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# Long term experiences of tenants in social housing in East Kilbride: an oral history study

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Lynn Abrams and Linda Fleming

*History, School of Humanities, University of Glasgow in collaboration with East Kilbride & District Housing Association*



'The double doors of East Kilbride', reproduced with the permission of Anne Ward

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Lynn.Abrams@Glasgow.ac.uk

## ***East Kilbride: a brief history***

East Kilbride was designated Scotland's first new town in 1947. Situated on a hilly site in the lower Clyde valley just 8 miles south of the city of Glasgow, East Kilbride was originally envisaged as a self-contained town of around 45,000 people containing all necessary social and civic amenities and surrounded by greenbelt. By 1960 the target population was increased to 70,000. Today East Kilbride is home to 74,012 people.<sup>1</sup>

East Kilbride, as with all new towns, was planned in part as an overspill development, designed to relieve congestion and substandard housing within cities, in this case Glasgow. The Clyde Valley Regional Plan of 1946 proposed the dispersal of 550,000 of the city's inhabitants to peripheral areas and to new towns. In a 1964 survey it was found that 80 per cent of East Kilbride's inhabitants hailed originally from the Greater Glasgow conurbation, although it is notable that even at this early stage of the town's development only 57 per cent of those surveyed worked in East Kilbride, with many commuting to Glasgow.<sup>2</sup> This tendency to commute continued and in a survey of the town conducted in 1970 it was further remarked on as a distinguishing feature of East Kilbride compared to some English new towns; although at this time, residents who travelled to work more commonly had employment in other parts of Lanarkshire rather than in Glasgow city centre.<sup>3</sup> A further aim was to promote industrial diversification in the wake of the decline of the West of Scotland's traditional heavy industries by providing new 'light industries' with space to grow and develop.<sup>4</sup> In other words, East Kilbride was to act as 'an industrial magnet' whilst at the same time providing homes for those living in overcrowded circumstances in the city.

The town was originally planned around four neighbourhoods: Mains, The Murray, Calderwood and Westwood with the Calderwood extension and the new neighbourhoods of St Leonards and Greenhills, added later. The majority of houses built were medium-sized family homes to meet the needs of residents who consistently maintained that their preference was for a house with a front door and a garden rather than a flat. By 1960, 84 per cent of homes here were dwellings with two or three bedrooms. Nevertheless, 36 per cent of the dwellings built by the Development Corporation in the first phases of construction were flats. A small number of private houses for sale were built by private constructors.

In contrast to the overcrowded conditions in Scotland's largest city, a low population density was a key ambition of the East Kilbride planners and initially the target density of 10 persons per hectare was lower than any other new town in the UK. But given the topography of the site - the town is surrounded by high land unsuitable for building - and the need for land for industry, this ambition was soon quashed with the consequence that more flats needed to be built in

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics are based on East Kilbride parliamentary constituency boundaries, <http://www.sns.gov.uk/Reports/Report.aspx?ReportId=2&AreaTypeId=SP&AreaId=24>

<sup>2</sup> Peter Willmott, 'East Kilbride and Stevenage: Some Social Characteristics of a Scottish and English New Town', *Town Planning Review* 34: 4 (1964) pp. 308-9.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie A. Karn, *East Kilbride Housing Survey: A Study of Housing in a New Town* (University of Birmingham: Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, 1970) pp.7-8.

<sup>4</sup> See Douglas Robertson, 'Scotland's New Towns: A Corporatism Experiment', John Beech (ed.), *Scottish Life and Society* (Edinburgh, 2005) pp. 372-402.

order to achieve the target population of 40,000 or more.<sup>5</sup> Until 1959 houses outnumbered flats in the number of housing units built each year but during the 1960s the proportion of flats (mostly two-bedroom dwellings) increased dramatically. In general though, East Kilbride's houses were larger than the Scottish average and certainly compared with Glasgow the proportion of homes with fewer than four rooms was low (10.7 per cent in the new town, 27 per cent in Glasgow).<sup>6</sup> One consequence of this was that rents were higher in East Kilbride (remarked upon by a number of our interviewees). In 1965 the annual rent for a three apartment flat in Glasgow averaged £44 whereas in East Kilbride it was £57. By 1970 the discrepancy was greater with new town residents paying £117 per year as opposed to £83 in Glasgow.<sup>7</sup>



*View of flats at East Mains, reproduced by permission of loumurphy's photostream@flickr*

The homes were marketed as 'modern' and in comparison with the older housing stock in Scottish towns and cities these new dwellings were far better equipped. In 1952 an article in the *Hamilton Advertiser* described the new flats as 'a housewives' dream' with their built-in wardrobes, pram stores in the entrance hall, a heated towel rail and a kitchenette with a gas boiler and built-in cabinets.<sup>8</sup> Almost 100 per cent of homes in the new town in 1961 possessed the most essential of household facilities, that is exclusive use of cold and hot water, a fixed bath and a WC compared with just 79 per cent in the county of Lanark.<sup>9</sup> In some cases modern also meant open plan whereby there was no separate dining room and living and eating areas were merged into a single larger space. Certainly it was the promise of a new, modern home often in contrast to the classic room and kitchen flat in an older tenement, which persuaded many to move to the new town along with the rural aspects, the clean air and the promise of a healthy environment for children.

Each neighbourhood pivoted around a neighbourhood centre comprising shops and children's playgrounds. Moreover eventually each also contained primary schools and churches. The town centre housed a spacious pedestrianised shopping development, commercial offices and civic

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<sup>5</sup> R.Smith, *East Kilbride: the Biography of a Scottish New Town, 1947-1973* (London, HMSO, 1979), pp.30-32.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *East Kilbride*, p.69.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *East Kilbride*, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> South Lanarkshire Archives, East Kilbride Development Corporation Press Cuttings File 1952-54: *Hamilton Advertiser* 6 Sept 1952.

<sup>9</sup> *Census for Scotland 1961* (HMSO), Table 23.

amenities. Adjacent is the park with its large swimming pool and other leisure facilities contained in an ultra futuristic styled building.

The social profile of new towns in the early decades distinguished them from more established urban settlements. In 1960, 62 per cent of adult inhabitants of East Kilbride in 1960 were under 40 years of age and between 1961 and 1966 almost 60 per cent of new immigrants to the town were between the ages of 15 and 44.<sup>10</sup> This was in part a consequence of the recruitment patterns of local employers who attracted youthful workers who in turn brought young families with them or started a family once they arrived. A concomitant of this was that there were comparatively fewer older residents in the town, a situation that the Development Corporation addressed head on in 1964, opening up house lets to those who did not fulfil the employment qualification and thus allowing parents of East Kilbride residents to move there.

In terms of social class distribution East Kilbride had a rather different profile from other towns in the region, again due in the early years to the employment opportunities in the town and the work qualification for new tenants. Amongst economically active males East Kilbride was over endowed with professional, skilled manual and clerical workers and had far fewer unskilled workers than comparable towns in Lanarkshire.<sup>11</sup> Reflecting this distinction also, was the fact that the average weekly income for male householders was 'well above the national average'.<sup>12</sup> Against this background it has often been assumed that female employment was relatively low. The picture of young women with young children who had moved to a new environment away from their support networks gave rise to the spectre of suburban neurosis or 'the new town blues'.<sup>13</sup> The movement of people out of the cities to peripheral new towns was said to result in a decline of community consequent upon the focus of families and especially women, shifting to the immediate home environment. Their social isolation, it was said, was a measure of respectability.<sup>14</sup>

However, this picture does not appear to hold true for East Kilbride. To begin with, married women's employment here was higher in terms of their proportion of the economically active female population than in Glasgow and significantly higher than the Scottish average. In 1961 in East Kilbride 36 per cent of the female population was economically active (compared with a Scottish average of 32 per cent) and 82 per cent of those were married compared with just 47 per cent in Glasgow.<sup>15</sup> By 1971 52 per cent of the female population of the new town aged 15 and over was economically active and 71 per cent of these women were married, compared with 42 per cent and 54 per cent respectively in Scotland.<sup>16</sup> Ten years later in 1981, female

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, *East Kilbride*, p.115.

<sup>11</sup> Unskilled manual workers made up 3.2 per cent of economically active males in 1966 compared with an average of 13.1 in nearby Lanarkshire towns and 10.4 in Scotland as a whole. Smith, *East Kilbride*, p.120. See also Karn, *East Kilbride Housing Survey*, p.4-6.

<sup>12</sup> Karn, *East Kilbride Housing Survey*, pp.6-8.

<sup>13</sup> The term 'suburban neurosis' was coined in 1938 in an article in *The Lancet* (March 26). It was revisited in 1958 following the post-war building programme. The study by Dr S.D.Coleman in East Kilbride was probably influenced by this literature. See S. D.Coleman, *Mental Health and Social Adjustment in a New Town: An Exploratory Study in East Kilbride* (University of Glasgow, 1965).

<sup>14</sup> Mark Clapson, 'Working-class women's experiences of moving to new housing estates in England since 1919', *Twentieth Century British History* 10:3 (1999), pp.345-65.

<sup>15</sup> *Census for Scotland, 1961*.

<sup>16</sup> *Census for Scotland, 1971*.

employment rates in East Kilbride were still higher than Scottish average with 56 per cent of women in paid work, 66 per cent of them married. The figures for Scotland were 46 per cent and 62 per cent respectively.<sup>17</sup>

Relatively high female employment rates were in part a consequence of the availability of work in the new town. There were numerous opportunities in the 1960s and 70s in the clerical side of the new manufacturing industries and in the service sector. But our interviews have revealed that many women returned to work once their children were at school for both financial and social reasons. The relatively high rents in the new town and the necessity of furnishing and decorating a brand new home placed new economic pressures on young families. At the same time though, many married women undertook paid work in order to escape the home and make social contact in an environment where, at least for a while, they were often isolated from family and friends. Historically, this trend can perhaps now be viewed in a more sophisticated way with regard to 'home centeredness'. East Kilbride women appear to have been in the vanguard of changes affecting women in the Scottish labour market generally. These women most likely entered paid employment as both a means to enlarge their personal horizons *beyond* the home, as well as to further improve general standards of living within households. What we perhaps see is a new modern environment ushering in what was to become a more modern and accepted way of life.

### ***The project***

The aim of the project was to conduct an analysis of the extent to which the 'modern' homes of the new town have met the promises of the original new town planners. It was their belief that high quality 'modern' housing in a planned environment would promote a sense of health and wellbeing amongst residents, improving their quality of life. Certainly, in the early years of the town's life this ambition seems to have been achieved. In a 1964 survey by renowned sociologist Peter Willmott, a large majority of respondents expressed their contentedness with life in East Kilbride. Most were pleased with their modern home, enjoyed the rural aspect, and had few regrets about moving. While there was some disappointment with the level of social amenities in comparison with what they had been used to in the city environment, residents seemed to have focused on the benefits of their home life. Indeed, ownership of various household items such as television sets, refrigerators and washing machines was significantly higher here than in the UK as a whole.<sup>18</sup> In 1970, after just over 20 years of the new town's existence, over 90 per cent of those surveyed reported favourable impressions of life there, with the majority attracted to move by the housing on offer.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding the relative expense of living in East Kilbride compared with elsewhere, this was a price worth paying for a better quality of life.

In 2011, questions about quality of life and wellbeing remain salient despite the changed status of the town. The Development Corporation was wound up in 1996 and following the right to buy policy introduced by the conservative government in 1980, the majority of homes were

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<sup>17</sup> *Census for Scotland*, 1981.

<sup>18</sup> Willmott, 'East Kilbride and Stevenage', p.311.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Livingstone and A.J.M. Sykes. *East Kilbride 70: An Economic and Social History* (University of Strathclyde, 1971), p.23.

purchased and taken out of the social housing supply (although the Development Corporation had started to encourage the sale of homes in the 1960s with limited take up). Indeed East Kilbride tenants were the most enthusiastic participants in right to buy in Scotland indicating the high levels of satisfaction with their homes and the quality of life in the town itself.<sup>20</sup> Today the majority of social housing in the town is managed by South Lanarkshire Council with a smaller number of lets available via several Housing Associations, including East Kilbride and District Housing Association, a small organization which manages 460 houses and flats throughout East Kilbride, mostly acquired from the former New Town Development Corporation.<sup>21</sup> It exists to provide and manage low cost high quality homes for rent to those in most in need.<sup>22</sup>



*East Kilbride and District Housing Association Housing at Lindsayfield. Reproduced with permission of EKDHA.*

Like all housing associations, EKDHA is legally obliged to carry out consultations with tenants. It is also committed to providing 'maximum opportunity and support to tenants and influence to shape future policy and practice.'<sup>23</sup> However, as a small housing association it has limited resources for research. Tenant satisfaction surveys, which the association conducts every four years, are valuable but these only measure in quantitative terms immediate responses to home improvements and neighbourhood problems. They are not able to be so responsive to the impact of larger scale changes in the demographics of tenants and successive improvements made by the housing association over longer periods of time. The aim of this project was to seek qualitative information about the experiences of residents over time, in some cases decades, through personal testimony. In contrast to surveys which assess satisfaction at a particular moment, we aimed to investigate how people's relationships with their homes have altered over their life course and in response to shifting needs in respect of family structure, income and age and also in reaction to the changing character and infrastructure of East Kilbride since 1947.

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<sup>20</sup> *Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics:*

<http://www.sns.gov.uk/Reports/Report.aspx?ReportId=2&AreaTypeId=SP&AreaId=24> (accessed 4.11.2011).

