofferridge Close.

Designed as an integral part of Cofferridge Close, 1970-76 by Derek Walker, chief architect to the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC), project architect Wayland Tunley.

Reasons for Designation

7-23 Silver Street, Stony Stratford, including the covered entrance to Cofferridge Close, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Architectural interest: a skilfully designed and integrated terrace of town houses which survive as an early phase of the significant post-war contributions of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, under architects Wayland Tunley and Derek Walker.
- * Planning interest: flexibly-planned town houses that form the southern boundary and integrated covered entrance to the contemporary shopping centre; their enclosed courtyard gardens and first floor principal living space with balconies respond to the open green space, historically an orchard, of the wider development;
- * Materials: expressive use of brick, a modern interpretation of the local vernacular tradition;
- * Degree of survival: high level of intactness of plan form, original materials, fixtures and fittings;
- * Historic interest: an integral part of Cofferridge Close, a commercial and residential development, set within a carefully-designed landscape that reflected the historic use of the site. It was the first phase of development by the well-known Milton Keynes Development Corporation, establishing it in the existing historic market town of Stony Stratford.

History

Cofferridge Close, a commercial, retail, community and residential development, was designed and built between 1970-76 by Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) under Derek Walker, coinciding with his period in office as chief architect to the MKDC, and project architect Wayland Tunley. Work started on site in July 1973. It lies within the Stony Stratford Conservation Area (designated 6 August 1975).

Milton Keynes is significant as the most ambitious new town to be planned and built in England during the post-war period following the New Towns Act of 1965. Designated as a new town in 1967, it was laid out on a grid plan that overlay or incorporated the established towns of Bletchley, Wolverton and Stony Stratford. While the residential areas reflected the informal village character they replaced, the centre was intended as a 'downtown strip', an American-style grid lined with sleek, urban buildings of a Miesian character (referencing the work and style of the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1886-1969), most successfully realised in the Shopping Building (Listed Grade II).

Stony Stratford is a historic market town laid out on a linear plan that straddles the historic route of the A5 (Watling Street), close to the River Ouse. To the south of the High Street deep plots, following the medieval burgage pattern, run back to Silver Street, the historic back lane. Set back from the High Street to the north-west and south-east of Cofferridge Close are the Market Square and Horsefair Green. Historically Cofferey's Close was an open space, that by the late C17 was bounded by buildings, and in the early C18 was recorded as a fruit orchard. Prior to the development of Cofferridge Close, the site was divided between a number of owners and tenants, the principal player being Flemings agricultural hardware business fronting the High Street, which also had yards to the rear, while the southern end of the site was laid out with gardens and orchards, largely owned by the local authority.

The land was acquired by the MKDC but care was taken to integrate the development into the existing fabric and market town economy of Stony Stratford, working to a brief to provide flexible commercial, small-scale retail, communal and residential facilities. With MKDC as the main users of the office space this would ensure their occupation and established MDKC's presence in the town. While the shopping centre reflects the Miesian philosophy that underlies the plan and structure of the new town, it was designed at a scale and using carefully chosen materials that were considered sympathetic to the local vernacular tradition. The height of the development was restricted so that it did not exceed the surrounding buildings; hand made brick cladding reflected the local preponderance of brick-built buildings.

The building was enlivened with street sculpture in the form of Christine Fox's bronze fountain, Batrachian Cascade, placed near to the supermarket entrance and with hanging and wall-mounted signage which reflected the tradition of street and shop signage in the town. Consideration was given to reduce the impact of the development by rich landscaping which retained many of the existing trees and introduced green partitions between the building and car parks, in the form of planted pergolas framing the walkways, and with seating. At the boundaries of the development small scale projects such as the extension to the rear of 27-31 High Street knitted the new development into the existing building stock. Subsequently the north-eastern block facing the High Street was extended at the rear and the fountain was removed. The seating has also been removed and while some of the hanging and wall-mounted signs remain in place, the majority have been dismantled. A separate Health Centre was built to the north-west of the site, outside Cofferridge Close.

Details

MATERIALS: reinforced concrete frame with load-bearing external brickwork and cladding in Colliers handmade Georgian Red facing bricks, a textured brick laid with deep joints that was also used for the main building at Cofferridge Close.

PLAN: the southern edge of the site is bounded by the three-storey row that comprised five town houses, three single-bedroom flats and a studio above the vehicular entrance to Cofferridge Close. Each has two outlooks, over the urban setting of Silver Street to the south and the open landscape of the Close to the north. Although some have been subsequently subdivided, the majority retain their original floor plan.

The three-bedroom town houses were laid out on three floors, with the main living area at first floor level. Each house opens onto a small enclosed garden at the rear and a large balcony at first floor level that gives an open view over the gardens and southern end of the main building. The project team considered that small courtyard gardens were sufficient because the wider aspect provided by the Close acted as a garden extension. The ground floor comprised an entrance hall with a WC leading off it, a kitchen and dining room overlooking the garden and a small multi-purpose room at the front. The first floor was laid out as an open plan living room for which the balcony effectively forms an outside extension and leading off the living room at the front, a small study. The upper floor had three bedrooms and a bathroom.

