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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Stonehouse: Scotland's last new town, c. 1967–1977

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Abstract

This article examines the proposals for Stonehouse, designated as the sixth Scottish new town in 1972 but abandoned in 1976. Several themes emerge, with lessons for the wider urban and political histories of 1970s Britain. First, the evolving plans demonstrate the 'malleability' of the post-war 'new town idea', conceptually and organizationally. Second, cancellation was the consequence of short-term factors, changing strategic objectives and local government reform, rather than being the result of a sudden ideological pivot towards inner-city renewal. Third, Stonehouse counters established narratives of the practice and decline of regional planning in post-war Britain. At least in a Scottish context, regional planning took on new forms during the mid-1970s.

On 10 May 1976, two families became the first residents of Murray Drive in the Lanarkshire town of Stonehouse.¹ Comprising 96 houses (and a herd of concrete elephants, created by the artist Stan Bonnar), Murray Drive was the first built manifestation of Scotland's sixth post-war new town, designated in 1972 (Figure 1). Stonehouse's future as a new town initially seemed bright. Many businesses reportedly wished to locate there, among them the German car manufacturer Opel.² However, at the same time as the first families arrived, storm clouds were gathering. *The Times* reported that 'the first citizens of Britain's newest new town' were 'quite possibly also virtually the last'.³ Two days after they arrived, work was halted.⁴ Within the history of the UK's new towns programme, Stonehouse has a double distinction: the last new town to be designated, and the first to be scrapped. Other new towns – notably Craigavon – were curtailed, and some proposals, such as Llantrisant, never reached designation, but only Stonehouse was abruptly halted with so little achieved on the ground. For *The Times*, this decision meant not only the writing-off of the £4 million already spent, but also the end of 'a

¹'Why Britain's newest town may end on the scrapheap', *Times*, 10 May 1976.

²'Stonehouse concern over cutback', *Herald*, 24 Jan. 1974.

³'Why Britain's newest town'.

⁴'New town scrapped to help the inner city', *Architects' Journal*, 163 (19 May 1976).



Figure 1. Houses at Murray Drive, Stonehouse, with elephants by Stan Bonnar. Photograph: Alistair Fair, 2021.

whole generation of planning concepts'.⁵ The *Architects' Journal*, too, noted the 'significant change in emphasis', with cancellation being accompanied by a commitment to divert funding and personnel to Glasgow's regeneration.⁶

The 32 new towns in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland begun between the mid-1940s and the early 1970s were among the flagship elements of the planned post-war state.⁷ Their intellectual origins lie in the early twentieth-century 'garden city' movement, which, inspired by Ebenezer Howard and others, called for planned urban decentralization. These ideas were taken up internationally.⁸ In Britain, the post-1945 new towns programme was especially closely associated with the practice of 'regional planning', which flourished during the 1940s and again in the 1960s.⁹ Regional planning had two inter-related aspects: first, the distribution of economic resources in order to address disparities; and second, a concern with the form of urbanization and urban living conditions that manifested itself in the planned dispersal of population. In this respect, the new towns embodied the process of regional planning and were an essential tool in its realization.¹⁰ The 1946 New Towns Act created a process whereby new towns were 'designated' by central government, with their development being managed

⁵'Why Britain's newest town'.

⁶'New town scrapped'.

⁷G. Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge, 2019), 3–9.

⁸R. Wakeman, *Practicing Utopia: An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement* (Chicago, 2016).

⁹U.A. Wannop, *The Regional Imperative: Regional Planning and Governance in Britain, Europe and the United States* (London, 1995), xv.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 7; P. Damesick, 'Strategic choice and uncertainty: regional planning in southeast England', in R. Hudson and J. Lewis (eds.), *Regional Planning in Europe* (London, 1982), 85–111 (85–9);

by unelected 'development corporations'. The new towns thus contrasted with the contemporaneous and sometimes sizeable urban projects of local authorities. In Scotland, the central government body overseeing the new towns process was the Scottish Office (in Edinburgh), which negotiated with the Treasury (in London). In their government origins and relationship with regional policy, the Scottish new towns have sometimes been seen as an anti-municipal gesture.¹¹ They certainly represented doubts about Glasgow's ability to solve its housing problem quickly and in well-designed ways.¹² More controversially, it has been suggested that the new towns served to weaken Glasgow, politically, economically and socially.¹³

The first new towns were designated in the late 1940s, including East Kilbride and Glenrothes in Scotland. The former was one of several new towns proposed in the Clyde Valley Regional Plan, a 1946 report commissioned by the Scottish Office which took in Glasgow and its hinterland. New town designations stalled in the early 1950s, but Cumbernauld, north of Glasgow, was begun in 1955. At the start of the 1960s, amid concern for the economy and renewed interest in regional planning, further new towns were created. In Scotland, Livingston was designated in 1962 and Irvine in 1966. Across the UK, the designations of the 1960s were increasingly ambitious. Not only were they larger than their predecessors, but planners also sought to accommodate an increasingly affluent, leisured and mobile society. Meanwhile, residents embraced home-centred ways of living, enjoying the privacy and opportunities of new town life.¹⁴ By the late 1970s, however, the attention of planners and politicians alike was shifting to the 'inner city', which, as a place and an idea, was increasingly the target of policy initiatives.¹⁵ The new towns were portrayed as having accelerated its decline.¹⁶ Labour's Peter Shore indicated new support for the inner city in late 1976.¹⁷ He subsequently commented that his words were not intended to be anti-new town, but in 1981 the Conservatives' Michael Heseltine announced that the remaining development corporations would eventually close.¹⁸ There was a parallel shift away from regional planning by central government during the 1980s.¹⁹

D. Diamond, 'New towns in their regional contexts', in H. Evans (ed.), *New Towns: The British Experience* (London, 1972), 54–95.

¹¹F. Urban, 'Modernising Glasgow – tower blocks, motorways and new towns, 1940–2010', *Journal of Architecture*, 23 (2018), 265–309 (266–7); R. Smith, 'Stonehouse – an obituary for a new town', *Local Government Studies*, 4 (1978), 57–64 (62).

¹²Wannop, *Regional Imperative*, 115.

¹³C. Collins and I. Levitt, 'The modernisation of Scotland and its impact on Glasgow, 1955–1979: "unwanted side effects" and vulnerabilities', *Scottish Affairs*, 25 (2015), 294–316.

¹⁴L. Abrams, B. Hazley, V. Wright and A. Kearns, 'Aspiration, agency and the production of new selves in Scottish new town, c. 1947–c. 2016', *Twentieth Century British History*, 29 (2018), 576–604.

¹⁵O. Saumarez Smith, 'Action for cities: the Thatcher government and inner-city policy', *Urban History*, 47 (2020), 274–91; P. Shapely, *Deprivation, State Interventions and Urban Communities in Britain, 1968–79* (Abingdon, 2018); A. Andrews, A. Kefford and D. Warner, 'Community, culture, crisis: the inner city in England, c. 1960–1990', *Urban History* (FirstView online publication).

¹⁶L. Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture: Imagining England* (Abingdon, 2019), 95.

¹⁷Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, 13.

¹⁸*Ibid.*; for Shore: Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, D-MKDC/1/1/14, minute of 5 Nov. 1976.

¹⁹Wannop, *Regional Imperative*, 130; R. Martin and P. Townroe, 'Changing trends and pressures in regional development', in P. Townroe and R. Martin (eds.), *Regional Development in the 1990s: The British Isles in Transition* (London, 1992), 13–24.

