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Cumbernauld: Scotland's Model New Town

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Cumbernauld is without doubt the most extraordinary New Town built in Britain after the Second World War. Breaking with all conventions, when the town centre was officially opened in 1967, it was the largest megastructure in Europe.

The residents of the new town were principally drawn from Glasgow, which by the mid-1950s had a massive housing problem. Most of the housing stock was tenement housing, built in response to the nineteenth-century industrial boom, when Glasgow was the second city of the British Empire, one of the richest cities in Europe, with booming heavy industry: shipbuilding, locomotive construction, and heavy engineering supplied by local supplies of coal and iron ore. In parallel with the wealth and prosperity, however, were extremes of poverty. By the 1940s a large part of the working-class housing stock was reduced to slum status, and in one of the worst housing areas, the Gorbals, 40,000 people were living in appalling conditions.

In addition to great ocean liners like the Queen Mary, the Glasgow shipyards on the banks of the River Clyde were also one of the main suppliers of ships for the Royal Navy. This made them a target for German bombs during World War II, and Clydebank was heavily bombed in March 1941: 16,000 homes were completely destroyed, 35,000 people were made homeless, and just over 1,000 died. Across the UK, some 475,000 homes were destroyed by German bombing, prompting the establishment in 1945 of the New Towns Commission, led by Lord Reith, the first Director General of the BBC, who during the war had been appointed Minister of Works and Public Buildings.

Reith's commission led to the New Town Act of 1946, which recommended that New Town developments should have a population of up to 60,000, and should be located as far as possible on greenfield sites. The housing should be predominantly low-density, single-family housing ordered in neighbourhoods around a primary school, with a pub and shops selling staple foods. Out of the Commission came the 1946 New Town Act of Parliament, which led

to the construction of the first generation new towns, such as Stevenage and Harlow on the northern edges of London, which were modelled on the Garden Cities like nearby Letchworth and Welwyn, built on the instigation of Ebenezer Howard in the early twentieth century. Stevenage had a pedestrianized town centre and six neighbourhood communities, each planned with 10,000 homes, schools, a community centre, a pub, and shops.

An understandable disinclination to follow the hard, white modernism of the Bauhaus and of the German models, combined with a weariness with the burden of Empire might explain the infatuation in the immediate post-war Britain for the simple life in general and for Swedish housing models in particular, which provided the prototypes for the early British New Towns. This housing was characterized by shallow-pitched roofs, brick, load-bearing walls, vertically-boarded spandrels, and squarish, wood-framed picture-windows, usually painted white.

The first Scottish New Towns were East Kilbride, south of Glasgow, designated in 1947, and Glenrothes in Fife, launched in 1948. Car ownership at this point was extremely low among the working-class population, and transport in these New Towns meant the bus. In the two decades following the war, however, Keynesian economic management enabled British workers to enjoy a golden age of full employment which, combined with a more relaxed attitude towards working mothers, led to the spread of the two-income family. Inflation was steady at around 4 per cent; money wages rose from an average of £8 a week in 1951 to £15 a week by 1961; home-ownership spread from 35 per cent in 1939 to 47 per cent by 1966; and the relaxation of credit controls boosted the demand for consumer goods.

The consumer boom over the decade 1950-1960 can be clearly seen in the statistics for car and television ownership. In 1950, 2.3 million cars were registered in Britain, more than doubling by 1960 to 5.5 million. Television ownership increased even more spectacularly over the decade, with 344,000 licences to watch BBC television issued in 1950, rising to 10,470,000 in 1960. Although car ownership was booming, the relationship, still barely understood, between traffic and towns was a key concern in the early 1960s, and a report commissioned in 1960 by the Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, appeared towards the end of 1963, authored by Colin Buchanan, and entitled *Traffic in Towns*. The scale of the challenge was made clear in the comments of the Steering Group, which prefaced Buchanan's technical report: "It is impossible to spend any time on the study of the future of traffic in towns [...] without at once being appalled by the magnitude of the emergency that is coming upon us. [...] We are nourishing at immense cost a monster of great potential destructiveness, and yet we love him dearly. [...] To refuse to accept the challenge it presents would be an act of defeatism."¹ Such

1 "Report of the Steering Group" in Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary

was the impact of this governmental study that it became a best-selling Penguin paperback a year later. Buchanan forecast that there would be 27 million cars in the UK by 1980 and 40 million by 2000. He was almost exactly correct in his forecast, there were 27.2 million cars in 1980.