EXTERIOR: Silver Street elevation in seven bays, of which the sixth bay includes a two-storey entrance to the Close. Houses are of three-storeys, the upper storey having an asymmetrically-pitched mansard roof. As with the main building at Cofferridge Close, each unit is recessed between full-height piers that are flush with the cornice. The ground floor is clad in vertically-ribbed panels with matching front doors, punctuated by narrow full-height windows. Horizontal first floor window units, in black anodised aluminium, each of six lights, fill each bay between flush brick panels. The upper floor has a continuous glazed mansard.

At the rear, each unit is contained behind a high brick wall forming a small courtyard garden, each with a small outside shed. Full-width ground floor rear windows in the manner of a glazed wall, and set back beneath the balcony, open onto the courtyard. Similar full-width first floor rear windows are set back under brick soffits and open onto secluded first floor balconies, each set between brick party walls. Balconies have timber balustrades or deep planters and afford views over the open leafy landscape at the southern end of Cofferridge Close. The upper floor is lit by a continuous glazed mansard similar to the south facing elevation.

Covered vehicular entrance with brick lined soffit and exposed brick-clad beams; the opening is flanked by brick clad piers, brick kerbs and paviors and enlivened with wall-mounted signage to Cofferridge Close.

INTERIOR: most houses retain their original floor plan, where the internal structural piers are exposed. Flexible ground and first floor plan where fully-glazed rear walls and quarry tiled ground floor flooring diminish the barrier between inside and outside spaces. Stairs have a solid, timber framed balustrade and timber handrail. Flush-panel internal doors and fitted cupboards, some with original door furniture.

Selected Sources

Architectural Design , Vol. XLV, 6/1973

Cofferidge Close supplement, Milton Keynes Express/Mirror, November 7 1975

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Meadows, Dorothy M, Early Years in Stony Stratford 1913-1929

Pevsner, N and Williamson, E, The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire, 2000

Walker, Derek, The Architecture and Planning of Milton Keynes, 1982

Wynn, Martin with Smith, Roger & Totterdill, Peter, Planning Games, Ch. 2 New Build in a New Town (the Design of a Retail and Service Centre): the Cofferidge Close Game, 1985

Housing at Cofferidge Close, sale details (nd)

Map**National Grid Reference:** SP7873340255

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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1407948_1.pdf

Annex 2**Factual Details**

Name: Cofferridge Close

Location: Cofferridge Close, High Street, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes, Bucks,

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Milton Keynes	Unitary Authority	Stony Stratford

History

Cofferridge Close, a commercial, retail, community and residential development, was designed and built between 1970-76 by Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) under Derek Walker, coinciding with his period in office as chief architect to the MKDC, and project architect Wayland Tunley. Work started on site in July 1973. It lies within the Stony Stratford Conservation Area (designated 6 August 1975).

Milton Keynes is significant as the most ambitious new town to be planned and built in England during the post-war period following the New Towns Act of 1965. Designated as a new town in 1967, it was laid out on a grid plan that overlay or incorporated the established towns of Bletchley, Wolverton and Stony Stratford. While the residential areas reflected the informal village character they replaced, the centre was intended as a 'downtown strip', an American-style grid lined with sleek, urban buildings of a Miesian character (referencing the work and style of the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1886-1969), most successfully realised in the Shopping Building (Listed Grade II).

Stony Stratford is a historic market town laid out on a linear plan that straddles the historic route of the A5 (Watling Street), close to the River Ouse. To the south of the High Street deep plots, following the medieval burgrave pattern, run back to Silver Street, the historic back lane. Set back from the High Street to the north-west and south-east of Coffery Close are the Market Square and Horsefair Green. Historically Coffery's Close was an open space, that by the late C17 was bounded by buildings, and in the early C18 was recorded as a fruit orchard. Prior to the development of Coffery Close, the site was divided between a number of owners and tenants, the principal player being Flemings agricultural hardware business fronting the High Street, which also had yards to the rear, while the southern end of the site was laid out with gardens and orchards, largely owned by the local authority.

The land was acquired by the MKDC but care was taken to integrate the development into the existing fabric and market town economy of Stony Stratford, working to a brief to provide flexible commercial, small-scale retail, communal and residential facilities. With MKDC as the main users of the office space this would ensure their occupation and established MKDC's presence in the town. While the shopping centre reflects the Miesian philosophy that underlies the plan and structure of the new town, it was designed at a scale and using carefully chosen materials that were considered sympathetic to the local vernacular tradition. The height of the development was restricted so that it did not exceed the surrounding buildings; hand made brick cladding reflected the local preponderance of brick-built buildings.