Stonehouse figures in histories of Britain's new towns, though discussions are typically brief.²⁰ Nonetheless, Roger Smith, writing in 1978 from a 'policy' perspective, has provided a useful chronology of the project.²¹ The ambitious *New Towns Record* anthology of the 1990s also included information about Stonehouse, including first-hand testimony, but was largely based on published sources.²² (Its availability on CD-ROM, coded for Windows 3.1/95, makes this material increasingly challenging to access.) Stonehouse's significance has hitherto largely been considered to lie in the moment of de-designation, rather than what was actually proposed or indeed the circumstances in which de-designation happened.²³ Even then, discussions are not only cursory but sometimes are also inaccurate: Anthony Alexander, for example, attributes Stonehouse's cancellation to Peter Shore.²⁴

An account of Stonehouse now does more than simply plug a gap in the literature. Stonehouse offers a particular window into the political and social challenges of 1970s Scotland and the ways in which they were navigated. Accordingly, this article seeks to nuance our understanding of what might initially seem like a dramatic pivot, from regional planning and new towns to inner-city regeneration. It recovers and contextualizes the plans for Stonehouse, and considers the circumstances in which de-designation occurred in order to shed new light on the connections between the new towns, regional planning and local government reform. It shows that new towns policy was created locally as well as nationally, and looks for continuities in the idea of regional planning as well as changes in direction. The discussion is rooted in the archive. Whereas the proposals for some of Stonehouse's near-contemporaries are documented in substantial illustrated publications, Stonehouse's early demise means much remained in outline. However, there are glimpses of what was proposed, and the decisions that were made along the way. In part, the story is one of an imagined future, but it also speaks to the way that, as Guy Ortolano writes of the unbuilt North Buckinghamshire New City of the early 1960s, 'the present was managed'.²⁵ Indeed, during their short life, the proposals were very real. While previous mentions of the abandonment of Stonehouse imply that there was a singular vision for the town, we shall see that there was an evolving sequence of proposals. A belief in planning was a constant, but the story of Stonehouse is also one of the malleability of the 'new town idea' during the 1970s.

The birth of a new town

The poor housing conditions in many working-class areas of Glasgow attracted attention from the late nineteenth century, and, despite the construction of

²⁰E.g. A. Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (Abingdon, 2009), ix; F.J. Osborn and A. Whittick, *New Towns: Their Origins, Achievements and Progress* (London, 1977), 457–8.

²¹Smith, 'Obituary'.

²²T. Duncan, 'Stonehouse – overview', *New Towns Record*, disc 1 (1996 Planning Exchange CD-ROM).

²³M. Glendinning, R. MacInnes and A. MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Edinburgh, 1997), 488.

²⁴Alexander, *Britain's New Towns*, 50.

²⁵G. Ortolano, 'Planning the urban future in 1960s Britain', *Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), 477–507 (482).

extensive new estates of council housing during the 1920s and 1930s, remained serious at the end of World War II.²⁶ After 1945, Glasgow Corporation sought to retain much of the city's population within its boundaries, combining new suburban estates with high-density inner-city redevelopment. However, the Scottish Office's commitment to regional planning and scepticism of Glasgow's capability to deliver led it to favour the planned reduction of the city's population through the construction of new towns.²⁷ The two approaches were bitterly debated; ultimately, elements of both were adopted. By the mid-1960s, the new towns at East Kilbride, Glenrothes and Cumbernauld had provided homes for 162,000 people.²⁸ Yet conditions in parts of Glasgow remained poor. In March 1968, it was reported that some 138,000 homes (38 per cent of the total) lacked a fixed bath; 22 per cent still had no private internal toilet.²⁹ It was also noted that the city appeared to be running out of housing sites, prompting proposals for ever-taller blocks of a kind which the Scottish Office believed was 'unacceptable to most people'.³⁰

From its inception in the 1940s, the new towns programme was framed in terms of 'self-containment', providing employment and leisure opportunities alongside housing. By the 1960s, mass mobility increasingly challenged the self-contained ideal, but providing jobs remained important: indeed, it increasingly dominated thinking. In 1962, responsibility for new towns within the Scottish Office was transferred to the newly formed Scottish Development Department (SDD).³¹ The SDD's creation reflected the recommendations of the 1961 Tothill report and embodied contemporary interest among policy-makers in the modernization of the Scottish economy. New towns would be motors of change. The 1963 report *Central Scotland: A Programme for Development and Growth* positioned new towns within a renewed policy of 'regional development', seeing them as 'growth areas' in which development would be concentrated.³² This line of thinking informed the designations of Livingston (1962) and Irvine (1966).³³ The report played down the role of existing centres: there was to be a 'new look' for Glasgow, but it was ultimately to have a 'support' function.³⁴ It was thought easier to build for modern industry in the new towns than to try to assemble suitable inner-urban sites; in addition, Glasgow's success in attracting industry was felt to be poor.³⁵ The city's image was thought to be off-putting.³⁶ With jobs being lost in west-central Scotland at a

²⁶L. Abrams, A. Kearns, B. Hazley and V. Wright, *Glasgow: High-Rise Homes, Estates and Communities in the Post-War Period* (Abingdon, 2020), 1.

²⁷Urban, 'Modernising Glasgow', 266–74.

²⁸National Records of Scotland (NRS), DD12/3776, White Paper: 'The Scottish New Towns'.

²⁹NRS, SEP15/510, J. Kerr memo, 4 Mar. 1968.

³⁰NRS, SEP15/510, A.A. Hughes memo, 11 Apr. 1968. For Glasgow's housing policy, see M. Glendinning and S. Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven, 1994), 220–40; also Abrams, Kearns, Hazley and Wright, *Glasgow*.

³¹I. Levitt, 'The origins of the Scottish Development Department, 1943–62', *Scottish Affairs*, 14 (1996), 42–63 (59).

³²*Central Scotland: A Programme for Development and Growth* (Cmd. 2188) (Edinburgh, 1963).

³³I. Hodgson, 'Irvine – overview', *New Towns Record*.

³⁴*Central Scotland*, paras. 82–5, 113.

³⁵'New new town for Scotland', *Architects' Journal*, 156 (13 Sep. 1972), 156.

³⁶Such perceptions were not unique to Glasgow: A. Andrews, 'Dereliction, decay and the problem of de-industrialization in Britain, c. 1968–1977', *Urban History*, 47 (2020), 236–96 (256).

high rate,³⁷ it was suggested that ‘new areas of growth must be built up rapidly if there is not to be a very severe lag in industrial development in the next five to seven years’.³⁸

The potential of the Stonehouse area (Figure 2) was first mooted in a 1966 White Paper on the Scottish economy. How, though, would development be delivered? Although moves were then afoot to designate a new town at Irvine, a different course was taken at Stonehouse. In 1965, Lanark County Council made an evaluation of its housing requirements.³⁹ Consideration was given to either a series of town extensions in Lanarkshire, or the creation of one or two ‘new communities’, housing up to 40,000 people.⁴⁰ The question was discussed with the minister of state for Scotland, Dickson Mabon, who invited the County to prepare proposals for the Larkhall/Stonehouse area, ‘primarily for the redeployment of population from Glasgow’.⁴¹ The need was also for ‘attractive sites for the expansion of employment in modern growth industries’.