With rapidly evolving patterns of demand and ownership, the design of motor cars evolved dramatically over the 1950s in step with the new consumerism. A state-of-the-art car in 1959 was the Triumph Mayflower. In the design of its bodywork a hint of the horse-drawn carriage survived, while the name Mayflower was that of the ship that took the Pilgrim Fathers to America in 1620. This was still a world in which Britannia ruled the waves.

But by the 1950s, the traffic was not East to West across the Atlantic but West to East, as Europe became enthralled with North American consumer culture. In 1954, for example, we find the radically progressive architects Peter and Alison Smithson enthusing in one of their texts over American advertising and “that automotive masterpiece, the Cadillac convertible”. And the fascination with the American way of life informed notable exhibitions, such as “This is Tomorrow”, held 1956 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, which heralded the beginnings of Pop Art in Britain. One of the most striking images on display was Richard Hamilton’s collage entitled “Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?”, which proposes that the new aesthetic norms of the mid-1950s were set by consumer products: television, vacuum cleaner, tinned convenience food, and so on. Through the window we glimpse a Warner Brothers cinema showing a film from 1957, “The Jazz Singer”. Hamilton is proposing, however, that this sort of public entertainment was a thing of the past, and that modern man finds his pleasures and distractions within the home. A year later the same artist returned to the theme of consumption with a painting tellingly entitled “Hommage à Chrysler Corp.”

Ten year after the Triumph Mayflower appeared, the Morris Mini was launched in Britain to instant acclaim and commercial success. The Scottish response to the Mini car was Hilman Imp, built at Linwood, south of Glasgow, and launched in 1963. This high-tech urban runabout was rear-engined, as was the American car on which it was modelled, the Chevrolet Corvair, which had first appeared in the showrooms in 1959.

Architecture was also on the move, and by 1960 the British discourse had abandoned the post-war obligation to modesty, self-effacement, and to the austere Scandinavian modernism of the early New Towns, in favour of a fascination with Brutalism, the machine, and the megastructure, a term brought into common parlance by the British architectural historian

Office, 1963), no pagination.

Reyner Banham. The most influential early examples of the vast urban megastructure came, however, from Japan. Kenzo Tange's Tokyo Bay project was first published in 1960, as was Arato Isozaki's vision of Space City. When Space City and the Hillman Imp are brought together, we enter the world of Cumbernauld New Town.

Two designers gave Cumbernauld its form: the city planner Hugh Wilson and the Geoffrey Copcutt, who from 1953 until 1963 was group leader in the architecture office of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation. An early drawing by Copcutt shows a 1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible driving into an extraordinary megastructure, quite unlike anything that had ever been built in Britain or even Europe. Abandoning the neighbourhood planning of Stevenage and Harlow, Cumbernauld offered a completely different conception of the town, which resolutely aimed to be a city of the future than a cozy reminiscence about the past. The site had been specified as early as 1955 and the New Town was designated in December that year, under the New Towns Act of 1946. The location is in the central belt of Scotland between the two principal cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Again in marked contrast to the earlier British New Towns, the chosen site for Cumbernauld was not in flat farmland, but centred on a hilly ridge, characteristic of central Scotland. The previously underprivileged urban poor from Glasgow were to be relocated to the higher ground favoured by the rich, with the intention that everyone living and working in the New Town would have views out to the neighbouring hills and distant mountains.