<sup>21</sup> An account of the dissolution of the Development Corporation and inauguration of EKDHA can be found in Robina Goodlad and Suzie Scott. 'Housing and the Scottish New Towns: A Case Study of Policy Termination and Quasi Markets', *Urban Studies* 33: 2 (1996) pp.317-335.

<sup>22</sup> See Section 3.3, *East Kilbride Local Letting Plan* (South Lanarkshire Council, April 2010).

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.ekdha.co.uk>

Since its inception, East Kilbride has undoubtedly become more like many other Scottish towns in terms of its population structure, its housing tenure and employment characteristics. In the 1950s and 1960s, East Kilbride was a youthful place - it had a significantly higher proportion of people under the age of 44, more than 80 per cent, than Scotland as a whole and only 4.3 per cent of its citizens were aged over 65 compared with almost 12 per cent on average.<sup>24</sup> But by 2001, population figures for the town compared more closely with those for Scotland generally, although it is notable that East Kilbride still contained a slightly larger percentage of its population in the 30-44 age group than Scotland as a whole—25.2 per cent as against the Scottish average of 23 per cent.<sup>25</sup> This perhaps reflects the appeal that the town continued to have for young families. In terms of residents over the age of 65, by 2001 East Kilbride's age profile was then approaching a comparable level with the Scottish average suggesting retention of many of the original settlers who have aged alongside the town.<sup>26</sup> With regard to employment structure, in the first few decades this was skewed towards manufacturing, providing a range of skilled and semi-skilled jobs for men and for women. Where housing was concerned, the new town offered spacious and desirable single-family homes for rent. In 1965, 96 per cent of homes were social rented properties compared with a figure of 73 per cent made of a combination of social and private rentals for Scotland as a whole.<sup>27</sup> While the population structure of East Kilbride is now broadly on a par with other Scottish towns and the employment structure is more similar having more people engaged in service and public sector jobs, a difference in housing patterns can be seen. Most notable is the high proportion of owner-occupation in the housing sector that now exists. In complete contrast to the early decades, 75 per cent of residents of East Kilbride own their homes compared with just 63 per cent in Scotland as a whole, perhaps testament to the quality of the homes built by the Development Corporation and the desire of people to remain in the town.<sup>28</sup> Our project was designed to explore the degree to which East Kilbride has met people's expectations and aspirations in terms of housing, local environment and quality of life over the life course.

### ***The research methodology***

Fifteen one-to-one interviews were carried out with a cross section of residents, both present day tenants and former tenants who had lived in the town over several decades. Details of the respondents and the methodology employed can be found in Appendix A: Table 1 presents a summary of personal details of respondents. Table 2 summarises the respondents' experiences of a variety of housing tenures.

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, *East Kilbride*, p.115.

<sup>25</sup> Scotland's census Results Online (SCROL) available at: <http://www.scrol.gov.uk/scrol/browser/profile.jsp?profile=Population&mainArea=East+Kilbride&mainLevel=Locality> (accessed 04.11.2011).

<sup>26</sup> SCROL statistics for 2001 state East Kilbride has 14.21 per cent of its population aged over 65 years against a average national figure of 13.98 per cent; and 5.57 per cent over 75 years in the town compared to 7.09 per cent nationally.

<sup>27</sup> Karn. *East Kilbride Housing Survey*, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics: <http://www.sns.gov.uk/Reports/Report.aspx?ReportId=3&AreaTypeId=SP&AreaId=24&AreaTypeIdSecond=SC&AreaIdSecond=420> (accessed 4.11.2011).

The interviews were digitally recorded and summary sheets produced. Details of where the data can be accessed can also be found in Appendix A. An example of the release form used which complies with the ethics guidelines of the University of Glasgow is contained in Appendix B. In brief:

- Life course Interviews allowed respondents to reflect on the ways in which their new town homes had changed their lifestyles and affected personal, family and community experiences.
- The information elicited through interviews provides insights into how the development of the town was viewed from the personal perspectives of tenants; it includes reflection on perceived successes and failures of changes in tenure, housing provision and governance of the town's wider infrastructure.
- The interviews offered opportunities to respondents to express their likes and dislikes in respect of houses and the wider environment and provided an insight into changing needs of tenants across the life course.

## ***Findings***

Our interviews revealed a number of key themes:

- reasons for moving to East Kilbride
- the experience of settling in
- perceptions of housing and homemaking
- experiences of community life
- perceptions of change in more recent times.

Each of these themes are separately summarised and illustrated with a selection of extracts from the interviews in the five sections that follow.

### **1. *The Big Flit: Choosing East Kilbride***

*'We had no lack of population passionately desiring to come in...'*<sup>29</sup>

Reflecting on her experiences as a leading member of the Scottish Town and Country Planning Association who was co-opted onto the Board of the Development Corporation to serve as 'the woman' representative, Elizabeth Mitchell rejoiced in the enthusiasm of prospective and new tenants within East Kilbride. In a 1970 survey 40 per cent of respondents reported that the attraction of a new house was the key factor in deciding to move to East Kilbride. Another 23 per cent named the availability of work.<sup>30</sup> Our respondents were able to go beyond the blandness of statistics and reported a wider range of often interrelated factors that led them to

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted from Elizabeth B. Mitchell. *The Plan that Pleased*, (Welwyn Garden City: The Town and Country Planning Association, 1967) p. 35; Elizabeth Mitchell was a leading member of the Association in Scotland and was invited to be involved with East Kilbride at the town's inception; in this personal memoir she outlines her commitment to the idea of Scottish new towns and her close involvement with East Kilbride during its planning and early years of growth.

<sup>30</sup> Livingstone and Sykes, *East Kilbride 70*, p.5.

set up home in the new town. The most likely reason - relocation following employment of the male of the household - did feature. For example, Linda grew up in the town because her father worked for Rolls Royce in East Kilbride and her family moved to a 'sound, good' house in The Murray in 1954. Other respondents moved to the new town in their own right as adults, following work and guaranteed housing. One of our male respondents deliberately requested a transfer to East Kilbride as he knew he and his wife would then be allocated a Development Corporation house. This was the experience of many, especially in the early years as housing allocation was dependent on employment in the town. But there were other push and pull factors. Many were looking for an improvement on what they had been used to, commonly a room and kitchen in a tenement, sharing with in-laws or living in lodgings. In some cases, the move was made from less than salubrious accommodation in Glasgow. For instance, Grace who had two small children was desperate to leave her room and kitchen in Glasgow's south side that was infested with cockroaches. Others opted for the chance to live near relatives who had already made the move to the new town and to share in what was quickly assessed to be an improved standard of living. This feature of chain migration is one that is frequently overlooked in the history of East Kilbride. The arrival of children also prompted many couples to want to leave the city and seek what was perceived as a cleaner and healthier place to raise a family. Whatever the reason or reasons given, in the early years of the town a move there signalled aspirations for the future that emphatically revolved around a desire for better housing and a better quality of life. For many of the early residents higher standards in housing influenced the general environment of East Kilbride, which was regarded as 'up-market'. A move there signified ambition for a better life even though, perhaps surprisingly, a good number knew very little about the town beyond its rumoured social cachet, knew no one who lived there, and thus moved informed only by hope and expectation. Crucially though, the early new town residents made a positive choice to move there; they demonstrated a determination to change their lives for the better. The sense of independence and the desire for their place of residence to no longer be in the hands of private landlords or Glasgow Housing Corporation was a strong theme in our respondents' narratives.

### **Interview Extracts<sup>31</sup>**

JAMES

*We saw something we liked in East Kilbride, we did, it was a vibrant new town ...then, East Kilbride was the place to be.*

*Was your wife keen to come here?<sup>32</sup>*

*Oh aye. I think she saw the potential, with a young family ...a good place to grow up... That was the attraction I think. You could see the future for them [children] being better than Drumchapel, which was fine, but East Kilbride was better for that... It was a vibrant wee town and out in the country ... and the attraction of a brand new house was a big draw... It was a good environment to grow up in for the children because everything was new, the neighbours were new, they grew up with their pals, the schools were good...*

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<sup>31</sup> The transcription of spoken narration is not without pitfalls but wherever possible, extracts have been reproduced verbatim or as faithfully as possible. Within those which have been minimally edited to improve clarity of reading and remove repetition, insertions are indicated by square brackets, and the removal of speech demonstrated by ellipsis marks.

<sup>32</sup> The interviewer's questions (highlighted here in blue text) have been included only where this may improve clarity of reading.

ISOBEL

*When I got married at first we stayed with my husband's mother... and then we got a flat in East Kilbride. It didn't take long to get accommodation then. We applied for that just before we got married, we got married in September 1969 and 1 June we got the letter, I can still remember that, 1 June we got the letter to say we had a got a flat and we moved in... You had to be employed in East Kilbride. [My husband] worked for the council then in East Kilbride and that was how we got it.*

LINDA

*[My] father worked for Rolls Royce as an aero-engine fitter in East Kilbride, hence the reason we live in East Kilbride because the house came with the job... My parents were living with my mother's parents [in Glasgow] and they were on a waiting list for a house ... In 1954 they were advertising for jobs within Rolls Royce and my father went for an interview and got it...and if you got a job with Rolls Royce you got a house, and I always remember him telling me that when he went for the interview there was a table full of keys and there were all these men 'just help yourself to keys' and go and view the properties.*

SHIRLEY

*I went through this thing about how lovely it would be to have a garden – to hang your nappies out in a garden, I'd never had that... My husband at the time, he was a tailor's cutter...ended up he was working for Levi's...they had a sort of factory up here. We got word that we could get a house up here, back and front door, they were just getting built out in Greenhills...and I thought back and front door how lucky am I! We never really thought about moving... but, there was really a lot of flats in Castlemilk, there really wasn't a back and front door as such ... so I never would have thought of moving out of this high rise flat except we'd heard you could get a house in East Kilbride, and at that time East Kilbride was the place to live. I mean as my mother used to describe it, 'you'd need to wear a hat when you were going to East Kilbride' ... Aye, because it was really lovely then. And my sister lived up here at the time and my mother-in-law ... From her house we used to see them building Greenhills and she used to say 'be great if you could get a wee house up here' and as I say, my sister already lived up here and I used to come and visit her and I used to think it would be lovely to live up here, it's beautiful, it was in those days, it was so nice*

SYLVIA

*I really wanted to look for a place for myself... Eventually to get a house - I worked for Rolls Royce in Hillington, and I had to transfer to East Kilbride - I applied for and got a job with Rolls Royce in East Kilbride, it was the only way...so I was eligible to be on the housing list. So that's what happened and I eventually got a two bedroomed flat in St Leonards... Well, weighing it up...I didn't specify that I wanted to go to East Kilbride, I just couldn't get a house anywhere else and, I didn't know East Kilbride, I didn't know anybody in East Kilbride but I wanted a place of my own and I think I realised that... the only way to do it was this way so I put my name down and I travelled back and forth for some time ... I did alright, I got a nice flat...*

[So what did you know about East Kilbride?](#)

*Nothing. I knew where the Rolls Royce factory was, and either through being in somebody's car and seeing a bit of East Kilbride ... So [when] I came to East Kilbride and I really didn't know it at all, in fact it was so bad I got lost going to my work one day...*

GRACE

*At that time you had to work in East Kilbride before you got a house and [my husband] worked at Mavor & Coulson's and we came up here ...you had to have work before you came up to East Kilbride...They were building the town ...*

*What had you heard about East Kilbride before you came here?*

*Would you believe nothing! When we came up here I didn't even know how to get to visit my Mum and Dad ... It was strange at first because we were Glaswegians, we weren't used to all this open space ... [Our first house was] in the Murray. We had three bedrooms up the stairs, a kitchen, a bathroom and a living room and a back garden, a wee front garden and we all took to it like ducks to water, we all thought we were posh ... I wanted out the room and kitchen and all these cockroaches, [where] life was very very difficult, very difficult.*

ANNA

*I've got a feeling that it was something to do with health, that East Kilbride was seen to be a healthier place because when I was young I was quite ill a few times, I had whooping cough several times and I think I was a bit sickly so I've got a feeling that that had something to do with [my parents] wanting to move to East Kilbride ...[and] I think it was just a desire for somewhere nicer to stay.*

VERONICA

*We'd passed through it [going to Glasgow from Strathaven in the 1960s] and I used to think 'oh I hope we never come here this is just dreadful!' ... However, we did come and everything was fine... it was just an impression I got... But anyway, we had a new house and there's compensations in everything... because I'd lived in a flat in Strathaven and not a lot of garden and all of the rest... it was a huge compensation to come down to a brand new house and garden...*

HELENA:

*We were in a sublet in Kings Park... Because [my husband] worked in education in Lanarkshire at that time, he had the opportunity to get a house in East Kilbride, and we applied, and were then fortunate enough in getting that, by this time we had a wee baby as well...we got a house in the Murray, Murray Seven, which was a row of houses all occupied by young couples... When we came to stay most of the young people were the same as ourselves, starting out... [W]hen we came to East Kilbride, we were actually interviewed before we were given a house so I reckon were other people, so they actually selected the people they took on... I remember them coming to see us... perhaps on the basis to see how you were, perhaps even to see if you were clean...*