It is significant that Stonehouse was described as a ‘new community’, rather than as a ‘new town’. This terminological difference highlighted the planned delivery of the town without using the powers of the New Towns Acts. There was a parallel in the contemporaneous proposals being drawn up by the County of Renfrew for a similar ‘new community’ at Erskine, intended for 35,000 people. Erskine was planned to include local-authority rented housing (built on an ‘out-county’ basis by Glasgow), housing for sale and rented housing provided by the Scottish Special Housing Association (SSHA), a government-funded body set up in the 1930s. The SSHA represented a distinctively Scottish means of subsidized housing provision, associated with overspill and economic development; it had no English or Welsh equivalent. It was intended that the SSHA would build an initial 2,000 houses at Stonehouse.⁴²

A Working Party reported early in 1967.⁴³ By July that year, it had been determined that the Stonehouse area could accommodate industrial development plus housing for up to 124,000 people.⁴⁴ The site’s advantages were rehearsed on several occasions during the next couple of years, including the amount of land available and its handy location adjacent to the A74/M74 route connecting Glasgow with England, something that would benefit employers as well as an increasingly mobile population.⁴⁵ The project was framed in terms which echoed the new towns: ‘a well-mixed community with high standards of social facilities’; tenure was to be mixed, with three-quarters of the housing being for rent and one quarter for sale.⁴⁶ As of the start of 1969, the plan comprised ‘a series of residential

³⁷NRS, SEP15/734, ‘Stonehouse New Town Designation Study’, 7: unemployment in Lanarkshire by 1971 was 8.7% compared with a Scottish average of 6.2% and a UK average of 3.9%.

³⁸NRS, SEP15/510, J.H. McGuinness memo, 15 Mar. 1968.

³⁹NRS, DD12/3092, ‘County of Lanark Development Plan: Supplementary Report’, Feb. 1970.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Glasgow City Archives (GCA), COI/10/17/18, ‘County of Lanark Development Plan, feasibility of the Stonehouse area’, Jul. 1967.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

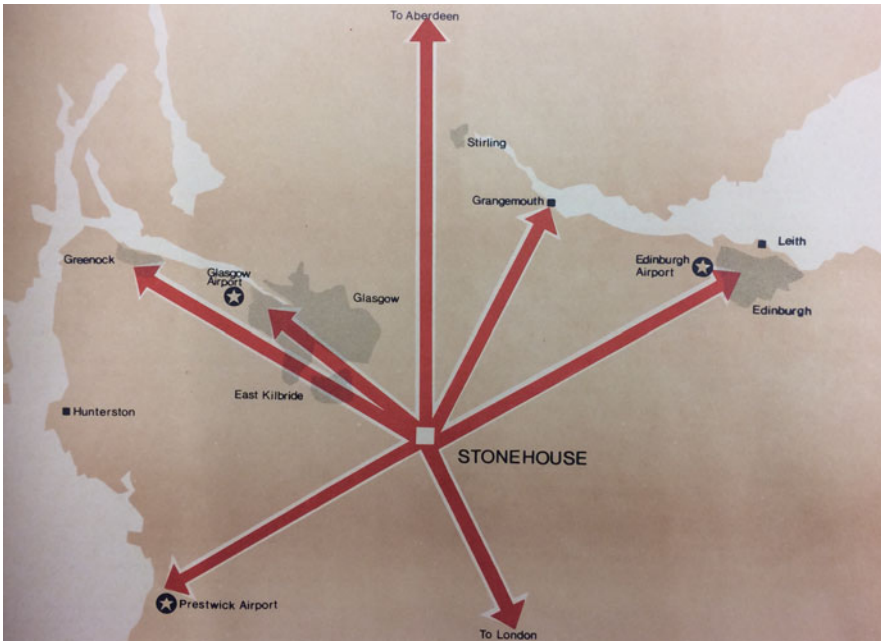


Figure 2. Stonehouse, location as shown in the booklet 'Scotland's new town centre for success', c. 1974. National Records of Scotland, SEP15/578, with the permission also of South Lanarkshire Archives.

neighbourhood groupings', with a first-phase target of 60–90,000 people and an 'ultimate population' of 120,000.⁴⁷

Having been framed as a 'new community', there was nonetheless continued discussion of the project's status. Mabon accepted the advantages of new town designation, but suggested that circumstances did not favour that approach; his thinking may well reflect the spending cuts that followed devaluation in late 1967. Lanarkshire's ability to lead the project, however, was now less clear, and it was increasingly understood that Glasgow Corporation was unlikely to build housing at Stonehouse. Although it would receive rent, the rates income would go to Lanark, and so the idea was considered 'burdensome'.⁴⁸ In this respect, Glasgow Corporation's changing political make-up was perhaps significant, with a period of Progressive leadership between 1968 and 1971 following sixteen years of Labour rule. Proof of Glasgow's hardening attitude came when, after much debate, the city council in early 1969 withdrew from Erskine, which was reconfigured solely as an SSHA project (to some relief in the Scottish Office; the SSHA, for its part, had long wished to tackle a substantial development).⁴⁹

Thus far, we have seen that, although not unlike an English overspill project, the proposed involvement of the SSHA cast Stonehouse (like Erskine) in a distinctively

⁴⁷NRS, DD12/3092, 'County of Lanark Development Plan, Supplementary Report', Feb. 1970.

⁴⁸NRS, DD12/3094, 'Urban development' [1969].

⁴⁹NRS, DD12/3095, 'Erskine development', 31 Mar. 1969.

'Scottish' light. However, with Glasgow's withdrawal and doubts about Lanarkshire's commitment, the project now took a new – and similarly distinctive – turn. The cause was Scottish local government reorganization. The 1969 Wheatley report recommended a two-tier system of administration with large, strategic 'regional' councils and smaller subsidiary district authorities replacing the previous patchwork of often very small counties and burghs.⁵⁰ Aspects of the new system, in which Glasgow and its hinterland would come under the aegis of a single regional authority, had first been mooted in the 1946 Clyde Valley Regional Plan.⁵¹ Mabon was concerned lest the Stonehouse project stall until the new system was introduced.⁵² To maintain momentum, it was proposed that a basic masterplan be prepared and that the SSHA construct an initial phase of housing. Lanarkshire was deemed not to have the resources to produce the masterplan, and so attention turned to the development corporation which had, since 1947, been delivering the new town at East Kilbride, 10 miles north-west of Stonehouse.⁵³ The involvement of one development corporation in two new towns was not unknown: in England, Hatfield was also responsible for Welwyn Garden City. However, Stonehouse was still not to be a new town. It was thought that the proposed 'West Regional Council' (the eventual Strathclyde Regional Council) might eventually take it on, echoing Wheatley's proposal that new towns could become regional responsibilities.⁵⁴ East Kilbride Development Corporation (EKDC) would thus be a planning consultant, in effect. Indeed, the SDD's chief planner, Derek Lyddon, had made such a suggestion as early as 1967, seeing a role for Cumbernauld Development Corporation in the Grangemouth–Falkirk area as well as the involvement of EKDC at Stonehouse.⁵⁵ This approach was innovative: 'a novel use of New Towns powers to create what might be described as "City Region Towns"'.⁵⁶

An amendment to the County of Lanark's development plan was submitted in 1970, making provision for the initial SSHA housing at Stonehouse as well as an industrial area.⁵⁷ That same year, further moves towards formal new town status were made. A Working Party investigating Glasgow's housing programme reported to government that 65,000 houses were needed beyond the city by 1981 and that the 'overspill' programme was short by 17,000.⁵⁸ Civil servants considered several ways of delivering these houses. The experience of Erskine showed the difficulties in co-ordinating the various local authorities, while even the SSHA route also required local-authority involvement in meeting service costs; there were, in addition, limits on what the SSHA could spend.⁵⁹ Though one official had earlier warned that there

⁵⁰Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland 1966–69: Report (Cmnd. 4150) (Edinburgh, 1969).