Working with the ridge rather than against it, the preliminary planning proposals were produced in April 1958, specifying a linear town centre running along the ridge from east to west, compact housing to the north and south, and a traffic plan that almost entirely separated the motor car from pedestrians, while giving both easy access to the town centre. As specified in the 1958 plan, Cumbernauld New Town would house 50,000 people, 80% of whom would come from Glasgow. Average family size was envisaged as 3.5 persons, with 70% of the families owning cars. The working population was to be 45% of the whole, of whom 80% would work in the town and 20% (ca. 7,000) would commute to workplaces outside the town. In short, the anticipated residents were expected to be young, physically active, productive, and with relatively small and highly-motorized families.

The traffic plan was key to the whole town, articulating the megastructure on the ridge and the surrounding housing. A major road runs along the ridge under the town centre, linking to a hierarchy of trunk roads, radial roads, collector and distributor roads, development roads, and pedestrian walkways leading to the housing. One of the great innovations of the project was that motorized traffic and pedestrian paths are completely independent of each other. The hilly topography of the site meant that the main roads often had to be constructed with

embankments and deep cuttings in order to achieve reasonable gradients. Rather than compete with the sculptural nature of the roads, it was decided from the outset not to build alongside them. Heavily planted with trees, which are now mature, the roads have a great visual power when seen either from a moving car or from the pedestrian bridges that cross them.

Sitting at the centre of this dynamic road system, rather like a spider, is the town centre. In his first sketches, the architect Geoffrey Copcutt envisaged a multilevel plinth, surmounted by a dramatically inclined high-level structure, reminiscent of the constructivist fantasies of El Lissitzky or Konstantin Melnikov. As specified by the 1958 proposal:

“The central area of the town will provide sites for shops, offices and public, cultural and recreational buildings and it is considered that there should also be some housing in the high blocks within the area, to ensure that it maintains a lively atmosphere even when the shops and offices close.”

Copcutt and his associates worked on the design of the centre in 1961 and 1962, which was made public in December 1962. He left the project soon afterwards, however, and the basic design was implemented by his successor, the architect Dudley Leaker. As an early model photograph shows, the acrobatics of the early sketch had given way to a massive, linear concrete structure on eight levels, topped by high-level penthouses, and accessed from car parking below and pedestrian ramps from the sides. The centre was intended to serve all the needs of the community, and the original plan envisaged shops, banks, cinema, community hall, sports centre, police and fire stations, a technical college, hotels and restaurants, and the usual civic and commercial offices. A whole town centre along one spine, served by pedestrian walkways, with built in car parking and delivery bays, with escalators linking the various level. It should be noted that this project was conceived in the early 1960s, when the schemes of Tange and Isozaki were still paper fantasies, and the Archigram group was just starting. On a Scottish hillside, however, a progressive development corporation was actually committed to building a megastructure.

Only one third of the initially-planned structure was actually built, however, but even this completed segment is spectacular. It is a very complicated building to understand. At ground level there are loading docks for goods and freight, parking at road level on the north side and on two lower levels on the south side, where the site falls down the hill. There is a mezzanine storage level above the loading docks, and above that is the main shopping level. Higher again is an office level with some further, specialized shops, and the megastructure is completed on the top level by penthouse apartments, a restaurant, a ballroom, and a bowling alley. Further complicating the section are the use of not one, but two structural systems. The basic system is composed of columns and waffle slabs, which give an effect of coffered ceilings. There is

then a secondary support system with six huge vertical piloti, which push up through the lower structure and emerge at the top, where they are linked with equally enormous cantilevered beams, which support the penthouses and restaurant on the top level. Even though the centre was built in a reduced form, it still incorporated such major urban elements as the largest supermarket in Scotland, which was also the second largest in the UK at the time, and a modern hotel. With housing incorporated on the top level, the ambition was to have a pulsating town centre day and night, where residents – most of whom had come from Glasgow – would rediscover the excitement of the big city. This sense of energy and activity comes across clearly in the architects' drawings of the shopping mall, and resonates in early photographs of the new centre. A German critic writing at the time confirms the initial success in creating a lively town centre: "The wealth of neighbouring activities allow multifaceted life to pulsate. The residents are encouraged to take an active part in shaping their lives. Living in the 'New Town' becomes attractive, the centre becomes an urban experience."²