CATHY

*[My Husband] had a job in East Kilbride and I had an aunt and uncle who stayed here so we applied, and of course the lady [Dev. Corp. Inspector] came to see the house [in Drumchapel] and the house had to be - I felt it had to be spotless when she came... [Then] [w]e went to see the house in Junipers and it was amazing, up and down the stairs and a massive big cupboard in the hall, your sitting room, kitchen, wee toilet downstairs and then when you went up the stairs we had a smaller bedroom and two big bedrooms, another cupboard here and a big bathroom. It was heaven, it was just so different, back and front door...it was the first time ever in a brand new house, we thought we'd won the lottery and gone to heaven.*

DOROTHY

*I went back to work in education in Hamilton because all the children were at school by this time...They were building the new school in East Kilbride up at Claremont there and I applied for one of the posts because by this time my parents had been allocated a house in the area up in St Leonards and my mother, again, she was crippled with arthritis so she needed me nearer hand. So while I was working in Hamilton, and I had applied for the job here, there was a circular came round saying that there were some houses available in East Kilbride, but at that time [for] non-residents because the rents were so high in this section that they weren't suitable for people being moved in. So I applied, and was given the tenancy of this one in my name because of my job in education. Which made it excellent...because I could be home in time to watch the children and be here for my mother...*

**So it wasn't your husband's job that brought you to East Kilbride?**

*No it was mine... I had to make a case for it, but it was a good case.... By this time my brother had been assigned a house in East Kilbride, he came out of the RAF after lifetime's service... everything just came together.*

JOAN

*[As new teachers] we got rooms in Cambuslang... two rooms and a makeshift kitchen...we were upstairs for a little while until my husband, who was in the Labour Party, put a poster up in the upstairs window and the landlady didn't like this very much and she asked us to leave.. And then we moved to rooms in Burnside and we were there for another year I think, then we applied for employment in East Kilbride...and so when a vacancy did arise my husband took the job ... [I]it was only by working in the town that you could get a house so that was how we got our first house in East Kilbride. We wanted a house so we applied to work there and we got the house in June 1951. I know we kind of jumped the queue a bit.*

**So was the problem of living in lodgings then that compelled you to do that?**

*Yes and the expense as well... You just felt nothing belonged to you really, you were marking time. But getting our first house was absolutely wonderful. A big house [in East Mains], three rooms upstairs, it was lovely. Nice big kitchen - still with the double sink you know.. .It was a four apartment semi-detached. It was absolutely wonderful compared to what we'd had.*

**What did you know of East Kilbride?**

*Very little really. It was a place we used to cycle to from Rutherglen.*

JOE

*[M]y dad's sister, she moved up here when they were moving the people out of Glasgow - into the Greenhills area...they got a house and it was brand new at the time...so I'd seen it as a small child from primary school and I always liked East Kilbride. And me and my pal used to play a lot of badminton and we used to use the Sports Centre in East Kilbride rather than use the one in the Rutherglen area - it was much bigger and much better so I knew a lot about East Kilbride through that avenue... I liked the fact that it was so open... It was [an ex-Development Corporation] house that I originally bought... The only way to get in [by] then was to buy in.*

## JUNE

*We didn't know one area from another... The prices were certainly excellent, you know for the size of the house and I thought this is a lot of house and a very well made house for the money... We only looked at three houses in East Kilbride... I thought the house is a good size and seems a really nice quiet wee area...*

### Summary

The key points raised within personal testimony on this subject are summarised below together with some discussion of their historical context:

- push factors: inadequate and overcrowded accommodation in Glasgow, sharing with relatives, insecurity of tenure
- pull factors: desire for better housing, a secure tenancy, to be near relatives, a more healthy environment for children
- a brand new, usually non-flatted home, was a huge incentive
- male employment patterns were of initial importance but need to be seen in conjunction with housing quality
- Later moves following the 'right to buy' policy were nearly always dependant on purchase of a house
- the move to East Kilbride was a deliberate and aspirational choice

In describing the nation's dire post war housing situation a well-known historian of Scotland has memorably stated that, '[t]he queue at the Housing Department allocation desk became, in the 1940s, the main manifestation of the New Jerusalem.'<sup>33</sup> In the mid twentieth century the vast majority of Scotland's population were tenants and becoming an owner-occupier was an ambition too far for all but a minority. In this climate, according to some commentators on the subject, efforts made through council house building to address the dire housing conditions of many simply could not come to fruition quickly enough in established cities and towns.<sup>34</sup> This was acutely the case in Glasgow and surrounding counties. During the 1950s, overcrowding within Glasgow outstripped anywhere in the UK; in 1956 for example, 30 per cent of all families in Glasgow still shared a lavatory.<sup>35</sup> The need to obtain a decent house came to be seen, with some justification, pivotal to all other aspects of people's lives—with family, work, health, education and leisure appearing as hostage to the fortunes of the quality of the roof over their heads. Yet although the announcement of Scotland's first new town at East Kilbride may have met a critical desire by planners to attack this problem by dispersing some of Glasgow's population and creating a new, ideal community, for most of the city's population this type of move was never on the agenda. As the rejuvenation of inner city tenements from the 1970s has demonstrated, many Scots do indeed prefer city life.<sup>36</sup> What may distinguish many East Kilbride 'new towners' from the general population however is that they appear to have been unwilling

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<sup>33</sup> T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People*, (London: Fontana, 1987) p.57.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Levitt, 'New Towns, New Scotland, New Ideology, 1937-57', *The Scottish Historical Review*, LXXVI,2: 202 (1997) pp. 222-238.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Tom Begg, *50 Special Years: a Study in Scottish Housing*, (London: Henry Melland, 1987) p.27.

<sup>36</sup> Lynn Abrams and Linda Fleming, 'From Scullery to Conservatory: Everyday Life in the Scottish Home', in Lynn Abrams and Callum Brown (eds) *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) p.58.

to either wait patiently in line in the Glasgow housing queue or, even if lucky enough to be accommodated, settle for a flat in a peripheral scheme. Indeed, these were people who rejected tenement living and the congested quality of most Scottish housing environments, and who made a different choice. East Kilbride may have been based on a somewhat incongruous amalgamation of nostalgia for the market towns of Scotland's pre-industrial past and modernist principles in architecture and design, but moving to the town fired the ambitions of a significant minority of Scots to seek out a new way of living. Indeed, as the testimony from the two interviewees who moved to the town after the 1970s demonstrates, East Kilbride continued to be an attractive choice chiefly because of the quality of the former corporation housing that was by then on offer on the open market.

Nonetheless, from the vantage point of the twenty-first century it may be difficult to appreciate fully the degree of upheaval entailed for families and individuals who took up the option of removal to the town in its first two decades when it was viewed very much as a politically and socially contested experiment. In reflecting on this experience, interviewees tended to be sanguine about being 'inspected' by the Development Corporation for example, seeing this somewhat intrusive means of tenant selection as a small price to pay in order to achieve what they reflect upon as being their *own* ambitions. East Kilbride was too, as many acknowledge, an unknown quantity for city dwellers used to an intensely urban lifestyle and who usually had little conception of the different tenor of life in a town. On the other hand, and as we shall see in section 2 below, moving to a 'new' town was not the same as moving to an established town. Yet for Scots with ambition for an improved standard of living, it represented a better and perhaps more guaranteed option than the other available at the time, which was emigration. The narratives provided clearly reflect that what East Kilbride signified was the chance for a new start in a new place that was both modern and inspirational but also secure and, in terms of its location, not so far from that which was familiar.

Employment patterns, particularly for male workers, have often been seen as the economic driver for the town's early success. However, although these undoubtedly acted as the necessary precursor for much of the early movement to the town, in retrospective memories of settlers what stands out as the main pull factor is the staunch belief that a decent house in a clean, modern environment could change lives for the better. This in combination with the relative youth, optimism and energy of the women and men who settled is what characterises memories of the town's establishment. The move to East Kilbride was more commonly an aspirational choice made by individuals rather than a *fait accompli* of overspill policy that affected individuals. Whether this choice then proved to be a positive one is examined in the next section.

## 2. *The Best of Both Worlds: Settling Down in East Kilbride*

*'East Kilbride was to be a town, and a good, active mixed town, not a suburb or a scheme.'*<sup>37</sup>

To some extent, the housing and urban landscape planned for East Kilbride did look for nostalgic inspiration to the supposed 'humane tradition' of town life in Scotland's pre-industrial past.<sup>38</sup> However, it also undoubtedly absorbed parts of the ideology that had attached itself to architectural innovation by the post war period; that is that new, modern, functionalist building would improve the overall culture of life for the masses. This turn towards social experimentation within planned communities was often a feature of writing about new towns in the early years of their development. Yet as mentioned in the introduction, what often emerged from enquiries into new town experiences in the UK were the potentially troubling aspects of that experience in terms of feelings of displacement, increased social isolation and a lack of contentedness that manifested in ill health rather than raised aspirations. Decades on, the story of Scottish new towns has still little considered this aspect of their ambition. This is perhaps because personal perceptions about wellbeing can be difficult to pin down, communicated as they often are through nebulous statements about having a greater sense of freedom and just feeling more at ease with oneself.

The Scottish New Town Movement did grow out of some very pragmatic issues—a mixture of political, social, economic *and* cultural interests that were the burning questions of the day as the Second World War drew to a close. This probably accounts for the fact that in the official story of Scotland's new towns political and economic features tend to loom largest. The contested notion of overspill, while being essentially a social consideration that aimed to cure Scotland's chronic housing shortage and endemic overcrowding and promote slum clearance, was always seen in seemingly unavoidable union with the country's industrial decline and political arguments over how to arrest this. The overarching historical narrative has therefore tended to marginalise the cultural ambitions of those who lobbied hard to get new towns off the ground in Scotland simply because they believed this would provide a better quality of life for working people.<sup>39</sup> Likely, the brand of utopian socialism that gave rise to the garden city movement did seem irrelevant in the hard-headed political environment of post war Scotland. Yet the will to transform the lives of people by facilitating a move away from high density, heavily urbanised living, though it may have been a lesser consideration by most of the actors involved in the planning of new towns, does seem to have captured the imaginations of interviewees who took advantage of moving to a new home in East Kilbride.

For many newcomers, East Kilbride was perceived as something of a rural idyll, green and clean, despite the fact that it was a building site for the first two decades. In contrast to Glasgow and some of the other west of Scotland towns, the new town had the gleam of wellbeing, the perfect place for those wanting something better for their children and for themselves. In the survey of

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<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *The Plan that Pleas'd*, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.39.

<sup>39</sup> See for example writings by Patrick Dollan in 'East Kilbride new town: I say it's a bargain at 45,000,000 pounds' (East Kilbride Development Corporation, 1953) n.p.; and in 'East Kilbride Development Corporation Handbook for Tenants', (1952) p.3.

1970, 75 per cent of those asked agreed that they had 'bettered themselves' by moving to East Kilbride, the majority identifying a better house followed by better living conditions and a better chance for the children.<sup>40</sup> it was relatively easy to make comparisons with what they had left behind: the tenement flat, the flat in a scheme, sharing with in-laws, could not compare with one's own front door, a garden and modern amenities. As one of our respondents who grew up in the new town said, 'everything was brand-spanking-new'.



*The Reid children in the garden of their home in The Murray. Reproduced with permission of Alison Reid.*

In many of the narratives provided for this study, a sense of good fortune, of having made the right move, and of having effected a transformative change in life for the better, is very clear. A type of pioneering spirit inhabits some narratives: the notion that people took a risk that paid off in unexpected ways. In almost a reversal of the official historical narrative then, personal retrospective stories concerning the success or otherwise of the new town, place much more emphasis on what we might consider as less tangible social and cultural features than on more straightforwardly economic benefits. When respondents were asked what they particularly liked about their homes in East Kilbride, while they sometimes mentioned things like being near to workplaces, to transport and to schools, they were even more likely to emphasise elements like space, clean air, open aspects, neighbourhoods and a sense of community, and sometimes the fact that it was 'not the city'. Publicity material issued to promote the town during its early development did of course emphasise such features and it is likely that interviewees have absorbed something of this official line in bolstering the identity of the town into their own subjective analyses of the town's success. Interestingly though, no interviewee spontaneously recalled any of this kind of publicity although it was widely circulated in the Scottish media of the time. Moreover, those who were asked forthrightly if they remembered seeing or hearing anything of its type, could not recall doing so. Even so, retrospective narratives can be especially helpful in this area given that those who settled in a new town many years ago have had the opportunity to reflect on the pros and cons of the experience.

The excerpts included in this section provide some insights into what the narrators recall as important to their health, wellbeing and sense of optimism for the future as they settled into their houses and made a home in East Kilbride. These include things already mentioned such as space and fresh air, but also the improvements that seem to have emerged for them in terms of family and community life.

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<sup>40</sup> Livingstone and Sykes, *East Kilbride 70*, p.22.