⁵¹Clyde Valley Regional Planning Advisory Committee, *Clyde Valley Regional Plan, 1946: A Report* (Edinburgh, 1949), ch. 12.

⁵²NRS, DD12/3092, 'County of Lanark Development Plan, Supplementary Report', 1970, Appendix 2.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴NRS, DD12/3094, J.M. Ross memo, 15 Apr. 1969; *Royal Commission on Local Government*, paras. 292–7.

⁵⁵NRS, SEP15/510, W.D.C. Lyddon memo, 4 Dec. 1967; also J. Kerr memo, 3 Jan. 1968.

⁵⁶NRS, SEP15/510, A.A. Hughes memo, 11 Apr. 1968.

⁵⁷NRS, SEP15/584, memo by the secretary of state.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹NRS, SEP15/733, 'Redevelopment of Glasgow population', 27 Nov. 1970.

was a danger of ‘another New Town for ill-defined reasons’,⁶⁰ full use of new towns powers had attractions: housing could be built quickly, taking advantage of the ‘all-round economic and social possibilities of a new growth point’.⁶¹ The question of speed was important, as a sustained high rate of house completions – some 1,430 each year until 1981 – was needed if the apparent Glaswegian housing deficit was to be met.⁶² The suggestion was made that EKDC – whose work in East Kilbride was then planned to end in 1974 – simply take on Stonehouse.⁶³

Stonehouse’s transformation into a full-blown new town was announced by the prime minister, Edward Heath, in March 1971, with an initial target of 10,000 houses.⁶⁴ During the 1970 election campaign, Heath had pledged special aid for Glasgow, a promise that led, on the one hand, to funding for ‘environmental improvements’ in the city, and, on the other, to support for Stonehouse.⁶⁵ Gordon Campbell, secretary of state for Scotland, wrote to Heath early in 1971 arguing that designation was the only approach ‘which would guarantee the necessary number of “overspill” houses’; it ‘would represent an advance on anything done by the previous Administration’.⁶⁶ This change in status in some ways repeated the experience of Skelmersdale a decade before, where new town status had come about after little progress had been made by local authorities.⁶⁷ Campbell nonetheless hoped that Stonehouse would be ‘much cheaper to Central Government in the long run than a normal New Town’,⁶⁸ perhaps partly because of its intended size, some 35,000 people in the first instance (and thus around half the population of East Kilbride),⁶⁹ but also because of the apparent efficiencies of having EKDC manage the project.⁷⁰ A further advantage of this approach – and further evidence of its pragmatic basis – was that it allowed a decision on the future ownership of land and buildings in East Kilbride to be deferred beyond 1974–75, when EKDC was expected to have completed its work there.⁷¹ Whereas in England the New Towns Commission had been created to take over new town assets upon the winding-up of the development corporation, no equivalent existed in Scotland. Glenrothes was expected to be completed only in the early 1980s, so giving EKDC the task of building Stonehouse bought time to develop a policy for winding-up the Scottish development corporations.⁷²

The designation of Stonehouse as a new town was thus the result of several years’ debate, during which the proposals had evolved, organizationally and conceptually. Following studies of the Stonehouse area, the draft Designation Order was prepared

⁶⁰NRS, SEP15/510, A.A. Hughes memo, 17 Oct. 1967.

⁶¹NRS, SEP15/733, ‘Redeployment of Glasgow population’, 27 Nov. 1970.

⁶²NRS, SEP15/734, ‘Stonehouse Designation Study’, 1971.

⁶³NRS, SEP15/733, ‘Redeployment of Glasgow population, 27 Nov. 1970.

⁶⁴NRS, DD12/3195, ‘Note on Stonehouse’.

⁶⁵NRS, SEP15/733, prime minister’s statement, 26 Mar. 1971.

⁶⁶NRS, DD12/3533, Gordon Campbell to Edward Heath, 1 Feb. 1971.

⁶⁷T. Szydłowski, ‘Skelmersdale: design and implementation of a British new town, 1961–1985’, *Planning Perspectives*, early online publication Oct. 2021, 6–7.

⁶⁸NRS, DD12/3533, Gordon Campbell to Edward Heath, 1 Feb. 1971.

⁶⁹NRS, SEP15/734, ‘Stonehouse Designation Study’.

⁷⁰NRS, SEP15/576, George Young to R. Mowat, 28 Jun. 1972.

⁷¹NRS, SEP15/576, A.B. Hume memo, 6 Sep. 1972.

⁷²*Ibid.*

in the autumn of 1972, taking in some 6,765 acres.⁷³ An Outline Plan was published in April 1974 and a more detailed 'Basic Plan' in March 1975. In what follows, we turn to consider these proposals.

The plan for Stonehouse

An initial strategy for development in Lanarkshire was prepared by the Scottish Development Department in 1968.⁷⁴ It proposed a chain of new settlements, stretching from Blackwood north to Hamilton, parallel with the M74 motorway. This polycentric approach partly reflected the existing pattern of towns in the area, strung along the River Clyde, but also echoed a wider strain of thought in contemporary planning that found expression in such (unbuilt) projects as the monorail-linked communities of North Buckinghamshire New City or the 'circuit linear towns' proposed by the Alcan company with Gordon Cullen.⁷⁵ There were similar proposals for the Scottish Borders, overseen by Percy Johnson-Marshall, which reconceived the area as a sequence of rural communities linked by upgraded roads.⁷⁶ The polycentric plans for Central Lancashire New Town also reflected this philosophy, connecting Preston, Leyland and Chorley with new developments.⁷⁷ The 'linear city' concept was not new, but the popularity of multi-centre planning in the 1960s reflected factors including increased car ownership, which, as the planners of Milton Keynes recognized, made a dispersed settlement more easily navigated, at least for those with transport.

Subsequent proposals for Stonehouse maintained the idea of linked communities. A planning brief was drawn up by the SDD's Derek Lyddon in April 1971 and was subsequently developed.⁷⁸ Lyddon called for 'small village-sized development groups', each of 10,000 people. There were echoes in this idea of earlier new towns, whose 'neighbourhood units' were on the one hand an organizational device (being focused on a primary school and local shops) whilst also being a potential source of identity and community. The aim at Stonehouse, however, was practical. A dispersed plan had the advantage of flexibility; it could be developed at a fast or slow rate and 'would allow discrete stages of completion to be reached by small increments'.⁷⁹ It responded to the possibility of stop-start funding, future changes of plan and uncertainty about the town's eventual size. Different 'design agencies' would take responsibility for the groups, a move which meant that work could be spread out in the interests of speed and which also implied a role for the private sector. In contrast to previous new towns practice, the idea of an all-encompassing Development Corporation was played down, with Lyddon suggesting that 'the internal technical team would be limited to a small nucleus of high-quality people,

⁷³Duncan, 'Stonehouse - overview'.

⁷⁴NRS, DD12/3092, 'County of Lanark Development Plan: Supplementary Report', Feb. 1970.

⁷⁵For North Buckinghamshire, see Ortolano, 'Planning the urban future'; for Alcan, see D. Gosling, *Gordon Cullen: Visions of Urban Design* (London, 1996), 75-80.

⁷⁶*Discussion Paper: The Central Borders, A Plan for Expansion* (Edinburgh, 1968).