In contrast to the thriving centre, the housing at Cumbernauld was designed to nurture peace, calm, and a positive combination of community and privacy. It was set around the megastructure on falling sites to the north and south, which offered the architects and planners a wonderful opportunity to escape from the dreary conformity of repetitive house designs. There was great diversity in the housing types, catering for different family-sizes and life styles. These ranged from small, one-person units, single-storey courtyard houses, split-level housing with bedrooms on both floors, two-storey family houses of various types, Y-shaped blocks of maisonettes, 12 sixteen-storey system-built blocks, and the penthouses in the town centre. All the housing units had provision for car parking, but were principally accessible by foot. The planning favoured informal groups, with privacy and sunlight as key determining factors. Particularly striking even now are the very carefully detailed outdoor finishes. The brick-built walls are finished in traditional Scottish harling, which is a stucco containing small stones, while the roof slates, like those on the Glasgow tenements, are grey-blue from the quarries in Ballachulish. Almost in deference to the previous lives of the residents, the cobbles that form the pathways were sourced from Glasgow, where they had previously been used for the tram tracks, which were torn up in the early 1960s. The former Glaswegians were thus walking on stones in Cumbernauld that they had trodden on previously in the big city. But to insist that in spite of these similarities, Cumbernauld was not simply a distant suburb of Glasgow, boulders from the site were placed strategically in the pathways and courtyards of the housing areas and in the childrens' playgrounds, to show that this was a new, autonomous

2 Hermann Stumme, *Bauwelt*, September 1963, p. 997.

town, set among the green hills and rocky outcrops.

Each housing sections had one small shop for essentials, plus schools and churches. These were designed not by the Development Corporation architects, but by outside design practices. Some of the results are spectacular. The Edinburgh-based architect Alan Reiach designed Kildrum Parish, inaugurated in 1962. Appropriate, perhaps, to the Episcopalian Church, its hall-like interior is very much in the Scandinavian manner, but topped with a strongly Brutalist concrete bell-tower. Responding to the historical sectarian divisions between Catholics and Protestants that still blights social life in Glasgow,³ each housing section had a catholic and protestant churches and schools. The move to a new, better designed housing and a town with no history of religious confrontation calmed down the traditional animosities, and sectarianism has never been a significant problem in Cumbernauld.

Like the churches, the design of the new schools was entrusted to leading Scottish architects of the period, and a very striking example was Kildrum Primary School, designed by the Glasgow firm Gillespie, Kidd and Coia and completed in 1961. In keeping with the Town Centre, this was a spectacular structure in *béton brut*, in which the various functions of the school were giving strong physical expression, right down to the water tank that dominated the outdoor playground. Sadly abandoned, it caught fire in 2013 and was subsequently demolished. Only a concrete handrail survives. This decline from a powerful and progressive statement of hope to a sad fragment may be taken to characterize the mixed fortunes and equally mixed reception of Cumbernauld from its heyday in the late 1960s to its nadir half-a-century later.

The reception history can be traced in the accounts of contemporary critics. When it was first completed an unsigned commentary in the *Guardian* newspaper described Cumbernauld as “[...]a motor-age town which is being planned on distinct lines to serve both pedestrians and motorists. [...] It will be a complete urban community planned down to the last advertising sign. It is likely to become a new northern mecca for architects, road engineers, and sociologists.”⁴ European commentators were equally enthusiastic, and the German magazine *Der Architekt* insisted in September 1964 that: “This town will be seen as a prototype for a development that one can already prophesize will take over the entire country in the not-too-distant future. The Cumbernauld experiment is of the greatest interest

3 The most public demonstrations of this sectarian strife are the so-called “Old Firm” football matches between Celtic, which is the Catholic club located in the East end of the city, and Rangers, the protestant club from the West end.

