

# Scottish 'New Town': Pattern for Growth

## Cumbernauld Has Its Mud and Blues but It Delights Eye

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Nine years ago the new town of Cumbernauld, 14 miles from Glasgow, was "just virgin fields and white sheets of paper," according to Dudley Leaker, chief architect and planning officer of the Cumbernauld Development Corporation. Not a line had been drawn to indicate where, ultimately, 70,000 people would live.

Today Cumbernauld is clustered neatly on a 930-acre hill-top that previously knew only sheep, well on the way to its first population goal of 50,000. It was also the first goal of touring American builders who have just completed a survey of the best in European planning and housing design.

In spite of its newness, Cumbernauld neither shocks nor startles; it seems to belong to the rolling green Scottish landscape, as does the old town of Cumbernauld below it. But it has shocked and startled professional planners and critics who come from all parts of the world to tramp through the gentle hills and gray mists to see what many consider to be the best example of a notable postwar phenomenon: the British "new town."

**22 Towns in 19 Years**

Cumbernauld's quietly radical scheme, devised in 1956 by the architect-planner Hugh Wilson, packs houses tightly together in open country. It represents the culmination of 20 years of trial and error in Britain's post-war efforts to decentralize bulging cities and channel exploding population into orderly urban growth.

Under the New Towns Act of 1946 and subsequent revisions, the British have built or begun about 22 Government-planned towns in 19 years. It would take a town of 70,000 every two months to keep up with the urban growth problem.

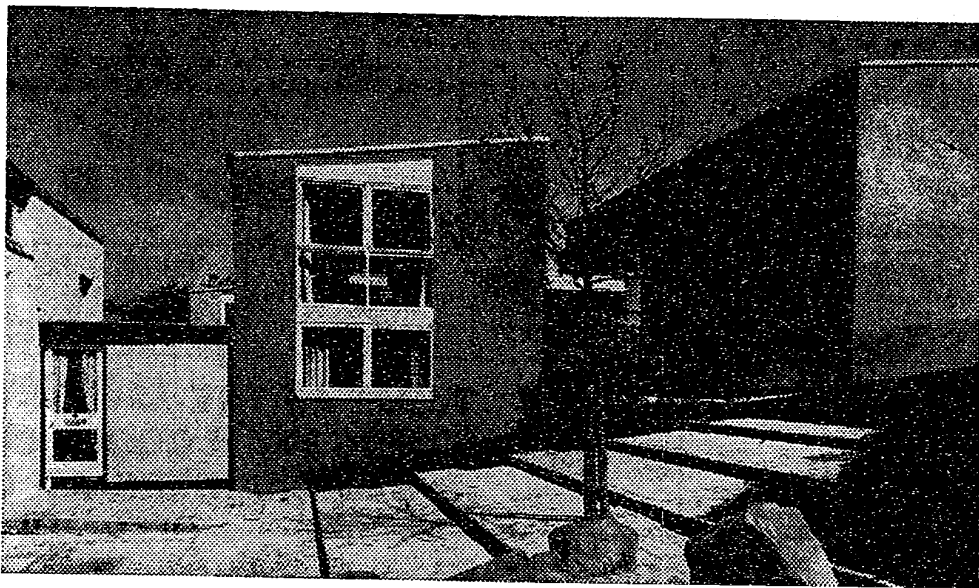
In the span of a generation, these plans have produced a series of low-density, lower-middle-class new towns of almost identical character—Crawley, Stevenage and Harlow are three examples within a 25-mile radius of London—and a sharp upsurge of "new town blues."

Like the others, Cumbernauld has had its mud and blues, but it breaks the new-town pattern.

Cumbernauld's closely clustered row houses and apartment blocks hugging the triangular hilltop represent a complete departure from the British tradition of the "garden city" where every man's castle is a cozy detached house and garden. This is a compact, high-density town, with 70 to 120 people to the acre, increasing in density toward its center. It is sometimes closer to city than to country living.



Children of Cumbernauld, Scotland, scramble through a playground enclosed by rows of houses and apartments. Cumbernauld is one of 22 post-war, Government-planned towns.



Some of the hilly town's split-level houses. Terraced pavement includes old cobblestones brought from Glasgow, 14 miles away, and the site has been landscaped with heather.

©Cumbernauld Development Corporation

It is visually exciting. The grouping of its small, close buildings, beautifully related to the land in its more successful sections, delights the eye.

Open spaces are as carefully designed as structures and landscaping starts where buildings end. Rivulets of round, smooth pebbles join house and grass; paved areas are traced with old Glasgow cobblestones. Grassy mounds and random boulders are placed as artfully as sculpture; building shapes appear as rhythmic abstractions; masses of red roses make soft and brilliant contrast to slate gray walls.

Cumbernauld satisfies in a way that towns always satisfied: with intimate walks, surprise vistas, humanly scaled buildings at human distances, changing views and variety of design.

It is a pedestrians' town in the automobile age, its main traffic restricted to encircling

roads. A system of footpaths serves the residents and makes the intimate module of its design. It is a remarkable creative exercise in the pursuit of total environment, carried out with extraordinarily subtle and sophisticated details.

Above all Cumbernauld is Scottish. Its pleasant contemporary houses make traditional jagged rooflines 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.

The town has faults. The planners' initial enchantment with compactness led to some crushing densities and design monotony in the earlier sections, effects that had to be tempered. They make the garden city's champions shudder.

Even the town's admirers consider the apartment blocks less successful than the clustered houses. All homes are

rented — at Britain's artificially maintained and controversial low levels, Cumbernauld is still struggling with the one-class, one-age group, new-town syndrome, and there is a discouraging lag between its housing and the shops and services of the town center.

The center is in construction now, straddling the highway like a mammoth concrete battleship, a concept oddly at variance with the cottage style of the housing. When it is done it will supply the "amenities" — dance hall, cinema, bowling and banqueting — without which the younger generation finds rustic beauty unbearable.

The country squire is being replaced by the Mods and the Rockers. Garden cities are out and urban togetherness is in. With Cumbernauld town planning has entered a new age.