## Interview Extracts

STEPHEN

*I was literally a new town kid.*

*Did you grow up feeling a new town kid?*

*Oh yes yes, we had the easy contrast with my mum's side in particular, in Rutherglen, we knew what a tenement looked like ... we knew we were a little bit lucky, and a little bit special perhaps... Everything was brand-spanking-new, you know new swing parks, new houses, new schools, teachers with enthusiasm and willingness to learn, a real great social mix in the street you know we had teachers, we had policemen, we had middle management, you know, we had lots of factory workers, so just a great place, a great buzz and green and clean - super, loved it!...*

*So that seemed to you an advantage?*

*I'm convinced it was an advantage yes, convinced then and convinced now.*

*What about your parents, did they ever speak with you about that, about why they moved there?*

*All the time...they were Glasgow tenement dwellers my dad was from Partick and my mum was from Rutherglen, and they were very pleased and happy and felt very lucky and privileged to move to East Kilbride and get the keys to a brand new house – with an inside toilet!... They were very quick to remind us how lucky we were –, it was obviously pretty self-evident from going to visit relatives that East Kilbride was certainly a lot more comfortable and privileged... My very early life was Jedburgh Place [in East Mains]. All the neighbours we were all in it together you know, everyone was into their first new house and perhaps because of that it was a slightly more sort of open door policy and there was a lot of energy and enthusiasm and a lot of camaraderie, ah it was a good positive start to life...*

*What about space?*

*[A]t the bigger level East Kilbride was very successful in having lots of green open space...physical form is important, but so too is the opportunity for networking...the first people in are so lucky, the house we moved to in Lindsayfield was a new house, so we were all new neighbours, so it was a little bit like Jedburgh Place 45 years previous where all of the neighbours were in it together – so that was a nice experience...*

HELENA

*At that time we had fields behind us with cows in them... I remember when they came round with the milk, delivering it literally with horse and cart... There was a lot of greenery, you didn't look into each other...*

JOAN

*I think maybe the people who came here were anxious for health reasons or to better themselves or a better job or a better house mostly, that's been my experience... much better than living in a tenement in Glasgow'.*

SYLVIA

*It was really all new. A sister's friend was a district nurse in East Kilbride so I suppose I must have heard bits and pieces or asked about it but of course really most people then said 'oh East Kilbride's a lovely place' ... It looked much nicer here (than Glasgow) and the streets looked bigger...*

Did you feel at the time that it was a different kind of lifestyle?

Oh aye it was... *East Kilbride was totally different. It was wonderful, I mean you really thought it was wonderful after Pollok.*

GRACE

*[I]t was as if you'd been given a chance. You all had lovely homes... [T]o have your own back and front door was so different because they all came from tenements in Glasgow and I just liked it... East Kilbride was just like a holiday village. It was so beautiful... Everybody took a pride... I thought it was a great place for children... Glasgow's a beautiful city but at that time it was kind of smoggy whereas up here there's fresh air. I mean you had new schools up here...they [children] thought everybody lived with a back and front door with a garden. They were always out playing. They had swing parks, they had everything... It became a way of life, like I could never have went back to a room and kitchen – we became East Kilbride people, new towners I think they called us!...*

DOROTHY

*It was a beautiful house, it had everything we wanted... I was quite good at adjusting... It was a high rent but we just had to find the money to pay for it...*

[How did you find the new schools in East Kilbride?](#)

*Excellent, Claremont was a first class school, top quality staff, and in any new school the staff all bond together much more easily you know, because they're all coming to this new environment, and it's a different atmosphere, it was a wonderful school.*

[So do you think that was an incentive too?](#)

*I was quite happy to stay here... I wouldn't have gone back to the city... It used to be described as a town in the country...*

LINDA

*All the kids would be round about the same age and we would be in and out everybody's house, playing games in the street that you wouldn't do now, having races, running up and down the road because when I was smaller there weren't many cars, I don't ever remember not being allowed to go anywhere... There were...ordinary sized four level flats... [T]here weren't so many children in the flats... most of the children lived in the terraced houses... There were two or three people had their grandparents with them... I think my grandmother changed her life. When she was widowed she came to live in East Kilbride and she never looked back because she was never in. After school she'd maybe go out to some club, I think she was in every club in East Kilbride and there were lots of things she used to do. And then as we got older and were teenagers my gran was out in the afternoon, she was away at various activities, I think there were a lot of things, not old aged clubs but the Murray hall had a lot of afternoon clubs and my gran went to them all and she went to the Salvation Army, church things, she was always away... She had a lot of friends they were grandparents of children who had moved to East Kilbride so she ended up meeting up with people she used to go to school with [in Glasgow] who were also living in East Kilbride.*

ISOBEL

[What did you like best about that house \(in the Murray\)?](#)

*I think I loved everything about it... I liked where it was, I liked my neighbours, I think I just liked my life at that time...the whole thing... I think I just had a nice wee life in that house.*

ANNA

*I really liked that house [an end terraced house in the Murray].... I was happy there, I grew up and there was a lot of children in the street that I made friends with and obviously at that point it was quite safe, there was a lot less traffic than there is now and I just remember always being out and always having time.*

*I think it is a good place to live, it just seems cleaner and brighter and nicer – than living in the city...*

SHIRLEY

*There was six houses built and I was one of the six people to move into this row of six houses, and then the builders went on strike...we lived up in Greenhills, six families and nothing!... So we had to like each other!... The kids were all just round about the same age...a wee knitting bee just for the six of us!... It wasnae really a street because obviously in East Kilbride they were building so they never had roads for children tae cross... Kids could get out to play and there wasnae really any traffic... To get all that from nothing really, we went from nothing to get as much as that... I think because we were in that wee community together we got to know each other really well, we had time to get established... Everybody was in the same boat... There wasnae anybody that was better than anybody else... I think the kids would be healthier moving up here all they years ago. Really away from the city. You felt when you took the children back into the city and they were brown you know cos they were out playing all the time and they looked really healthy, you think back and that they looked different from city kids...although you never thought about it when you were living in the city... They looked different fae city kids...it was a nicer environment to be brought up in I think...*

VERONICA

*Well, initially when we heard we were coming to East Kilbride I wasn't overly happy, to me it was just a big housing scheme...but then I thought about it and the children were growing up and I thought – well, we've got amenities here...and we probably were better off coming here when the children were young... It was different to see the place grow...it was fine and I had good neighbours... You just accepted where you were going...*

*I think initially people who came to East Kilbride really were all working and they had a higher standard of living... You had to have a certain standard of living before you could get housing in East Kilbride and when they took all of that away anybody could come to East Kilbride. So people were coming out [from Glasgow and Lanarkshire] and didn't have the same standard of living as the people who were already here ...it was a wee bitty different... Greenhills always had a reputation as having a bit of rough and tumble and St Leonards was the be all and end all!*

JAMES

*The scheme was called Greenhills, right on the edge of town...we were surrounded by open fields and cows grazing, we were oot in the country...then it was really beautiful... A brand new house, even when we moved in the roads weren't made up, it was mud everywhere, the kids were trailing in mud for months...everything brand new!... The good thing was, there were a lot of young families moved in at the same time and we all became very friendly...that was the bond between us the children were young and they played together...there was a good community spirit...it was a good environment for the children to grow up... We were all working-class people. Naebody was better than anybody else. We all had jobs, they weren't high flying jobs, they were just jobs... We went to the church down the road eventually and made a lot of friendships. They came from all*

*over East Kilbride... There was folk had fancier houses than us but they didn't treat us any different... You knew it was a better life. Having the house with a back and front door, a garden, you definitely knew you had bettered yourself and your family. Especially from the background we came from...*

*I know when I worked in the town centre that there was a culture of 'oh they're the overspill, they're not as good as us'. I think there was a bit of snobbishness, I think there still a bit of snobbishness in East Kilbride. People look down their nose at folk fae Glasgow but they forget that most of them came from Glasgow, it's strange. Greenhills used to get a bad name in the town. Calderwood used to have a bad name. But every area has problems...but as I say there was a kinna snobbishness, people did look down on folk who came in from Glasgow, especially overspill families...*

**What did you most like about it?**

*It was new, brand new, everything was new, that was something special I think...*

**CATHY**

*Sometimes the neighbours would take turn about watching the children and we'd get a bus [from Greenhills] to the town centre, get most of the shopping and come back in a taxi and that meant that we didn't have to traipse all the children to the shops. This is what we had, we really had a good bond, we all sort of worked together, helped each other in whatever way we could...this is the way it worked and I think this is what a community is about, having good neighbours and all working together...we had a good time there, we really did.*

## **Summary**

In recalling first experiences of the town, respondents refer to different parts of their own life courses. Those who grew up in the town remember aspects of their childhood when their families were settling in; those who moved as adults did so for the most part in the decades when the town was still quite new and overseen by the Development Corporation, a couple came later to an already established town. Nevertheless, within these varied personal contexts several common issues were raised in the testimony provided. These can be summarised as follows:

- Comparisons between older urban environments and East Kilbride coloured positive responses to the town and its 'newness'
- The housing environments were perceived as spacious, clean and safe which informed a general belief that they promoted wellbeing for individuals and families
- Neighbourhood networks were more easily established in the context of a new town and these too affected overall contentedness with the housing and its surroundings
- The positive effects of the new town environment on the lives of children was of particular importance for encouraging successful settlement
- The social mix of the town is recalled as a positive aspect of its character in the initial stages
- Neighbourhood distinctions were quick to develop and these had both positive and negative connotations.

In the personal testimony of our respondents, settling down in East Kilbride was not always recalled without *any* reservations. The interviews were conducted with awareness that how

people reflect on common aspects of the past is always filtered through their own experience. For some women in particular, settling in East Kilbride was enabled in the first instance by men's employment and women responded to this new environment in variable ways according to the level of involvement they had in the decision to take up employment in the town. There is no doubt that some women were not passive in this process, encouraged their partners to make this move, and were themselves committed to making a success of settlement, but this was by no means a universal condition. One female interviewee recalled for example that on driving through the new town in its early days, before she moved there, her impression of the building going on was not favourable and even after many years of living in the town, she has 'never really fallen in love with East Kilbride'. And a good number of women in the early days reportedly suffered from what was termed 'transitional neurosis', a condition brought on by a combination of high rents and money anxieties and social isolation resulting from poor public transport, young children and distance from kin.<sup>41</sup> Some of the tribulations of localities are also recalled such as the lack of local shopping in new neighbourhoods, the absence of roads, the domestic ordeals of dirt and disruption due to ongoing building works, and for some, the financial constraints in the early years.

However, the perception of 'feeling lucky' is an example of a repeated phrase that occurs in interviews and can be interpreted to refer, sometimes simultaneously, to the housing conditions that many families left behind, and to the quality of what they encountered in East Kilbride. Regardless of various setbacks described by interviewees, the fact that both women and men valued their new homes did affect their ability to feel more optimistic, both at an individual level and in respect of their family's fortunes, and influenced how new towners coped with early difficulties. These factors appear to have created a spirit of positivity across neighbourhoods that proved infectious. The trope of being 'all in the same boat' is a further reiterated feature of personal narratives collected for this project. This may say much about the ways in which settlers in the town recognise that together with obtaining quality housing their experience of community life also affected the overall success of settlement and promoted a general feeling of belonging and identification with a neighbourhood. The stories told by interviewees about their first years in East Kilbride do serve to undermine the notion of widespread emotional displacement, particularly amongst women.

East Kilbride's 'honeymoon' period was probably over when the town began to expand beyond its original planned perimeters. Within personal recollections of settling into new homes and communities, many interviewees also select collective memories from the town's history to illustrate the issues that affected their own progress in making a home in the town. The building of the Greenhills neighbourhood and the eventual decision to abandon the employment qualification is one example. It is clear that many new towners saw themselves as having exercised personal autonomy in coming to the town and in having been selected as suitable to settle in what was perceived as a privileged environment. Metaphorically speaking, the widening of access seems to mark the end of one era in the town. Nevertheless, the networks established within the first neighbourhoods, and it should be noted, later amongst Greenhill's residents, proved resilient. Many interviewees commented on the lasting friendships made that have survived voluntary dispersal of families to different parts of the town. The neighbourliness that is recalled was often centred on the commonality of incomers' circumstances – men and

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<sup>41</sup> Coleman. *Mental Health and Social Adjustment*.

women employed in the same industries, children attending the same schools and playing together in the streets and in each other's homes, and the will to make the most of new homes and the surrounding locality.

### **3. Modern Homes: Keeping House in East Kilbride**

*'Housing designs were limited by cost, but there was a strong effort to supply variety...'*<sup>42</sup>

Elizabeth Mitchell recounts an anecdote that on one of the occasions she showed delegations of overseas visitors round the town, a woman architect from Finland commented 'but these are not workers' houses, they are middle class'.<sup>43</sup> The ambitions of early planners were to provide superior housing and early movers to the town were not disappointed by their efforts. Our interviewees confirmed the results of earlier surveys that the new, modern houses provided by the Development Corporation were a key factor in them deciding to move to East Kilbride and that their homes were, on the whole, a source of satisfaction and pleasure, particularly in contrast with their former accommodation. As early as 1953, it was reported that it was the new houses promised that encouraged young workers of an engineering business and their wives to move to East Kilbride from Portobello near Edinburgh.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, our interviews confirmed the importance of high quality social housing in not only attracting people to East Kilbride, but also in encouraging longer term settlement in the town and the development of neighbourhood identities. Respondents told stories of how they had moved several times within the new town as their housing needs changed - for example from a house to a flat - and most were very satisfied with the quality and range of housing on offer.



*Modern homes with open front gardens and paths separated from road. Reproduced with permission of Design for Health's photostream@Flickr*

For the time the new town houses were well-equipped and most of our interviewees recalled sufficient space and suitable layouts when asked to describe their first homes and what they liked (and disliked) about them. Built-in cupboards, fitted kitchens, downstairs WCs, and space inside and out were all mentioned as desirable features of the new homes which were also clean

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<sup>42</sup> Mitchell, *The Plan that Pleased*, p.38.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p.38.