⁷⁷Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall, *Central Lancashire Development Corporation Outline Plan* (Preston, 1974).

⁷⁸NRS, SEP15/733, 'A brief for Stonehouse', 22 Apr. 1971; Derek Lyddon memo, 7 Jul. 1971.

⁷⁹NRS, SEP15/733, Derek Lyddon memo, 7 Jul. 1971.

previously experienced in “the product”, who could brief and co-ordinate the work of other design agencies.⁸⁰ Residents’ agency was stressed, with Lyddon concluding that they ‘must be attracted to the area by high quality living conditions and by job opportunities’.⁸¹ As far as the central area was concerned, the earlier new town ideal of self-containment was decisively abandoned, with Lyddon suggesting that ‘these communities would not have their own new town central area but could have neighbourhood shops and would thereafter look to Hamilton’.⁸² Such an approach – a new town almost without a centre – was the diagrammatic opposite of Cumbernauld (on which Lyddon had earlier worked), where the town centre megastructure was the focus for the whole town.

The subsequent Outline Plan (April 1974) and Basic Plan (March 1975) were prepared by the staff of the newly renamed East Kilbride and Stonehouse Development Corporation (EKSDC), under the direction of architect-planner Richard Colwell. The planners had the experience of East Kilbride on which to draw, but the Scottish Office also believed that an external consultant might slow the process.⁸³ One official noted ‘the horrible example of Irvine’, where the initial masterplan by Hugh Wilson and Lewis Womersley had recently been found to be unviable.⁸⁴ The themes that emerge from the Stonehouse reports are in many ways typical of the later new towns. First, the plans were understood in social terms:

The creation of a community is not simply a matter of producing a physical framework of roads, housing, industry, etc. It is more fundamental and involves an understanding of the complex nature of society. All the activities, values and attitudes of the people, organisations and authorities who will form the New Town need to be considered.⁸⁵

As in contemporaneous new towns elsewhere – not least Washington and Milton Keynes – choice was stressed, in terms of housing, employment and leisure facilities.⁸⁶ A high level of car ownership was assumed, though it was also thought that public transport use would increase; future moving walkways and monorails were noted. The town centre would potentially include a one-stop hypermarket, a type of building then coming to prominence. Overall, Stonehouse was to provide ‘the opportunity for the wider material aspirations of the individual to be realised’.⁸⁷

Questions of housing tenure were given particular attention. On the one hand, high standards were required in all housing. Of the first ninety-six houses, it was reported that

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²NRS, SEP15/733, ‘A brief for Stonehouse’, 22 Apr. 1971.

⁸³NRS, SEP15/733, F.M.M. Gray to W.D.C. Lyddon, 12 Jul. 1971.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵NRS, SEP15/578, ‘Stonehouse Outline Plan’, Apr. 1974, 10.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁷NRS, SEP15/762, ‘Stonehouse Basic Plan 1’, Mar. 1975, 17.

The layout...took account of the fact that the standards of amenity now expected in houses to rent was [*sic*] as high or higher than in houses for sale. The aim was to provide an end product which would give an indication of the kind of treatment the Corporation were looking for and which could not be classed as a stereotyped private or public sector.⁸⁸

At the same time, owner-occupation was emphasized. Targets for owner-occupied housing in the new towns had been increased in the late 1960s to 50 per cent in England and 25 per cent in Scotland.⁸⁹ When in 1971 Gordon Campbell proposed to Edward Heath that Stonehouse become a fully fledged new town, he suggested a higher proportion of owner-occupied homes than in previous Scottish new towns, which he linked with the government's wish to encourage home ownership more generally (although in fact the owner-occupation targets for the new towns had been increased during the previous Labour administration). During the 'Barber boom' of the early 1970s, it was believed that demand for owner-occupation would increase significantly; Stonehouse could meet this demand.⁹⁰ It was also suggested that 'a high proportion of private housing...would assist in the development of a growth point',⁹¹ implying a link between the potential (aspirational?) residents of this type of housing and the kinds of employers who might choose to come to the town.

The Basic Plan differentiated itself from 'traditional' new town master plans, which were understood to have a degree of rigidity and finality.⁹² In contrast, it comprised 'a system of inter-related parts which are constantly changing', a series of potentially unpredictable activities, in effect.⁹³ 'There never can be a final basic plan', it noted,⁹⁴ and public feedback was emphasized.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, a broad pattern of development was set out (Figures 3 and 4). Most housing was to be to the west of the M74 motorway. 'Employment parks' were proposed for the area east of the motorway and also the western fringe of the town, accommodating c. 30,000 jobs (Figure 5). Their name distinguished them from the well-established 'industrial estate', hinting at the considered landscaping which was intended but also suggesting modernity by echoing the 'industrial parks' of the United States, a kind of environment which at exactly this time was proving a formative influence on Cambridge's new 'science park' and which in time would spawn a wave of 'business parks'.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, as we have noted, the exact form of the new town centre was open to debate, but a central area was nonetheless denoted in the valley of the Cander Water, south of Stonehouse village.

⁸⁸NRS, SEP15/573, minute of 4 Mar. 1974.

⁸⁹NRS, SEP15/734, 'Stonehouse Designation Study', 11.

⁹⁰NRS, DD12/3311, note of meeting, George Younger and County of Lanark Planning Committee, 17 Jan. 1972.

⁹¹NRS, SEP15/734, 'Stonehouse Designation Study', vi.

⁹²NRS, SEP15/762, 'Stonehouse Basic Plan 1', 9.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁶S. Wetherell, *Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Princeton, 2020), 165.