The building was enlivened with street sculpture in the form of Christine Fox's bronze fountain, Batrachian Cascade, placed near to the supermarket entrance and with hanging and wall-mounted signage which reflected the tradition of street and shop signage in the town. Consideration was given to reduce the impact of the development by rich landscaping which retained many of the existing trees and introduced green partitions between the building and car parks, in the form of planted pergolas framing the walkways, and with seating. At the boundaries of the development small scale projects such as the extension to the rear of 27-31 High Street knitted the new development into the existing building stock. Subsequently the north-eastern block facing the High Street was extended at the rear and the fountain was removed. The seating has also been removed and while some of the hanging and wall-mounted signs remain in place, the majority have been dismantled. A separate Health Centre was built to the north-west of the site, outside Coffery Close.

Details

MATERIALS: reinforced concrete frame and concrete floor slab with load-bearing external brickwork and cladding in Colliers handmade Georgian Red facing bricks, a textured brick laid with deep joints; brick clad concrete piers; black anodised aluminium framed windows. Red and buff brick paviers. Entrance areas: interior walls in fair faced brick, quarry tiled floors and stairs.

PLAN: commercial and accommodation (c 4200 sq m) set in landscaped grounds on an enclosed plot of c 1.5 hectares between the High Street and Silver Street to the north-east and south-west and between Market Square and the Horsefair Green to the north-west and south-east.

Pedestrian access from the High Street and via small incidental entrances to the east and west lead to paths which cross the site, maintaining the historic rights of way and linking the High Street with Horsefair Green and the Market Place. Vehicular entrance from Silver Street, through an archway incorporated in the seven units that comprise 7-23 Silver Street.

Long, L- plan, two-storey, flat-roofed block running back from a narrow High Street frontage. The supermarket and ground floor shops open onto the High Street and flanking colonnade that leads back from the High Street. Above and to the rear, an office area, originally divided into 1040 sq m of tenanted space over the shops, and the MKDC offices to the rear, is separated by an east-west passage at ground level. Extending to the west, a single-storey curved arm that was originally intended as a community and health centre, was on completion included within the supermarket and assigned as the Midland Bank (now a dental

surgery). To the north of it is the service area to the shops. A largely open-roofed colonnade leads from the covered High Street entrance forming a visual link between the building and the car park to the east.

Landscaped car park to the east, separated from the colonnade by shallow beds and planters. These were originally more richly planted in raised beds that forming a deep swathe of greenery between the building and car park where original trees were also retained, breaking up the parking bays. To the rear are open lawns planted with mature trees, some surviving from the orchards and gardens which preceded the Close.

The southern edge of the site is bounded by the three-storey row of five town houses, three single-bedroom flats and a studio flat, at 7-23 Silver Street, which frames the covered vehicular entrance to the Close. From the entrance a service road leads to the loading bays to the west of the supermarket.

EXTERIOR: the 32m High Street frontage is set behind an eight-bay, brick-faced portico of which the central four bays of the colonnade have been removed, but are visible as a scar on the elevation of the building. A similar colonnaded arcade extends to the rear, parallel to the front block, defining the passage. Vertical joints on the colonnades and junctions with the main blocks are emphasized by straight joints in the brickwork. Each bay of the main block is recessed between full-height piers that are flush with the cornice. Horizontal first floor window units, in black anodised aluminium, each of four lights, fill each bay between flush brick panels. On the High Street elevation and the north-eastern bays of the rear block the windows are set back above shallow brick planters or window boxes. On the High Street these are hidden behind later steel canopies; those on the north-east elevation have been capped. Original shop fronts facing the colonnade have low, chamfered brick cills, recessed, aluminium framed windows and roller shutter blinds. Full-width windows to the supermarket to the side elevation are also deeply recessed above chamfered cills.

The southern section is similarly articulated on all elevations by full-height piers that frame similar recessed window bays on both storeys, creating a powerful rhythmic regime that diffuses the mass of the building, particularly where it is seen through the colonnade. The main entrance to the offices, at the north-eastern corner of this block, is fully glazed on two sides, with window units in chamfered brick openings, giving views into the lobby and stair well. The same horizontal window treatment is repeated in the rear service elevations and in the single-storey wing, which is additionally punctuated by individual windows inserted in the otherwise blank curved wall.

The covered pavements to the High Street and beneath the colonnades and passages are set out in red and buff paviers, most of which are original while some were replaced during the extension to the rear of the High Street bank and remodelling of the car park landscape; brick steps rise to car park level.

An added steel-framed glazed canopy projects from the main elevations to the colonnade at first floor level on both the High Street and return of the colonnade adjacent to the supermarket, while individual bays have solid steel canopies over the shop fronts.

INTERIOR: walls and stair wells in the entrance foyer and public area of the offices in the rear block are faced in fair faced brick, while floors and stairs are quarry tiled. Open plan, flexible office space, between central spinal piers.

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Map

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