<sup>44</sup> South Lanarkshire Archives, East Kilbride Development Corporation, Press Cuttings 1952-54; *The Bulletin*, 22 Aug 1953.

and bright - and modern. Aspects that were rarely explicitly mentioned were inside WCs, the separation of living and sleeping space and the ability to undertake housekeeping tasks within one's own home, unlike in some of the unmodernised tenements where shared facilities and multi-functional rooms were still the norm. It is easy to forget that facilities taken for granted today were experienced by some as luxuries in the 1950s and 60s.

Activities around the house began to inform the identities of those who moved to the town: moving to East Kilbride provided women and men alike with greater opportunities for home-making. Given that the prospect of a new home of one's own, albeit rented, was a key push factor for many moving to the new town, it is hardly surprising that the new residents spent so much time there. Added to this the relatively high rents, the desire for fixtures and furnishings and to personalise, the obstacles to socialising with relatives and friends outwith East Kilbride, and the demands of young children, home-making became the focus for many couples in the first years of settlement. For the most part the homes were easy to keep clean and maintain thus freeing up time and money for decoration and renovation over and above what was provided by the Corporation. For some it was a stretch to equip the extra space they had acquired, one of our respondents commenting, there was 'always too much month left at the end of the salary'.<sup>45</sup> Purchasing second-hand furniture or obtaining more expensive items on hire purchase were common strategies. But many of our respondents described in some detail their efforts to beautify and adapt their new homes using their newly acquired DIY and gardening skills.

Yet the new modern homes were not always perfect in every conceivable way. Our respondents mentioned several factors. These included: kitchens that were too small or inconveniently located; problems with the metal-framed windows; old fashioned coal fires in some of the early homes in the Mains and Murray districts that provided inadequate heat; the expense of later heating systems, usually electric storage heaters or sometimes under floor hot air systems; problematic access to the rear of some homes, and, due to local soil conditions, gardens that were stubbornly resistant to cultivation!

The majority of our interviewees lived in a house rather than a flat during their first years in the town. This experience coincidentally matches the intentions of the original housing profile for East Kilbride as Elizabeth Mitchell explained: 'Our experience at East Kilbride was that nearly all the people coming from Glasgow wished for a house. We had flats, in three-storey or at most four-storey blocks, but the desire in the heart of incomers was for a little house on the ground.'<sup>46</sup>

As is well known, the pressure to proceed more quickly with overspill plans resulted in repeated compromises being made to the intended size and population of the town, which had repercussions for housing: multi-storey flats were soon built. Notwithstanding such concessions, accolades for the town's public housing overall by far outweigh any complaints about its utility and comfort. Moreover, for those interviewees who continue to live in former Development Corporation housing, this continues to be the case. Respondents repeatedly highlight spaciousness and sound building as valued aspects of homes. But alongside the continuing accolades many of the problematic issues remain broadly unchanged. Amongst these were small and awkwardly situated kitchens, and for some of those who live in flats, the

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with 'Cathy'.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *The Plan that Pleased*, p.56.

persistence of storage heating systems, the lack of outdoor space in the form of a veranda, and poor noise insulation.



*The view from the Reid's house in The Murray drawn by Mr Reid in 1970s. Reproduced with permission of Alison Reid.*

For many new tenants the collective ethos of East Kilbride in the early days was to 'take a pride'. This venture very much began at home. It was demonstrated through activities such as housework, DIY, shopping for furnishings, and making use of indoor and outdoor domestic space for family activities. Indeed, East Kilbride provides an excellent case study for understanding patterns in post war consumerism within Scotland. In the following excerpts from interviews, the respondents describe their home life. Notable in this testimony is the differential gender lines of home-making.

### **Interview Extracts**

CATHY

*The house was a 'dream come true, brand new house'.*

*We worked it out that we could afford it, it was about £30 a month - I know it was about £13 more than where we stayed in Drumchapel... Plus you had to furnish it, you know, new carpets...the dearest thing I think were the carpets because we had everything else...I think everybody was the same. We didn't have a lot of money, we never have. It was the provie cheque ...the kids going to school, you got your provie cheque and got your clothes. We used to think it was awful that you couldn't afford to go out and buy things but that's the way it was.*

SYLVIA

*I think when I came here I found things quite tight, particularly the electricity...I never ever felt that I had a lot of money. I did find it hard. I suppose I found it hard even paying the rent at times... To fill my living room up I bought quite a lot of second-hand furniture. I couldn't move into a house this size and buy things new...it was a case of a cheap carpet and a more expensive suite or the*

*other way around and I remember having curtains up and I couldn't close them because they were just to dress the window you know.*

**In comparison (to former accommodation in Pollok) how easy was it to keep the house clean?**

*It was great, it was fantastic... it was much easier to keep clean, I mean it really was much easier. I suppose even in the old houses the coal fires would have meant a lot more dirt but oh no you had all these cupboards in the kitchen and everything went into the cupboards you know. That house in Pollok had metal window frames, freezing cold... In St Leonards the kitchen was fitted, you had all these cupboards and worktops and everything, I don't even think I saw a worktop in the old house, I don't think people had them. And the bedrooms both had walk-in wardrobes...and a great big cupboard in the hall for your Hoover, when you got one... Oh the bathroom was great; having your own bathroom was great, being able to, you know it was quite modern, there wasn't all this condensation round-a-bout ...and I quite enjoyed doing a bit of papering, painting and all that. The novelty wore off mind you!*

VERONICA

*The house itself was a fair-sized living room and kitchen off it - that was the only drawback, the kitchen off it. Then there was a kind of back porch type place that was under the stairs because the kitchen was off the living room and out into the back garden which was hedges all the way round it and it was ideal. I would say the drawback in the kitchen being off the living room [was that] the boys were getting older and if I had someone in they had to come down and go through the kitchen to pour themselves a drink to go back out ... It was a super wee house. That was a Development Corporation house aye.*

**And that kitchen in your house in the Murray?**

*It was adequate ...the cooker was there...and I had my own washing machine and fridge-freezer... I had a kitchen table that folded down and four wee chairs, [where] we always ate...*

GRACE

*I mowed the grass, mowed the grass back and front, kept it tidy. You see a lot of the houses in East Kilbride didn't have fences between them and I think that was a source of irritability to a lot of folk. You could just run right through all the backs and people didn't like that...and out the front you just had a wee sloping bit but it was nice, we just mowed the grass.*

**The Corporation didn't let you put fences up?**

*No. no. We just had like a piece of wood that cut you off from each kitchen window, for privacy, but that was all. And you washed your stairs out the front door every Friday... Everybody took a pride. I loved it [having own back door and garden]. I think I washed the first three weeks I was up there....*

**Was the cooker there when you moved in?**

*No you bought everything. When you went in up here it was a bare shell. Well with us being in a room and kitchen we had a cooker, had the bed, had a cot...we didn't have a three piece suite but we had a dining room suite, everybody had a dining room suite, it was a table, four chairs and a sideboard...*

ANNA

*It was just a wee square kitchen...it wasn't all that big... There was a hatch through [from the living room].*

**Did your family use the hatch?**

*Yes! For clearing the table.*

[\[W\]as the house wallpapered?](#)

*I know there was wallpaper in the living room...with big kind of teasels on it. Because my mum and dad were quite – I think they were quite kind of aware of what was going on in terms of fashion – what was nice. I remember wallpaper from Sanderson's and places like that... I remember kind of hanging about looking at patterns when they were choosing stuff... Wylie and Lochhead's that was another place they shopped in, in town...*

SHIRLEY

*In those days, when you managed to get anything, you saved up to get it and you thought it was great, you'd saved up that long and hard to get it! When I moved up here... I had some furniture, no a lot, didnae have a carpet, any carpets... In fact -- we were there quite a while, and it was my mother's suggestion 'why don't you get wee bits o' carpet and stick them on the stairs', and it was just like wee square bits of carpet and we cut them up and stuck them on the stairs!*

[Can you walk me through that house in Greenhills?](#)

*You'd a big long hall and a cupboard in the back - the bikes and everything all got in this cupboard which was great ... and off your hall you had the living room which wasn't a great big living room but we had the most massive big kitchen, I had a unit, a dresser type thing in my kitchen, that's how big it was lovely dishes on it, oh eventually, not when we first moved in! And a lovely big round table. Oh it was lovely our kitchen, big big kitchen, it was lovely. And as I say we had a wee toilet downstairs which my husband - when we got married we never knew how to do things like decorate and stuff like that, but we just had to learn all that and do it ourselves. We couldn't afford to pay people to do it. And he eventually tiled all this wee bathroom... [My husband] eventually learnt to do all the papering and papering, oh he was good at that, he was really good at doing it, and because as I say her was a designer for Levis so he also made the trousers for the kids, he made trousers for neighbours kids and sold them to make money to do things -- before I went out to work.*

JOAN

*As you went into the lobby there was space and coat pegs and under the stair there was space for a pram would you believe. The bathroom was downstairs but there was no toilet upstairs - that was a bit of a snag - the kitchen was quite big. It had a double sink and opposite the back door there was a coal cellar with the big water tank up above it - the water was heated from a coal fire which was a bit of a nuisance when you were out working so my husband got me gas led up to the fire and we used the gas poker... And it was a composition floor, not a wooden floor and that, we were told, was because of the Korean War, they couldn't get the timber, so we had a carpet square and polished the surround dark dark brown... Heating was only the one fireplace. It was pretty cold. I think we were hardier in those days, and younger too of course. We didn't buy everything new, we didn't buy anything we couldn't pay for - that was the way I was brought up and so we went to some auctions that were held in Hamilton and got table and chairs and things like that. We did without things we couldn't afford. I didn't have a washing machine until my first baby was born, otherwise it was a glass scrubbing board.*

STEPHEN

*When I look back down it was pretty ordinary little terraced house [and] that house was just a 2-bedroomed house, and we moved when my little sister was born, five or so years later, we moved sort of a street and a half away to a 3-bedroomed house... A traditional brick built house – but again when you think back to where my parents had come from – it had its own front and back*

*door, its own bathroom, and probably the fifties' housing was particularly blessed for having lots of light and things like cupboards which modern houses don't have! So it was fine, the downside probably is that it wasn't the warmest of places but Glasgow tenements weren't, so, it had a coal fire. Again my parents wouldn't have thought [this] was out of the ordinary... I remember the paraffin smells from having the wee paraffin heater upstairs and my mum making the hot water bottles up of a night – far from being centrally heated that's for sure...*

LINDA

*Our first house was in Livingstone Terrace in the Murray, it was a terrace house, I even remember who built them, Stonehouse. My father always told me that they were built with the best materials...they were sound, good built houses. They had a front and back door, they had large living rooms, a kitchen that was really big, three bedrooms, I would say double size - you wouldn't get them in modern houses nowadays - plenty of cupboard space, fitted bathroom. When I think my mother and father grew up in tenements in Dennistoun this was completely new ... I think everybody that knew them came up to visit to see this new house.*

*Front door and outside the front door was a porch which I always remember being nice and sunny and in the summer we'd sit there, and it went into a large square hall. Off to the left was the living room which ran the full length of the house so you'd a back and a front window. After the front door if you went straight forward that was the kitchen, it was a large square kitchen, a good size kitchen and I remember there was a cupboard under the stairs ...to the right was the stairs - there was a window in the hallway so it was a nice bright sunny hallway. And up the stairs there were three bedrooms, two of them a large double size and the other one you could still get a double bed in that so it was big compared to today's standards I think, and there was a large bathroom. It had a bath, sink and a toilet. It was a bright airy house. Every bedroom had a double walk-in wardrobe and I think that's unusual as well...*

*[In my present flat] the rooms are a good size, there's plenty of cupboards, for one person it's adequate. Perhaps I would put the kitchen where the bathroom is because the bathroom's slightly bigger and I would have put the cupboards in different places but then I'm probably looking at it with a female eye rather than a man's eye...it's a man's design. A woman would have designed the kitchen differently... I would have more cupboard space, the way the cupboards are you're leaning over.*

JAMES

[What did you most like about the house?](#)

*It was new. Everything was new. In fact when they sent us out a list of things that was in the house we were totally gobsmacked that we were going to move into this house with all these amenities. I mean my wife was over the moon and we couldn't wait to get out to see it. This is going to be a new life. It was quite exciting. In some ways I was surprised that it was so good. It was a new scheme, it was out in the countryside, what more could you ask for?... It had a downstairs toilet - they were designed for young families. You know with kids running into the garden and play, the toilet was there. And the other factor was if you had three kids in a family and especially with two lassies, trying to get in the bathroom was a nightmare.*

DOROTHY

*I just like the whole house. It has everything that I wanted. The only thing I possibly would have liked is not to have a big blank wall in front of me, looking out you know like this but on the other hand nobody's looking in on me...*

*So that's to do with the layout of the estate then? Do you think they could have done better?*

*I think it was very well planned having looked at other houses, the size of the house, I just like my house. ...*

HELENA

*The houses [in the Murray] varied but every second one had a through corridor so you could go through from front to back and that was an area that was taken away from the living room so we unfortunately had one of these and from that point of view felt that you were less well off but other than that the houses were very good, very comfortable. Just one of these see through living rooms with front window and back, nice kitchen, hall and stair, three bedrooms and a bathroom...the kitchen had the cupboards built in, it had the cooker supplied which was very important and I remember my mother-in-law gave me an old washing machine with a wringer on the top where I used to do my washing, I thought I was rich having that.*