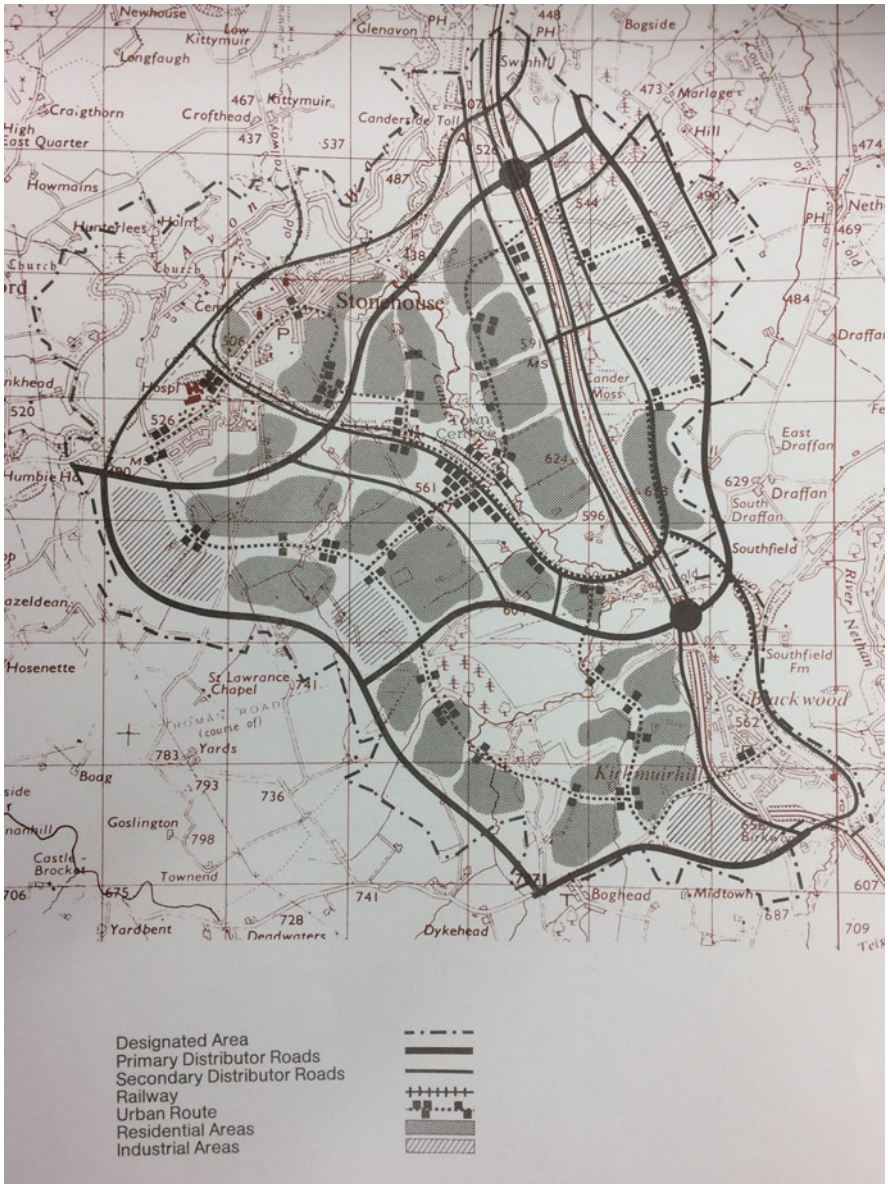


Figure 3. Outline plan for Stonehouse new town, as proposed in 1974–75. National Records of Scotland, SEP15/578, with the permission also of South Lanarkshire Archives.

New roads took sinuous routes between the residential ‘villages’, which were separated by open landscape. A so-called ‘urban route’, dedicated to public transport, also connected the ‘villages’, with local facilities spread along it. Such a route was also found in the contemporaneous plans for Irvine, but whereas in



Figure 4. Proposed phase 1 developments. National Records of Scotland, SEP15/578, with the permission also of South Lanarkshire Archives.

Irvine the route runs through the centre of the residential areas, here it was to pass between them. The local facilities thus typically appear at the boundary of two areas, promoting connections between them and potentially also offering residents greater choice than would be the case for a single neighbourhood centre. There are

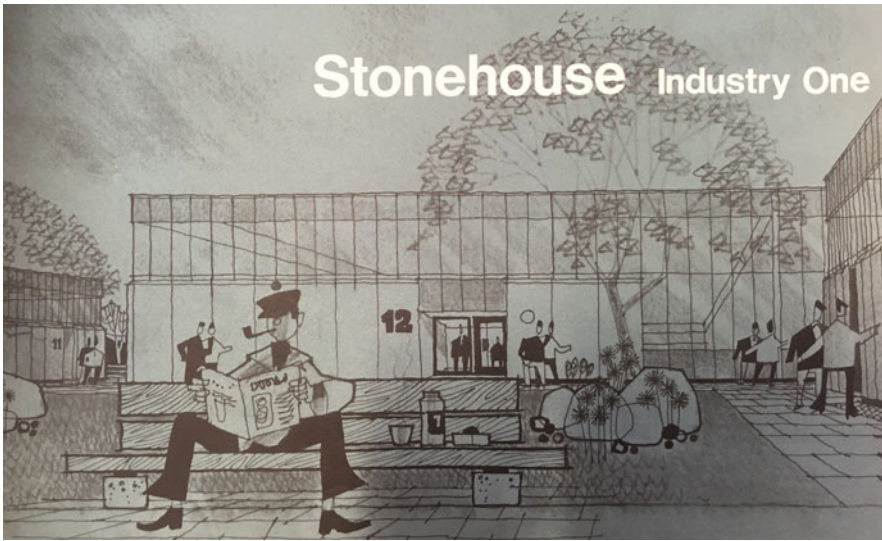


Figure 5. 'Stonehouse Industry 1': the proposed 'industrial park' at Canderside. Glasgow City Archives, SR3 31/3/6, with the permission also of South Lanarkshire Archives.

echoes of the original plan for Milton Keynes, whose 'activity centres' were similarly to be located at the junction of residential areas.⁹⁷ Landscaping was emphasized, both within the housing and employment areas.⁹⁸ The plan also considered the experience of those who might live in Stonehouse: the place of religious groups (Christian and other faiths) was noted; leisure was defined partly in terms of contributing to (and benefiting from) the 'social development' of the town; education was to benefit the whole community. Good design would, it was hoped, reduce 'social problems'.⁹⁹

The keynote of the Stonehouse plans is one of practicality. That this was the case is perhaps unsurprising, given that they were developed amid the economic and political turmoil of 1972–74, the years of the Oil Crisis and the three-day week. Stonehouse was to offer 'the widest range of benefits that limited resources permit at the present and in the future',¹⁰⁰ its flexibility and open-endedness being less a statement of urban theory (like Milton Keynes) as a response to uncertainty. This practicality also reflected the involvement of EKSDC, a body with three decades of experience: indeed, the target size of East Kilbride had been increased more than once, prompting some to view its initial 1947 masterplan as inflexible and too cautious.¹⁰¹ While the idea of modernity was important, evident in the 'employment park' or the way that EKSDC's managing director George Young invoked the idea of a 'twenty-first century' town, Stonehouse's clustered 'villages' strike a

⁹⁷Milton Keynes Development Corporation, *The Plan for Milton Keynes*, vol. I (Milton Keynes, 1970), 36.

⁹⁸GCA, COI/10/17/18, 'Industry 1'.

⁹⁹NRS, SEP15/762, 'Stonehouse Basic Plan 1', 46.

¹⁰⁰NRS, SEP15/577, 'Stonehouse: Draft Stage A Report', 2.

¹⁰¹NRS, DD12/3092, 'County of Lanark Development Plan: Supplementary Report', Feb. 1970.

different note from Irvine's megastructural central area, the construction of which required substantial demolition. The promotional film produced for Cumbernauld, 'Town of Tomorrow', suggested an idealized future in its title; the equivalent for Stonehouse (made by the same team) was entitled 'Centre for Success', suggesting pragmatism whilst invoking individual aspiration and economic growth.¹⁰² The film included abstract drawings of new housing and high-tech cars (Figure 6), but the presentation of Stonehouse was otherwise less dramatic. The Basic Plan was illustrated with historic photographs, suggesting that the new town of the twenty-first century was a less radical project than might hitherto have been assumed.

The unravelling of Stonehouse

Although the de-designation of Stonehouse has sometimes been presented as a sudden shift in policy, doubts were brewing about the project long before its cancellation. On the one hand, 1974–76 saw much progress. The Outline Plan and Basic Plan were produced; public meetings were held; Murray Drive was started. EKSDC began what it termed 'marketing' the new town to businesses, striking an entrepreneurial note.¹⁰³ At the same time, however, a combination of cuts in government expenditure and revised population projections for Glasgow began to cast shadows on the proposals, prompting EKSDC to run a vigorous publicity campaign. Confident claims were made about the many employers who were ready to invest, with 44 companies apparently interested by late 1974, including three car manufacturers.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the purpose of Stonehouse was altered, as were the plans themselves.