4 Anon., *The Guardian*, June 16, 1960.

for all the countries of Western Europe [...].⁵ In a similar vein, the high priestess of North American architectural criticism, Ada Louise Huxtable waxed lyrical in her review in the *New York Times*: “Cumbernauld satisfies in a way that towns always satisfied: with intimate walks, surprise vistas, humanly scaled buildings at human distances and variety of design. [...] Above all Cumbernauld is Scottish. Its pleasant contemporary houses make traditional jagged outlines against a blue or dour sky: the low-key palette of soft, dull grays is local and familiar. Its esthetic is stark, severe, northern, and restrained.”⁶ Patrick Nuttgens, writing in the *Architectural Review* in December 1967 called Cumbernauld “[...] one of the most important sites in town planning today,”⁷ and in that year it attracted some 10,000 official visitors from sixty countries and won the prestigious R. S. Reynolds Award for Community Architecture of the American Institute of Architects in competition with Vällingby (Stockholm) and Tapiola (Espoo, Finland). The AIA jury noted that the conflict between town and motor car had been successfully resolved, with the Town Centre and the circulation system bringing the urban environment and the motor car into what it called “a powerful resolution.” Another North American voice, this time Wolf von Eckardt writing in the *Washington Post* praised Cumbernauld for its bold novelty: “This is a different New Town, it is the antithesis, as it were, of Reston’s Columbia and Finland’s lovely Tapiola. It has become a mecca for city planners from all over the world.”⁸ Confirming this thesis, a typical week in 1968 saw official visits to Cumbernauld by 18 French architect-planners, 13 Danish engineers, 23 Dutch members of the International Society of City and Regional Planners, the city architect and deputy city engineer of Auckland, and three delegations of US architects and estate consultants.

Not all the responses to this radical redefinition of a town centre were positive, of course, and even at the official opening of Cumbernauld in 1967, Princess Margaret told a local dignitary that she wanted to get out “as soon as possible”. From the very outset, notes of caution had been expressed even by the most positive critics about the siting of the town on a hilltop in Western Scotland. Given the prevailing westerly winds, the east-west orientation and the many openings into the Centre, cold draughts were guaranteed. Indeed, waiting for a bus in the street level bus station was akin on a stormy day to standing in a wind tunnel. In section too there were problems, as the siting of the shopping centre on the ridge meant that the pedestrian access was invariably uphill. The housing, too, attracted criticism: the ultra-

5 R. Rosner, “Cumbernauld, die Stadt für das Auto”. *Der Architekt*, 13, no. 9. (September 1964), pp. 267/268.

6 Ada Louise Huxtable, *New York Times*, 24 November, 1965.

7 Patrick Nuttgens, *Architectural Review*, 1 December 1967.

8 Wolf von Eckardt, *Washington Post*, 16 February 1969.

conservative English magazine *Country Life* bemoaned its “monotone” character, and there were widespread complaints that it was over-compact. Indeed, even the redoubtable Ada Louise Huxtable wrote of “crushing densities”.

More significantly, the historical moment for the *grand récit*, for the single grand narrative that ordered the whole was already being challenged just as Cumbernauld was launched into the world. Symptomatically Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, which first appeared in 1966, insisted that:

“Architects can no longer afford to be intimidated by the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture. I like elements which are hybrid rather than ‘pure’, compromising rather than ‘clean’, distorted rather than ‘straightforward’, ambiguous rather than ‘articulated’, perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as ‘interesting’, conventional rather than ‘designed’, accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. I am for messy vitality over obvious unity. I include the non sequitur and proclaim the duality.”⁹

There was also a lot of hostile comment in the London-based architectural press, some of which was spectacularly ill-informed. Stephen Mullin in *Architectural Design*, for example, proclaimed that “It’s not Cumbernauld’s fault that it happens to be in Scotland”.¹⁰ He went on to argue that the town was too dense for localized car transit, so that it was not worthwhile driving from the housing areas to the Centre. On the other hand, it was time too dispersed to walk everywhere in the wind and the rain that Mullin saw as the default feature of Scottish weather.