JOE

*The access to the back of the house was actually looking straight onto a field but the car was able to get parked at the back which technically a lot of people might say was the front because that was where your living room was although that technically was the back and the front you walked past the kitchen.*

*Had your [ex-Development Corporation house] been renovated at all when you [bought it]?*

*The bottom windows were done...so I had to put in the top windows. The back cupboard was taken away – there's always a bin area in the old housing stock at the backs of the houses, which was attached to the living room – well they'd actually taken that away so it was more open plan in that sense and made the living room even bigger... The kitchen was the original...it was still a good kitchen...*

*What were the main advantages of it, what was the think that really sold it to you?*

*[T]he garden itself and I could never have probably have afforded that in the Glasgow area...it was the outdoor space...*

*In that neighbourhood had you begun to see people doing that [renovating houses purchased from the Corporation]?*

*Oh aye, it was always doors and windows, you could see that right away. Usually at the end terrace maybe there was a small porch put on at the back...*

JUNE

*I thought it's a lot of house, and it's a very well made house for the money ... I thought the house was a good size, in a quiet area, liked the idea that the back's quite secluded, didn't realise until we moved in that it can be a pain because there's no access to the back ...there never was any access, that's how they were built. The other houses have lanes running between them...*

*You mentioned there DIY, did you do a lot when you first moved in?*

*(Laughs)I don't think we were in 6 months and - 'we need new windows, new central heating'. I mean we have done a lot to this house, new kitchen - twice we've had a new kitchen - new bathroom three times since we moved ... I mean when we got married, you know you're a young couple, there was no money, if you wanted anything done then you did it on your own ... I would do all the painting and the papering but [my husband] could make anything in wood, he actually put*

*in plumbing, he put in central heating himself, not much he couldn't do... When you got married in those days no-one got a tradesman in our class if you like, you just didn't, far too expensive, it was a case of if you didn't do it yourself you did without.*

## Summary

Delight in having a new home largely outweighed any minor quibbles about layout or size. And although many of our respondents recall struggling financially at the beginning, they recall 'making do' with pride (implicitly contrasting their ways of managing with expectations today of having everything new). The key findings in this section were:

- internal and external space was desired and appreciated
- houses were mostly well designed, spacious and well-equipped
- tenants felt the expense of furnishing a new home
- Likes: front and back door, storage, downstairs toilet, fitted kitchen
- Dislikes: heating systems, lack of access from the rear of terraces

Differences between how men and women talked about the homes were quite marked. Our female respondents were able to walk us through their houses, commenting - often in some detail - on likes and dislikes, and recalling in particular the accoutrements of kitchens - storage space, washing machines and so on. Perhaps it is surprising that these new homes were so well liked. After all, the internal layout was often very different to the layout of a traditional tenement flat, yet open plan living rooms were remembered with fondness for the light and space. It is notable that one of our interviewees recalled the back-to-front orientation of his first home with the kitchen facing the street. This was not unusual in new town housing and followed a concept outlined by a female adviser on working-class housing in the post-war era who wrote: 'While the living room should face west or south onto garden or balcony, with utmost obtainable privacy from being overlooked or overheard by others, the kitchen, the workshop, should look onto the street, so that the woman can join, however indirectly, in the life of the neighbourhood.'<sup>47</sup> This revolutionary new design concept was a break with the tradition whereby the front of the house was associated with the display of status and aimed instead to prioritise the modern needs of housewives. However, evidence from Harlow new town suggests that being able to see out to the street from the kitchen was not liberating for women. Apart from being unable to keep a watch on young children in the garden, they effectively felt isolated from a world they could see but within which they could not participate. It would be interesting to explore further if this experience was replicated in East Kilbride, or not. Certainly, we know that East Kilbride women offset the demands of higher rents and the need to furnish new homes through taking the initiative to leave the house and go out to work, thus improving household fortunes and influencing the lifestyles of new towners. This factor is explored in the next section.

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<sup>47</sup> E.Denby (1941) cited in Judy Attfield, 'Inside pram town: a Case Study of Harlow House Interiors, 1951-1961' in J.Attfield and P.Kirkham (eds), *A View from the Interior: Women and Design* (London, Women's Press, 1995), p.217.

#### **4. The New Town Lifestyle: Home, Work and Leisure in East Kilbride**

*'I cannot think that life in a multi storey flat would have a tendency to promote personal initiative...'*<sup>48</sup>

'Women built this town' commented one of our interviewees. They had little choice. Many women had followed their husbands to the new town, looking forward to a new house which was dependent on his having a job there. Initially many women bonded around their young children, but later they also formed social relationships of their own around their working lives. We are familiar with stories about community and especially female solidarity in the tenements, a solidarity borne of poverty and the need to cooperate. In many narratives of tenement life, cleaning the shared stair and communal laundry facilities are vividly recalled, including within interviews conducted for this project. One interviewee recalls that, 'obviously your washing was spotless when you hung it out. My mother in Glasgow went to the steamie every week and you pegged out your washing a certain way...' Such narratives infer both conformity and conviviality in female domestic lives that promoted a sense of common purpose. By contrast, new towns have been described as harbouring 'new town neurosis' amongst the young women who moved there far away from family, friends and familiar networks and who lacked a shared identity.<sup>49</sup>

The extent of the 'new town blues' has almost certainly been overstated. Some women (and perhaps some men too, although the term neurosis does tend to be associated with females) did certainly struggle to adapt. Some were lonely, had trouble meeting people, and were nostalgic for their friends in Glasgow who were reluctant to travel to East Kilbride. Women in particular were often tied to the house by the demands of young children, their husbands working long hours to help pay the higher rents and without family and friends close-by they became isolated and cut off from social engagement.<sup>50</sup> But settling in took time as Dr S.D. Coleman observed in his 1960 study of mental health and social adjustment in East Kilbride. Families prioritised decorating and furnishing over socialising outside of the home when they first moved in, the absence of ready-made baby-sitting networks and limited public transport meant accessing social and leisure events was difficult. In 1970, more than 90 per cent of those questioned identified young children as the main bar on couples going out together.<sup>51</sup> However, we were surprised to discover the extent of chain migration, whereby young couples moved to East Kilbride to be near older relatives or vice versa. Indeed, just as Willmott and Young discovered in their famous study of rehousing from Bethnal Green to Essex in 1957, initial separation from extended family was overcome when parents were encouraged to move closer to their children, in turn relieving young mothers of some of the burdens of childcare.<sup>52</sup>

Our respondents were more likely to mention the social contact they did make. Women chatted while putting out the washing in their gardens; they travelled to work on the bus together; they worked in the same factories; and they socialised together within a range of activities organised in and around the home and family. Women were the backbone of family life but they were also often essential contributors to household income. Rents were high compared with Glasgow and

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<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, *The Plan that Pleasued*, p.55.

<sup>49</sup> See Clapson, 'Working-Class Women's Experiences'.

<sup>50</sup> Dr S.D.Coleman, *Mental Health and Social Adjustment in a New Town: an Exploratory Study in East Kilbride* (Glasgow, c.1960).

<sup>51</sup> Livingstone and Sykes, *East Kilbride 70*, p.20.

<sup>52</sup> M.Young and P.Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 1957).

jobs for women in the manufacturing, retail and service sectors were not hard to come by. This was the era of part-time and shift work. Women juggled housework and paid work in order to afford their new homes and particularly to enable them to decorate and furnish their homes without recourse to buying on Hire Purchase.

Compared to Glasgow, East Kilbride had few amenities for recreation and social life in the early years and some continued to travel back to the city for leisure, despite having to rush for the last bus home! Our respondents say little about recreation and other activities outside the home. Each neighbourhood eventually had its own churches but church-going and associated clubs were not singled out by many respondents as aids to social integration. Today Glasgow is probably more accessible for shopping and recreation owing to the rise in the car owning population. But the new residents, in the main, found themselves in neighbourly communities where the women met through their young children, they joined work-based social clubs and, in time, church and sports groups began to fill the void.

It is important to remember that in the 1950s and 60s few Scottish families had cars - by 1970 only around half of families in East Kilbride owned a car though this was a much higher percentage than the 21 per cent of the car-owning population of Glasgow.<sup>53</sup> However, few women had access to their own transport to reach work or the shops. Public transport between the neighbourhoods and the town centre was limited so everyday shopping was undertaken in the neighbourhood stores. Today, East Kilbride is described by some as a car town with edge of town supermarkets encouraging, even necessitating car use, leading to the decline of neighbourhood facilities. This has the greatest impact on those without access to a car - especially the elderly and those with a disability. Current discussions about locating a new supermarket in the centre of the town have been lively with many opposing the proposal but evidence from this study suggests that for those reliant on public transport this would be a helpful development.

It has been harder to elicit information about how men adapted to the new town lifestyle. For most, of course, their primary identification - after family - was work and some of the larger employers such as Rolls Royce provided workplace social facilities, closed down for the Glasgow Fair and organised outings for the families of employees. It seems that with the exception of pubs of which there were only a small number, there were few social facilities frequented by men. The home and family life were central preoccupations with many men discovering their DIY and gardening skills in their new homes.

What is noticeable in our respondents' recollections is a sense that East Kilbride in the first two or three decades was a socially mixed town, where class distinctions were not especially marked. There may be some truth in this. While there were certainly class differences, the newness of the town and the nature of the housing stock meant that, as one man put it, there was 'a real great social mix in the street you know we had teachers, we had policemen, we had middle management, we had plenty of factory workers.'

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<sup>53</sup> Livingstone and Sykes, *East Kilbride 70*, p.15.

## Interview Extracts

ISOBEL

*There was a bus once every hour [from the Strathaven road] ... [I] had to lug the go-chair onto the bus and then down to the town centre, it was Templeton's then at the front, and then back up the road, oh gosh aye Jesus when you think about it now, but you never thought about it at the time. I mean some days I even walked that [3 miles]. We didn't have a car when we moved up there. I don't drive... Templeton's was where we used to do our shopping, and there was one in the village.*

SHIRLEY

*In Castlemilk I loved it. I absolutely loved the Young Mothers in the church... and when I came up to East Kilbride I thought it would just be a matter of joining the same things up here; no it wasn't like that. Totally different. I tried it, well there wasn't a church up in Greenhills at the time, I went to the Westwood church and it was never the same. It lost the community thing, I don't know what that would be really. I still liked East Kilbride but I don't know, there was something different from living in Castlemilk... I got a wee bit disheartened.*

*I went to the playgroup with [daughter] so I met people through that... I think there was a Gingerbread group or something like that and that's where I went because you could take your kids and that's where I met new friends.*

SYLVIA

*What didn't you like about it?*

*I think in the beginning the isolation. I did miss - I mean I didn't know anybody... I obviously knew the people I'd started working beside but I'd never been able to get friendly enough where we'd visited each other because I was travelling backwards and forwards from Glasgow - so when I came here... I did feel a bit isolated and a bit kind of vulnerable - am I going to manage? It's OK saying I want my own place and I've got a job and all the rest of it, [but] I felt quite lonely in the beginning and I think I was lucky that I was able to go to work because you got to speak to people ... I wasn't into joining things, probably because I had my daughter, I thought I couldn't get involved with too many things at night... I think as well as the independence and the thought I've got my own place I was a wee bit scared.*

*The secondary school beside me, there really was a community group thing and they had different classes. I mean I really didn't know about that at that beginning but I did later on get involved, and then as I say because I was working, the people there, the Rolls Royce club had a few different things ... I still went into Glasgow quite a lot at weekends. I remember one of my neighbours saying to me when I lived in St Leonards saying 'Oh I'm going into toon' and I went 'oh you're going onto the town centre?' and she said 'Noo I mean I'm going into Glasgow, I don't call that the toon [meaning East Kilbride town centre], and I thought 'oh right'.*

*[My daughter] was very good at badminton ... and she would go to a church youth thing. It was mostly sporty things so she was at the John Wright [sports' centre] quite a lot and the baths quite a lot - she didn't go into Glasgow.*

CATHY

*How did you get to meet your neighbours when you first moved in?*

*When we moved in it was February and there was nothing really to do because the roads outside were mucky, and we'd seen them when we were moving in so I said to my daughter, 'go and chat to that lady and ask her if she wants a cup of tea' so she came in with her knitting and the children just played away together...I just felt you know we are all going to be living here so somebody's got to make the first move... We just sat and blethered.*

*Did you feel like incomers?*

*Yes we did...I think people were wary of who you were, where you come from but because we all moved in together...we weren't long in mixing in.*

HELENA

*Slowly they all [neighbours] moved away, they all bought houses... [My best memory] is the community spirit and we actually had outings to the seaside together, to have a picnic, yes that's what I treasured most, that's what I enjoy to be with people, and I'm still friends today with three lots out of those neighbours all these years later.*

*Did you go in and out of each other's houses?*

*Yes but only by invitation. We weren't in the habit of running in and out of each other's homes as such but if there was any need to look after a child...*

*Once we moved to this house here (Whitemoss) it was quite common that you entertained at coffee mornings, you went to coffee mornings. My husband was not keen that I was spending my time like that, he was always keen on education, so eventually I did go to college...*

GRACE

*We all went out to work, we all worked the twilight shifts 5 to 9, you had to, to get on. Your husband came in from work, you had the dinner ready – it's changed days! Then we all went out to work, everybody worked... We had big houses to furnish, it wasn't that anybody was snobs or wanted to get on... I'd never worked in a factory in my life... it was all women that worked at night...[and] women didn't get as much as men... We walked round to the Murray shops and then we got a Glasgow bus down to College Milton... You saved for holidays, everybody always went a caravan holiday down the coast... The majority of women worked who lived in East Kilbride and we always said we built this town...we worked for this town, we built this town..*