The tipping point came with the publication in 1974 of the draft West Central Scotland Plan. This regional report had been commissioned in 1971 by the West Central Scotland Steering Committee (the successor to the Clyde Valley Plan Advisory Committee), with encouragement from the Scottish Office.¹⁰⁵ News of the provisional conclusions reached the Scottish Office in mid-1973, and started to attract press coverage early in 1974.¹⁰⁶ The report was not anti-new towns specifically, but proposed that Stonehouse should be deferred.¹⁰⁷ It was informed by a downturn in population forecasts; furthermore, it argued that there was sufficient capacity in the existing Scottish new towns, coupled with undeveloped land elsewhere, to accommodate some 300,000 people. The question was thus one of population distribution, rather than a specific belief in the virtues of renewal over the new towns. Team member Urlan Wannop recalled the response:

Our view on Stonehouse was seen as plainly challenging the whole ethos of Scottish Office economic policy and development policy for Scotland. There

¹⁰²National Library of Scotland, Moving Image Library, 0949, 'Stonehouse: centre for success', 1975.

¹⁰³NRS, SEP15/579, G. Young to A.L. Rennie, 8 Oct. 1975.

¹⁰⁴NLS, SEP15/577, A.W. Denham memo, 4 Nov. 1974; 'Stonehouse concern over cutbacks'; 'New towns launch counter-attack', *Scotsman*, 29 Jan. 1974. One of the manufacturers, Datsun/Nissan, subsequently built at Washington new town in England.

¹⁰⁵Duncan, 'Stonehouse – overview'.

¹⁰⁶NRS, SEP15/734, draft memo, 26 Jun. 1973, and clippings in SEP15/574.

¹⁰⁷*West Central Scotland – a Programme for Action: Consultative Draft Report* (Glasgow, 1974), 120.

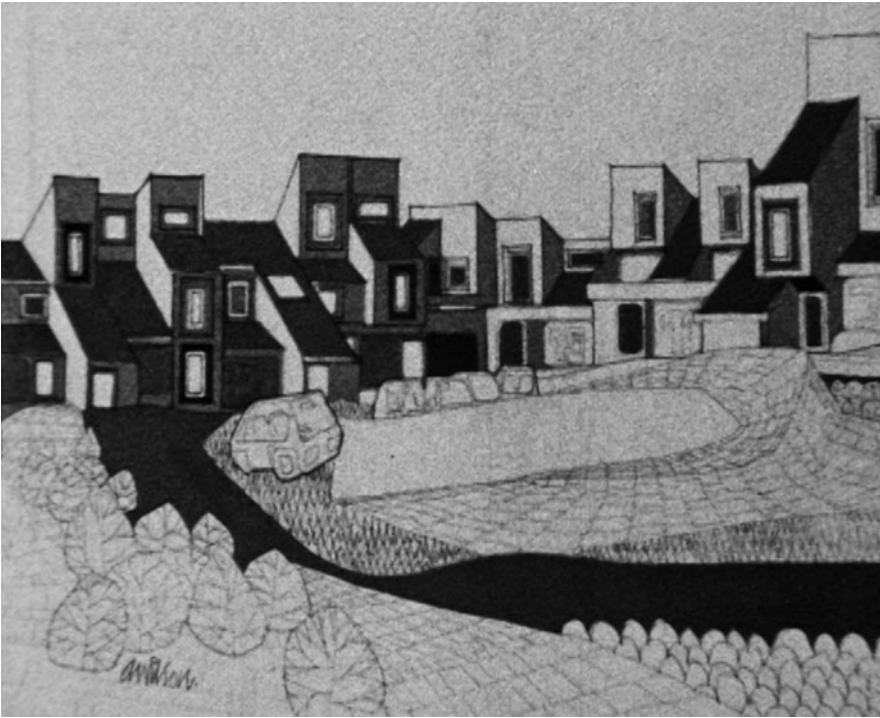


Figure 6. Stonehouse housing, as shown in the film 'Centre for Success'. National Library of Scotland, Scotland's Moving Image Archive, 0949.

was at least one Minister whom I believe thought that...the whole West of Scotland Plan was a disaster... Stonehouse was one of the flagships of their economic policy...we were also challenging the effort which specific senior civil servants had put into the designation order.¹⁰⁸

There remained a strongly pro-Stonehouse group among officials. They argued that Stonehouse was a more attractive location than other new towns, and that urban renewal was complex and slow; Stonehouse 'could perhaps have a disproportionate effect in improving the image of the region'.¹⁰⁹ One advocated a creative approach, suggesting that Livingston could be removed from the West Central Scotland study area, a move that would 'have a radical effect on the figuring in the Report which points to deferment of Stonehouse'.¹¹⁰ But views were not unanimous. Some asked whether Stonehouse would poach employers who would have come to the west of Scotland anyway.¹¹¹ Others questioned the whole idea of trying to attract new employers. One civil servant noted that some investment might be lost, but that

¹⁰⁸Interview: U. Wannop, *New Towns Record*.

¹⁰⁹NRS, SEP15/574, J.M. Ross memo, 20 Feb. 1974.

¹¹⁰NRS, SEP15/574, J.A. Scott memo, 6 Mar. 1974.

¹¹¹NRS, SEP15/574, R.G.L. McCrone memo, 26 Feb. 1974.

this loss needed to be weighed against the cost of Stonehouse.¹¹² Another was sceptical of EKSDC's ambitious claims for Stonehouse, especially when it became clear that many of the potential employers were less than committed. EKSDC was judged to 'look more like a Development Corporation refusing to admit that they have come to the end of their work'.¹¹³ In April 1974, another civil servant suggested that, with the overspill rationale abandoned, 'Stonehouse is a hell of an expensive way of providing an unknown, but probably small, number of extra jobs', and questioned its cost-effectiveness (at a time when cost-benefit analysis was being increasingly used in government).¹¹⁴

In these circumstances, in autumn 1974 the rationale for Stonehouse was altered. The secretary of state, Willie Ross, announced that it was no longer to accommodate Glasgow overspill, and that it would henceforth be 'developed primarily for the purpose of attracting or retaining employment in Strathclyde, with a variety of housing in both the private and rented sectors and a proper balance of social and other facilities'.¹¹⁵ Its role was to be solely a 'regional growth point' of the kind envisaged at the start of the 1960s; a sign to this end was erected alongside the A74 (Figure 7).¹¹⁶ At the same time, the 1981 population target was reduced to 13,000.¹¹⁷

Local government reorganization now came to have a bearing on the project. In 1974, the nascent regional councils were asked to set out their strategic priorities, reporting by summer 1976. Even before its report was received, it was known that Strathclyde took a highly critical view of Stonehouse.¹¹⁸ Senior politicians, notably Strathclyde's Convener, Geoff Shaw, were committed to the alleviation of social problems in Glasgow.¹¹⁹ At a time of limited resources, they concluded that they could not support a further new town; after all, the region already included East Kilbride, Cumbernauld and Irvine. Strathclyde highlighted unemployment and deprivation as issues needing a strategic response, arguing that 'a social and physical environment comparable with the rest of Scotland and the United Kingdom' was essential if people were to stay in the area.¹²⁰ New towns, it argued, had also encouraged voluntary movement out of Glasgow, leading to social polarization.¹²¹ Strathclyde concluded that it preferred to make 'best use of existing social and physical infrastructure'.¹²² This decision was significant, because Strathclyde's involvement in Stonehouse was essential. Although the regional councils existed at a level below the Scottish Office, only they were empowered to provide the infrastructure that a development like Stonehouse needed.¹²³ The tide – already in retreat

¹¹²NRS, SEP15/574, J.N. Randall memo, 4 Mar. 1974.

¹¹³GCA, SR3 31/3/6, D.S. Carmichael memo, 2 Apr. 1974.