The real problem and indeed tragedy, was that only the first phase was built as planned. The sports facilities, the community centre, and the extended shopping mall and double stack of penthouses were never built, so that the centre was stripped of the energy and life that it was supposed to have. Similarly, the demographics were wrong, so that in 1968 the population had only reached 24,000, some 46,000 down on the ultimately planned 70,000. Great efforts were made in the early 1970s, however, and a Woolco department store was opened in 1975. A year later, however, the Golden Eagle hotel closed and was demolished after a vehicle crashed into it and rendered it unstable. Towards the end of the 1970s, the money for investment in the West of Scotland was flowing back into the regeneration of Glasgow itself rather than into the 1960s New Towns. As the Convenor of the Strathclyde Regional Council argued in 1977: “The

9 Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 22.

10 Stephen Mullin, “Day Tripper”, *Architectural Design*, September 1968, p. 409.

vast majority of people who left Glasgow still have a great affection for it. But if Glasgow dies, the west of Scotland dies with it.”¹¹ The industrial decline that blighted Glasgow at the time also hit Cumbernauld, which had failed to attract the commercial enterprises that had been anticipated in the 1958 proposal. A report published by the Urban Research Bureau noted that in 1970 the town offered only 1,663 jobs for male residents, concluding: “The fact that Cumbernauld did not attract sufficient industry and commerce, in spite of large building grants, loans, training subsidies and other forms of assistance, is a very great disappointment both to the Corporation and to the residents. It adds to the discomfort of living in Cumbernauld and increases the living expenses in travelling to and from work.”¹²

Cumbernauld responded by turning to the media of film to explain the particular charms of the town to an increasingly sceptical world. A short feature film was made in 1977, called *Cumbernauld Hit*, which gave the director a chance to track around the city. The title is a play on words: a hit is a success, as in hit song; but it is also slang for a theft. The title, therefore, explained that the successful town of Cumbernauld was the site of a planned hijack, staged by an evil female villain. It was made by the Development Corporation, and is a strange mix of James Bond and slapstick. Of more lasting consequence, the cult film Gregory’s Girl, a coming-of-age rom-com directed by Bill Forsyth and released in 1980, used Cumbernauld as its backdrop.

But the mood of decline could not be halted simply by a movie. The postmodern shift of emphasis and funding back to the old city of Glasgow at the expense of the New Town was further aggravated by the election in May 1979 of Margaret Thatcher. One of her very first acts was to pass a new housing act of parliament in 1980, which allowed tenants in social housing to buy the houses they lived in off the town council. This was the “Right to Buy” initiative, which launched the shortage of affordable housing that is so catastrophic in Britain today. At the design level, the “Right to Buy” meant that the cohesion and integrity that had marked post-war public housing in Britain was destroyed in favour of statements of individuality, whereby new stone facings at odds with the neighbouring houses in a terrace, elaborate street doors, porches and the like were added to assert private ownership. Following the collapse of local-government funding, the Development Corporation was dissolved in 1996, and Cumbernauld became just another provincial town, struggling to survive.

Perhaps because of its much-heralded arrival as the saviour of late twentieth-century urbanism, the backlash against Cumbernauld was particularly extreme. In 2001 and 2015 it

11 Geoff Shaw, Convenor of Strathclyde Regional Council, October 1977, quoted *Architects’ Journal*, 166, no. 40 (5 October, 1977), p. 628.