*We used to go to lunch on a Friday down in the Willow Cafe, I mean that was the in thing every week...everybody went to the Willow Cafe and the waitresses with their black dresses and their white [aprons] and you felt really rich and you got a terrific lunch in there, it was packed... Occasionally we went to the cinema ...you didn't feel like you had to have social activity, you know the kids went swimming, you stayed in the house but you never felt as if you were put on to. It was just a good way of living. At that time the cinema was open. My kids used to go the cinema Saturday afternoon for half a crown and I used to say 'thank God peace' and you used to get dressed and you would go down the Centre, maybe go to the butchers but you were out ... Maybe once a month we would all go to the social club [connected to husband's work] on a Saturday night. Our organisation was working at night, we didn't have time to go anywhere else, though we would maybe with all my neighbours have a night out at the Alhambra in Glasgow once a year.*

LINDA

*Most fathers worked in Rolls Royce, everyone in the street all the Dads worked in Rolls Royce because Rolls Royce used to have Christmas parties and the Rolls Royce gala day so you would see everybody would be going to these great events... All the kids would be round about the same age and we'd be in and out everybody's houses, playing games in the street that you wouldn't do now, having races, running up and down the road because when I was small there weren't many cars... We had a lot of family came, especially after my gran came to live with us, all her friends and cousins and aunties and uncles.*

ISOBEL

*When we were 16 and 17 the Olympia was opened and all of these kinds of things, the bowling...we used to go [to the dancing] on a Friday night. I mean there was no drinking in the dancing then. We used to go to the pub first. We used to go to the Olympia and it would finish at one o'clock and it was absolutely brilliant, the big silver balls...*

JOAN

*We had lots of picnics on the grass at that house - it was wonderful...We had to go back [to Glasgow] quite a lot for clothing because there just wasn't the choice here. There was one little draper's shop in the village and if she didn't have what we wanted it was a trip into Glasgow with the pushchair and the toddler... When we came when the children were young there were grocers' vans, the Co-op sent a van round twice a week which was very handy, there was a greengrocer came round, milk was delivered on your doorstep every morning and things were a lot easier for your shopping.*

*It's very convenient but it could also be a bit confining. Did you find that?*

*Oh yes, oh yes, mind destroying, yes. Certainly we met other people who were pushing prams. That was about our only relaxation.*

ANNA

*Who did the garden?*

*My dad did that... There was a shed just outside the back door and a there was a lawn behind that, and then off to the side [t]here was beds with wee steps up and down and kind of rockeries there... I remember when we used to go places in the car he quite often was putting stones in the boot -- 'that would be good for the rockery'-- and took those back... There was a fence along the back because there was a kind of wooded bit which was another place we used to go and play...*

*Any [fence] at the front?*

*No, it's East Kilbride! You're not allowed!*

JAMES

*I transferred to the town centre [office]. If you knew the right paths to go twenty minutes took you doon tae the centre...I used to walk twenty minutes each way, so I had no transport costs or time travelling, so it was very handy for me.*

*Did you take to gardening?*

*Well, I mainly kept it tidy, I mean, when we moved in we had to dae a lot of work to get it into shape – digging etc. and seeding. They actually laid turf in the front garden, we just had the back garden to cope wi' which was hard work because it was full a' rubble and dods a' this and clay and*

*bricks... I wasnae a gardener but I sort of learned myself what tae dae, grew some vegetables – potatoes, beetroot... I quite like to see things growing...I did the bulk of it...*

*What were your other jobs in the house?*

*General helping with tasks, I was the one who kept the car – chauffeur! Dad's job... I suppose just general DIY about the house, painting and decorating, there was plenty of that to do when we moved in... I just had to learn... The man next door, he was a gardener, he gave me a few tips... There was a lot of talk over the fence in these days...in that whole row we were all friendly.*

*Did you go back into Glasgow once you had the car?*

*I asked for a transfer into Glasgow...[to] seek advancement. Eventually I ended up in the Head Office...I did get advancement... [This was necessary] to get any further on.*

JUNE

*The neighbours were really nice.. everybody's very friendly here without being nosy...*

VERONICA

*I joined the rambling club so I was away every second Sunday ...the club started in 1983 and there was no other rambling club in East Kilbride and there must be about 12 or 14 now.*

### Summary

- Importance of neighbours and all moving in together
- Early days importance of social clubs attached to workplace
- Female-centred sociability
- lack of women's access to private transport
- generational change in sociability: from home-centred to activity-centred

Our impressions of sociability in the new town have mostly been provided by our female respondents who recall how they often had to make an effort to make friends in a place where they knew no-one. And for women in particular it was often difficult to participate in recreation or evening classes when one did not have a car or did not drive or worked at night. Children were crucial to making those contacts often which raises the question of how single persons or childless couples socialised. It was much easier for the younger generation born in East Kilbride who grew up with sport and leisure facilities on their doorstep: green spaces, the sports' centre and the Dollan baths as well as flourishing youth organisations and a cinema. Their parents though have learned to take advantage of the opportunities available from the ice rink in the town centre to rambling clubs and the University of the Third Age.

## ***5. No Longer New: Personal Reflections on Change in East Kilbride***

*'There are a few things I personally regret, some permanent, some perhaps only temporary.'*<sup>54</sup>

Writing in 1967 when she was an elderly woman, Elizabeth Mitchell asserted that in her view East Kilbride was a special place and 'an achievement' of her lifetime. However, she conceded

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<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, *The Plan that Pleased*, p. 39.

that '[t]he site was nearer Glasgow than was ideally desirable' but that nonetheless it had 'an ideal green belt'.<sup>55</sup> She further remarked that she wished that the town centre had a 'more Scottish character', but her serious regrets were that the population limit had already been exceeded and that the town had 'so many commuters'.<sup>56</sup> Mitchell would doubtless have had much to say on the present condition of the town and its inhabitants. Most of those interviewed for this project had spent the majority of their lifetimes in East Kilbride or, a very substantial part of their adult lives, and were able to offer perceptive, personal perspectives on its progress over subsequent decades.

It was striking how many of our respondents expressed their pleasure in living somewhere special. They felt different. They knew they were lucky. East Kilbride was a path to social mobility, of family betterment. They had made a positive choice and were conscious that they had things - space, fresh-air, good schools, modern houses - that many of their friends and family did not have. While residents would not necessarily describe themselves as 'new towners' and indeed many retained their identities as Glaswegians, nevertheless, at least as long as East Kilbride had new town status residents were keen to identify with the place, perhaps as a means of distinguishing themselves from those who did not have the ambition to leave the city.

However, many regretted recent changes which, in their perception, had resulted in East Kilbride losing its special identity. These changes include: the loss of green space as housing has expanded; the longer-term effects of the 'right to buy' policy on individual residents; the increase of sub-letting; the loss of neighbourhood facilities; the more mobile population; the growth of the town, the decline of public transport. It is notable that housing quality is not featured in this list. The regretted changes are generally external to people's homes. The sense of all being in it together has gone and many commented on the reputations of the neighbourhoods, good and bad, indicating social differentiation that perhaps was less in evidence in the early days. All of these changes were seen as contributing to a loss of community cohesion and that sense of being special as well as contributing to social isolation for some. East Kilbride, in the views of many of our respondents, is in danger of becoming a town like any other with all the accompanying social problems experienced elsewhere. One respondent commented that for those who have come more lately to East Kilbride, 'it's just a place to stay, it's not my town'.

East Kilbride was originally a relatively young town because of the demographic profile of those who moved there in the early years. But in 2011 the percentage of residents of pensionable age is just slightly higher than the Scottish average. Our interviews - the majority with people in this age cohort - highlighted the needs of elderly residents, many of who are living alone and who require suitable housing and community facilities for their changed circumstances. For some, the optimism expressed in respect of their initial experiences of the town had diminished somewhat as they confronted the challenges associated with ageing. Of course rose-tinted spectacles are often worn when looking back but we think it more likely that people recall the early decades of the town so fondly because it often coincided with a formative and exciting time in their lives and because the optimism surrounding the new town coincided with their

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.39.

own ambition for the future. It is important to say that only a minority of interviewees expressed ambivalence about remaining in the town throughout their retirement years, most were keen to continue living there and none regretted the move to East Kilbride.

## Interview Extracts

STEPHEN

*The green open spaces which obviously to me were second nature because I was born there, but if you compare and contrast to so many other places – and indeed with what are they doing now -- building in a lot of the green spaces – maybe losing a bit of the quality East Kilbride had... The other dimension to that of course is the loss of the Development Corporation... [B]eing removed and remote from the local politics, you know, funded quite well I understand from central government, and able to maybe take slightly more strategic decisions without having to play the local politics game, so the Corporation across the piece probably did a pretty good job. Maybe a little high-handed perhaps, maybe not very answerable, very democratic, but nevertheless, I think they tended to deliver... [When] the Corporation got wound up, South Lanarkshire Council to us locals kind of wrecked a bit of a revenge by saying – ‘o ho here we go you’re part of Lanarkshire and you’ll get treated no better and no worse than the rest of it’... Who knows, maybe there’s a little bit of payback with the councillors doon at Hamilton saying ‘well you’ve been the jewel in the crown too long’. It felt a little bit like that up in East Kilbride... The great social engineering experiment for us was that you were all in it together 50 years ago whether you were a schoolteacher, a policeman, mid-management whereas now if you are any of those three you are probably in Lindsayfield, Stewartfield and I guess if you go back to East Mains, my old street, there are very few mid-management, those occupational types.*

VERONICA

[Did you approve of the sale of Development Corporation houses?](#)

*My father would be turning in his grave. He believed if you could afford to buy a house my you didn't buy a council house but if you can't beat them you join them...I don't agree with the houses that have been bought by just two or three people to sub-let. It's changed very very much, no not for the better, unless you're a shopper. But when I was growing up, unless you were a nurse or a policeman or something like that you'd never dream of leaving home to live in your own flat, it would not have crossed your mind ... now there's youngsters in houses, they don't bother with the upkeep.*

*The Housing Association houses are lovely...they're modern, they're newly built.*

*I think there's a lot of resentment in East Kilbride about how neglected East Kilbride has become ...it was a nice place, probably because it was new and because of the layout of the place, there was a lot of green, grassy verges and all that and trees.... It was a different kind of lifestyle.*

JAMES

[What do you feel about the sale \[of Development Corporation housing\]?](#)

*I think at the time it was a good idea, but I think a lot of folk maybe rushed in and didnae realise that when you buy a hoose... you've got to upkeep it which can be quite an expense... it's no always the best thing to do... I think they actually sold off too many... [S]ub-lets from my knowledge and my experience [as a caretaker] didnae work... quite often there were problems with folk that moved in because it was only a stop gap, they took nae pride in the place...we saw it often there was problems wi' sublets... You've only to walk round some of the streets and there's neglect. You*

*canny help but see it... To play an old tune, it's been as bad as that since the Council took over, there seems to be a different ethos... when you compare it with the Development Corporation...*

JOE

*I don't believe there should have been a right to buy...I got married and I bought a house it was a house that was bought under the right to buy, but at that point nobody realised what the right to buy would cause in the end... Unless more housing is built that's going to cause another problem because I think it's what, six or seven years if you stay with your parents before you can get a [social rented] house... There's a lot of things that'll cause more homelessness in the future.*

*Given that shortage of housing how do you feel about this town getting bigger?*

*As long as they can keep the open space within it... If you don't – the people who stay here, their kids cannot be housed. So you can't not allow it to get bigger.*

*Do you think that's changed the character [of the town]?*

*I think it's changed the character in the sense that you have more areas [within neighbourhoods]. For instance Greenhills was built – 40 years ago...that must have changed the character then because it was the influx of the Glasgow overspill coming in...as far as East Kilbride was concerned... and now they're building further out again it's got its own areas within it and the people that are in it will maybe stick to themselves... You've got a central location, you've got the central shops – it's got the pub – the only thing you'd need to go down to town centre for, or into Glasgow, is to go and get clothes...*

*Where do you shop?*

*Rutherglen actually! When I come back from my work, I go into Rutherglen... If I'm off work I shop in East Kilbride. I still like going into Glasgow, when I go out for a drink I tend to go to Glasgow... [But] there's now only two buses after midnight, whereas there used to be three, but if you know the times you just plan it...*

SYLVIA

*I think most people would say they think East Kilbride's getting far too big. I remember someone saying to me a few years ago, 'if they build anymore out there they'll be down to the Ayrshire coast!'...certainly I couldn't say I know all the bits of East Kilbride that I maybe could have done 15 years ago.... I don't think it looks as nice as it used to look. I don't think it looks cared for.*

DOROTHY

*Do you take a pride in East Kilbride?*

*I feel quite upset really at some of the things that are happening to it now, and I do think in their great push to provide all these brand new beautiful big houses, they neglect other things that are important...*

JUNE

*It's got so big. I think it was nicer when it was smaller. It is probably losing a lot of its community sense because it's so huge. You've got Westwood and Calderwood and St Leonards, they're all communities in themselves...it's just become too huge, a sprawling metropolis... But it's quite selfish to say, you're ruining my wee town, you can't halt progress.*

LINDA

*I don't think [East Kilbride] is as friendly as it was. It's lost its neighbourhood identity slightly. I think the addition of Stewartfield and all those new houses has meant it's all car oriented now. It*

