



'What's it called?': Cumbernauld New Town and New Conceptions of Mid-Twentieth Century Urbanism

Jessica TAYLOR, PhD. Student
Edinburgh College of Art, United Kingdom
jessica_taylor@me.com

The focus of this proposed talk is Cumbernauld New Town, designated in 1955, and widely considered revolutionary in concept and built form, both by many contemporary architectural/planning commentators and by subsequent historians. It was hailed by its advocates as the first significant built response to the widespread criticisms of early postwar town planning within early 1950s architectural debates in Britain; the first new towns, especially, had been branded monotonous, low density housing estates with monofunctional centres, and Cumbernauld would rectify these faults with a dynamic, densely mixed new formula.

The talk will examine the development of Cumbernauld from designation in 1955 to the late 70s, when the final form of the town was settled. Through in-depth research into primary sources, extensive interviews and a comprehensive field-survey of the entire original new town, it assesses whether the picture of a sharp rupture within postwar UK modernism, with Cumbernauld in the vanguard of change, might be simplified or misleading.

It will conclude that the concept and realisation of Cumbernauld was indeed an incremental development of, rather than revolutionary rupture from, the patterns of its predecessors, and that it drew heavily on a range of mainstream contemporary and planning influences of the late 1950s and 60s.

KEY WORDS: Cumbernauld, New Town, Garden City, mixed-use, density, housing.