12 Ferdynand Zweig, *The Cumbernauld Study* (London: Urban Research Bureau, 1970), p. 29.

was singled out as the “Carbuncle of the Year” by the Scottish design magazine *Urban Realm*, a dubious distinction given to “the most dismal town in Scotland”. It was also described as the Kabul of the North. Although undeserved, it is not difficult to understand the hostility attracted by the unfinished torso of the Town Centre, which might be described as the ruins of the post-war social democratic consensus. It would act as a telling illustration to Mrs. Thatcher’s speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on 21 May 1988, in which she insisted “There is no such thing as society.” But the story turns again, and the architectural profession over the last ten or fifteen years has reappraised the virtues and the obvious shortcomings of the radical but only half-completed New Town.

In 2002 Icomos – the architectural heritage advisory body of the United Nations – cited Cumbernauld as one of the best examples of 20th century British architecture, noting that the town is “an exemplar of high-quality design worthy of respect and preservation.” In the attempt to bring new life to the town, a new shopping centre, running beside the old megastructure was built in phases and completed in 2007, adding a new supermarket, 42 shops and 3,000 parking spaces to the town. In the first decades of the new century, increasing interest in green urbanism, combined with the expansion of email, social media, online shopping, and general digital connectivity, made life in the major cities less of an imperative that it had previously been. The diminishing attraction of the major cities was exacerbated over the same period, particularly for young families, by the escalating cost of housing, poor and diminishing provision of public services, and heavily and increasingly polluted air. In the Preliminary Planning Report from 1958, the integration of urban structure and nature – contrasting urban density with broad horizons – was highlighted as a key ambition: “[...] the low building forms contrasting with the tree belts, above them slightly higher blocks rising at either end, and above them again the strong lines of the central area and the point blocks rising at either end, the whole set against the wide expanse of the sky of the panorama of the Kilsyth Hills.”¹³ This close relation between architecture and nature is now seen as a positive, and the prospect of living in a small town set on a ridge among the hills has become increasingly attractive.

After years of negative headlines, Cumbernauld has seen a revival over the last decade. The current demolition of the tower blocks undoubtedly weakens the silhouette of the city and removes the vertical accents intended by the planners, but is nevertheless in accord with current anxieties about the residential tower. Indeed, when the residents of the residential

13 Cumbernauld Development Council, *Preliminary Planning Proposals*, First Addendum Report (May 1959), pp. 13-14.

towers were asked in 2001 if these structures should be pulled down and the housing replaced by low-rise alternatives, 72% of those who responded to the survey were in favour of demolition.¹⁴

A strong vertical dynamic is added, however, by the mature trees. The housing areas demarcated in the initial design had been partly determined by the existence of mature trees, and By 1972, a million trees and shrubs had been planted in the town, with the result that more than half of Cumbernauld's town centre is green space: gardens, parks, woodlands, and generous green margins to the major roads, which are now impressively lined with mature trees. Several initiatives at both local and regional level have been launched to build on the green legacy left by the town's original planners. Working with the regional council for North Lanarkshire and with the Forestry Commission Scotland, the Cumbernauld Living Landscape initiative, as one example, is dedicated to managing and linking woodland areas, protecting the town's green circulation networks, and improving access to green space. The results have been encouraging. In 2013 Cumbernauld won the Beautiful Scotland Award for the best "Small City". A year later, the UK's Royal Town Planning Institute awarded the town a certificate to mark its success as a New Town, and in 2016, it gained the Garden for Life Biodiversity Award for its commitment to biodiversity.

As Hugh Wilson, the chief city planner of Cumbernauld said in 1970 that the most important thing about Cumbernauld from the planner's point of view was that it was actually built. It certainly deserves a stronger presence in the literature on twentieth-century city planning, not only as a spectacular megastructure, doomed never to be completed, but also as tale of redemption, in which the mid-twentieth century city of the future as transmuted into the pleasant, eminently habitable green town of the twenty-first century.

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14 *Cumbernauld News*, 2 March 2011.