¹¹⁴GCA, SR3 31/3/6, D.S. Carmichael memo, 4 Apr. 1974.

¹¹⁵Quoted in NRS, SEP15/577, J.A. Scott to G. Young, 10 Oct. 1974.

¹¹⁶Duncan, 'Stonehouse – overview'.

¹¹⁷NRS, SEP15/577, Scottish Office Press Notice, 18 Sep. 1974.

¹¹⁸NRS, DD12/3776, 'Strathclyde and its new towns' [1975]: headed 'Explosive – in confidence'.

¹¹⁹R. Ferguson, *Geoff: The Life of Geoffrey M. Shaw* (Gartocharn, 1979).

¹²⁰GCA, SR3 31/3/6, 'Strathclyde Regional Report', 1976, 5.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 12.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 23.

¹²³Smith, 'Obituary', 60.



Figure 7. Stonehouse new town sign, c. 1975. National Library of Scotland, Scotland's Moving Image Archive, 0949.

after the publication of the West Central Scotland Plan – thus continued to turn. One official concluded in October 1975 that ‘the case for Stonehouse at the present time seems to me pretty weak’.¹²⁴

In April 1976, Willie Ross was replaced by Bruce Millan, who was less committed than his predecessor to the new towns programme.¹²⁵ In February 1976, Millan had concluded that renewal was inevitable; indeed, renewal seemed more likely to take place than hitherto, given Strathclyde’s clear commitment to Glasgow and other older urban areas.¹²⁶ Millan nonetheless indicated that the decision about Stonehouse ultimately rested with Strathclyde, while EKSDC (despite sounding out the Scottish Office about the possibility of taking on the task of Glasgow renewal) attempted to make a last-ditch case for a small new town with an ultimate size of 20,000.¹²⁷ Such a development would be, it was noted, unlikely to sustain a ‘sophisticated range of shops and entertainment facilities’, and ‘would be in no way self-sufficient and would represent a considerable departure from the conventional

¹²⁴NRS, SEP15/817, G. McCrone memo, 24 Oct. 1975.

¹²⁵Duncan, ‘Stonehouse – overview’.

¹²⁶NRS, DD12/3776, meeting at St Andrew’s House, 13 Feb. 1976.

¹²⁷NRS, SEP15/579, memo of 21 Jan. 1976; SEP4/1360, memo of 5 Mar. 1976.

new town concept'.¹²⁸ Local Labour politicians in Lanarkshire, too, pressed for the project to continue; one suggested that Glasgow was taking resources away from the rest of the region.¹²⁹ Ultimately, though, such arguments were in vain. Stonehouse was halted; many of the EKSDC staff who would have worked on it were transferred to a new initiative, GEAR (Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal), which brought together public- and private-sector bodies. If the abandonment of Stonehouse was a 'first' as far as the new towns were concerned, GEAR, too, was an innovation, trialling an approach that was to become commonplace across Britain during the next decade.¹³⁰

Conclusions

For the families who moved to Stonehouse in 1976, a new chapter was beginning. For Stonehouse as a new town, however, the end was in sight. Yet, as this article has shown, the story of Stonehouse new town encompasses more than the moment of its de-designation. Organizationally and conceptually, the proposals have their own history. Options were debated: about Stonehouse's purpose, the ways in which the town could be delivered and the opportunities it would provide. The plan itself evolved: a chain of new communities; a 'twenty-first-century' town made up of 'villages' and employment parks; a small town that looked towards Hamilton. More generally, the rise and fall of Stonehouse new town stands as evidence of a sustained belief in physical planning, led by the public sector: from the economic growth points of the early 1960s to GEAR in the late 1970s. Yet the example of Stonehouse also shows how 'planning' in general, and new towns policy more specifically, was not static in its processes, institutions or goals. In this respect, the flexibility of Stonehouse lay not simply in its dispersed masterplan but indeed the whole idea of Stonehouse itself and what a new town of the 1970s and 1980s might be. Such an argument amplifies Ortolano's view of a 'dynamic social democracy', responsive during the 1970s to new agendas and circumstances.¹³¹

Nonetheless, flexibility only went so far.¹³² Changing circumstances and priorities could derail matters. The eventual de-designation of Stonehouse was not a dramatic pivot, but rather the consequence of short-term factors, new strategic objectives and local government reform. Attending to the detail of these changes is critical if we are to understand how and why urban policy in Scotland and the wider UK evolved during the 1970s. In this respect, the example of Stonehouse sheds particular light on two sets of relationships: between local and central government (i.e., the Scottish Office); and between regional planning, the new towns and urban renewal. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, the Scottish Office's 'regional' approach sometimes relegated Glasgow – physically, and perhaps also administratively – to a subsidiary position. Subsequently, GEAR and a focus on renewal displaced a 'regional' policy that had been embodied most clearly in the new towns.

¹²⁸NRS, SEP4/1360, memo of 5 Mar. 1976.

¹²⁹NRS, SEP15/817, A. Wilson to W. Ross, 3 Dec. 1975; SEP15/762, letters from Lanark and Hamilton District Councils, 7 and 14 Jan. 1976.

¹³⁰Smith, 'Obituary', 64.

¹³¹Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, 17–22.

¹³²For a parallel example, see Szydłowski, 'Skelmersdale'.

However, renewal and the new towns were not necessarily binary opposites; growing interest in renewal did not make de-designation inevitable. Indeed, Edward Heath's 1971 commitment to Stonehouse had been accompanied by a promise of funding for Glasgow. In this respect, the halting of Stonehouse reflected the particular priorities of the new Strathclyde Regional Council. In July 1975, one official recognized that, because it controlled critical infrastructure funding, 'Strathclyde rather than the Secretary of State is effectively in the position to determine the pace of development of the New Towns in its region.'¹³³ The following year, another concluded that

the future of Stonehouse, whatever form the new town might take, is no longer to be argued with Strathclyde on an objective basis: a series of public statements have elevated it to the status of touchstone of the Region's policies of urban regeneration concentrated on Glasgow, to which New Towns in general and Stonehouse in particular are seen as inimical...little prospect of the Council being persuaded to change its view...attempt to do so would not only be profitless but might be positively damaging, by raising doubts about the Secretary of State's support for the Region's strategic objectives.¹³⁴

The Scottish Office was essentially caught in a trap of its own making, as to plough on in the face of Strathclyde's opposition would have undermined the new system at the outset.

While regional planning may well have declined in England, especially after 1979, a different story emerges in Scotland – one which points to the persistence of a 'regional' approach, no longer embodied in cross-authority plans nor the new towns, but rather made manifest first in the creation and then the priorities of the new regional councils. Before 1975, strategic planning required co-operation between often small, historic local authorities and implied a co-ordinating role for the Scottish Office. The regional councils disrupted the status quo. These new bodies, conceived in the same spirit of strategic planning which had earlier shaped the Clyde Valley Regional Plan, were the organs by means of which a renewed regional policy could be furthered – one which was driven at a 'regional' level. The fundamental question, then, is one of where power lay in late twentieth-century Scotland, to the history of which an examination of architecture and planning might usefully contribute. The debate had particular piquancy as calls for devolution grew during the 1970s. In the meantime, the idea of regional planning, which had earlier underpinned the new towns programme, served in the 1970s to end that same programme. Regional planning first created Stonehouse new town, and then led to its cancellation.

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¹³³NRS, SEP15/817, A.L. Rennie memo, 2 Jul. 1975.

¹³⁴NRS, SEP4/1360, memo, 5 Mar. 1976.

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