*needs to get back to looking after people of all different types... There should be more facilities who can only use the bus to get to places. If they're building anything else new I would say well how would you get from A to B if you didn't have a car? Kingsgate is one of my bugbears. It's like 'how difficult can we make it for a pedestrian'?*

VERONICA

*We were still factored by the Council... [Then following shoddy work done by the Council] we all got together and said we're not paying... So we got together again and said -- right I'm going to phone around and see if we can do our own factoring... If you've got a majority you can do your own factoring...we gathered together and started a bank book – and [now] we do it. Since we've been on our own, maybe 5 years we've had the close painted... we've had umpteen things done, cosmetically as well, and we charge the council a sixth of it because [one neighbour] is till renting... We've saved thousands... It's certainly been beneficial to us because we keep the place the way we want to keep it...we shopped around for that, if it that had been the Council, I wouldn't like to tell you how long we'd wait for it! And secondly, how much they would charge...because the factoring fees don't cover anything, they just cover them sending somebody and then you've to pay for the work!*

ANNA

*I always think of East Kilbride as a new town alongside Cumbernauld and Glenrothes. I always tell people it's the best...I think it is a good place to live...it just seems cleaner and brighter and nicer than living in the city... [Neighbourhoods] can make people a bit insular. Places like Stewartfield are a closed book to me. I know where it is but I couldn't find my way round about it... East Kilbride is not too bad in terms of separation of motorised and non-motorised users...there are some areas that are poorly served by public transport...I have noticed as well there has been a huge increase [in cars].*

ISOBEL

*At that time the Murray was a good place to bring up kids. There wasn't the trouble there is now. To be quite honest it's too big, East Kilbride is getting too big. I couldn't tell you half of the places...there's a lot of the green all gone in East Kilbride.*

JOAN

*People say it has gone down a bit. There is more rubbish about and so many shops closed, because of the recession...We have the feeling that East Kilbride is a bit neglected now and that Hamilton and other places...*

*Do you think it changed when people began to buy their houses?*

*Well I think so because people tend to look after a place when it belongs to them and not the Factor, they'll do improvements. I know my parents were very loath to do any improvements because it was a rented house.*

ELSPETH

*What is your view on the sale of public rented houses?*

*I wish they'd never done it...I think it's the biggest mistake... Am I saying that because I've no' got a bought house? – I don't know... But I feel that they just made a right mess o' East Kilbride by doing that... Different if there had been a law saying -- right you can buy this house but you've got to live in this, and if you don't want to live in it, sell it back to the Corporation type of thing. But to be able*

*to buy these houses and let them out to everybody has just made a right mess of East Kilbride so far as I'm concerned... The thing is, I think next year -- or 2013, you're going to be able to buy your [Housing Association] house if you want, but see I'm dead against this. More me now, I'll never be able to buy it... and I'm all settled here, love it...thinking this is definitely going to be me till I die, it's got to be. How do I know when the Housing starts selling the houses, what I would get above me, this worries me... Who's to say what's going to happen, where am I going to go next?*

GRACE

*You didn't miss Glasgow at all?*

*No. Glasgow is still my hometown...this town was built for overspill from Glasgow and everybody was still Glaswegian...but we just liked East Kilbride. When the sun shone and [you] walked out with your pram it felt like you were away your holidays!...*

*And how did things work out, Glasgow can be quite a parochial place – some from the west end, some from the east end?*

*East Kilbride is now the parochial place!... When we go to [housing] meetings in Hamilton, we're judged as parochial, because I really think East Kilbride has got a long battle to fight, because we'll never be the way we were – and it's sad...*

*How did you feel in the beginning about moving into a high rise?*

*I didn't like it... When I came in here...and it was a fawny-brown carpet that they'd left -- and the kitchen!... I thought oh my god, am I going to have live with this... The flat, I didn't know anybody... I formed the Residents' Association...and at that time people, believe it or not, were fighting to get out of here – there was so much anti-social [behaviour]... And we turned it round... We built all the gardens because that was just muddy embankments, we got money off Scottish Heritage and the National Lottery... It's been busy... It's been steady progress forward... I'm happy now, we can sit out in the garden in the summer, we've got a good rapport in here, everybody is a member, when there's new people come in they get a welcome pack...There's nothing I would change now.*

HELENA

*I've every reason to be proud of East Kilbride. I'm not so sure now. Shops are closing like anywhere else...there are disturbances at night, things happening that are not welcome. I don't go to the village or the town centre at night time but one hears it is better to stay away. I would have said I was proud to live in East Kilbride...*

### **Summary**

- regrets regarding growth of town - no longer special
- concerns about nature of growth - siting of amenities, loss of green space
- decline of local/neighbourhood facilities and of public transport
- regret at buy-to-let/subletting - changing character of neighbourhoods
- concerns about increasing social isolation
- sense of declining East Kilbride identity and ownership
- increased residential segregation

Almost all of our interviews expressed some regrets at recent developments in the town. It is not the place they moved to. Is this a consequence, at least in part, of ageing or of changing personal circumstances? Clearly some significant changes have occurred - the shift of most of the housing stock away from social ownership to private ownership; the steady growth of the

town and the appearance of social problems experienced by most urban centres. But the issue here is that people who moved to East Kilbride in the 60s and 70s wanted better then and still do expect better now. Some have made a conscious effort to improve their community by involving themselves in residents' associations and engaging in community action projects. They have experienced better when the town offered something different to Glasgow. We heard disappointment in their voices; disappointment that the new town was no longer new and that it had not been able to resist external pressures.

## ***6. Conclusions.***

The mass migration to towns and cities in Scotland's central belt that accompanied industrialisation fuelled a dichotomous relationship between urban and rural from the mid-Victorian period onwards. This produced a well-known mythology that for example, posited Highland against Lowland and city against village, to produce a version of Scotland that attached all of its negative features – crime, immorality squalor, disease, pollution and poverty – firmly in the range of its manufacturing towns and cities; while the rural developed as a permanent bucolic opposite. Scotland was not alone of course in experiencing this type of imagined and artificially separate ideological arrangement; but by the mid-twentieth century, it did have a particularly extreme purchase in the collective self-image of Scots because measures to counter the intense nature of overcrowding and poor living conditions that existed in its urban parts had so singularly failed. The more evangelical promoters of new towns, like Elizabeth Mitchell, were certainly not averse to conjuring such images in their campaigns. It is therefore impossible to ignore the possibility that such collective images also strongly affected people's decisions to move to somewhere that was perceived as modern, clean, and spacious, and to some extent, configured as anti-urban. But how people actually found that new environment once settled there is what really mattered for the success of East Kilbride as a social experiment. And it does seem that what settlers found did meet their needs and improved their lives.

Overemphasising the positive at the expense of negative experiences is often seen in stories about relocation, wherein people rationalise their decision to move away from the security of familiar environments. This narrative trope can operate to allow people to avoid recalling painful memories of feeling isolated or homesick. However, in the case of East Kilbride it does seem that it was the very 'newness' of the town that proved to be its biggest attraction and one which quickly ameliorated any initial misgivings and certainly has marginalised them in longer-term experiences. Although many people who moved there came from relatively settled communities, in particular, from parts of Glasgow where they lived close by extended families, ways round such separation seem to have been found. East Kilbride had the advantage of being far enough away to be entirely separate from Glasgow city, in other words it was not a suburb, but not so far that the city was entirely out of reach. In this way, East Kilbride New Towners appeared to get the best of both worlds: a modern town environment that was surrounded by countryside. Moreover, for many respondents, simply being able to exercise the choice to move to a new town seems to have invoked a positive sense of personal autonomy. This is not so surprising when we consider that many working class people in post war Scotland were often trapped in what must have seemed like a never-ending housing queue. Those who settled in East Kilbride invoke this experience in memory as one that promoted a sense of privilege that

from a retrospective vantage point they are keenly aware of having benefitted from. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that moving to East Kilbride was not always a rapidly unmitigated success. The interviews were conducted with awareness that how people reflect on common aspects of the past is always filtered through their own experience. For some women especially, settling in East Kilbride was enabled in the first instance by men's employment and women responded to this new environment in variable ways, often by forging supportive relationships with other women in the neighbourhoods and by engaging in the labour market themselves.

Yet the interviews overall produced a number of constant themes and it is notable that the most optimistic notes concerned housing. Far ahead of all other issues, the quality of the housing built was appreciated by people. Rightly or wrongly, they felt they got more than those outside of new towns and this had positive effects for self-esteem. Secondly, East Kilbride offered space both in interiors and within the geography of the town. No respondent felt they had inadequate space for living except perhaps in terms of some aspects of interiors in particular types of housing such as high rise flats. Thirdly, the benefits of a back and front door could not be overestimated. Although gardens prompted lukewarm feelings - relished for the access to the fresh air and a place to hang out washing rather than a place for cultivation - in light starved Scotland it seems people really value any small amount of easily accessible outdoor space. Even those in flats appreciate balconies with a sunny aspect. This can make a huge difference to how people feel about their homes. Finally, the importance of neighbourhood and community loomed large for our interviewees. Not that people wanted to be in and out each other's houses - far from it. But they did want to acknowledge there was a common stake expressed through 'taking a pride'. The loss of this has affected how people feel about their neighbourhoods, but it has also prompted community action.

Negative feelings tended to be clustered around issues that settlers in the town feel are out of their control, such as the town's ongoing expansion, governance being at a distance from the town itself, and the deterioration in appearance of some neighbourhoods. The latter is often blamed, in part, on some of the long-term effects of the 'right to buy' policy in housing which has promoted difficulties for some in maintaining the appearance of housing as both properties and their owners age, and the perhaps unforeseen practice of sub-letting. This seems to have had consequences perceived as more highly visible and therefore more troublesome in the context of the new town than in the city.

A local writer, Alison Reid, who was born in the town in the 1950s and still lives there, has commented that her sense of East Kilbride's past and of her own identity as a new townner includes positive memories of 'the future being built around me'.<sup>57</sup> New town settlers were people who clearly embraced change in a very personal way and who keenly cared about the vitality of their surroundings. Although it is not within the remit of this report to make proposals, it is evident from the narratives offered by respondents that feelings of disengagement from present developments in the town has had a deleterious effect on residents' collective sense of ownership of their local environment and personal optimism for its future. This suggests that a more public celebration of East Kilbride's social achievements

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<sup>57</sup> Alison Reid, 'A Sense of Identity' in Alison Reid (ed.), *Rain in the Laughing Garden: an Anthology by Writers Inc* (Glasgow, 2003) p.83.

through its built environment might inform a more involved conversation about how housing should develop in the future – a case of looking forward through remembering the past.

### **Summary conclusions**

- the best of both worlds: East Kilbride offered newcomers a modern environment that combined urban and rural aspects
- high housing quality: design, space and building quality were appreciated
- availability of social housing in past was valuable and desirable
- one's own back and front door: universally desired.
- importance of community: newcomers felt they belonged to a neighbourhood of like-minded people
- sense of security and wellbeing offered by new town life

## APPENDIX A

### The Interviews

This research project aimed to facilitate the telling of individual life stories by residents of East Kilbride. Oral history interviews, unlike other qualitative research methods, do not have the sole purpose of seeking information and opinions from respondents. Rather they aim to allow individuals to construct their own narratives of particular subjective experiences through the prism of memory. For this project, prospective interviewees were asked to reflect on their personal interactions with the town of East Kilbride and with their own and their families' experiences of making a home there. The overall approach of the researchers was to encourage such reflection through a meeting that, regardless of being formalised in order to obtain a recorded interview, was also as relaxed, conversational, and informal as could be arranged. For this reason, interviewees were able to choose where they wished to be interviewed and wherever possible this took place in their own homes.<sup>58</sup> Also underpinning this ambition is an acknowledgement that active recall is not always easy and may be a little unnerving for individuals who are not accustomed to engaging in what can be anticipated as a performance event, the conventions of which may be unfamiliar. For this reason, the fullest possible information about the recording process was provided to interviewees in the letters of invitation. Moreover, the researchers are conscious of the fact that reminiscence exercises can be empowering and pleasurable for individuals who take part in them and every effort was made to ensure such a positive outcome by being transparent about the purpose and possible uses of the interviews. In addition the interviewer spent time before beginning the interview in explaining the various clauses contained in the release form and the ethical boundaries of this research methodology (see Appendix B), and in providing clear answers to any questions posed by interviewees.

On the other hand, memory is fickle; the most innocuous of questions may trigger memories of hitherto forgotten aspects of a person's life. It is never possible for an interviewer to be forewarned about what may have been, whether by intention or not, suppressed in memory by an interviewee they have only recently met. This is particularly important to bear in mind within a project like this that asks people to talk about an aspect construed as private, that is, the home and family life, and which may elicit intimate memories. The interviewer for this project tried always to be alert to when respondents tired or seemed uncomfortable with particular areas of discussion and made no efforts to insist on pursuing a line of enquiry, which respondents either avoided, or about which clear signals of discomfort were evident. It is gratifying therefore, that after being interviewed most people were surprised by how enjoyable the conversational interview was, and expressed satisfaction in recalling aspects of their lives in this manner: it is not unusual for interviewees to state things like, 'I had forgotten about this but you asking me has just brought it back into my mind.' This process of facilitating recall and encouraging respondents to have the freedom to make spontaneous expressions from memory

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<sup>58</sup> Twelve members of the interview group were interviewed at home; but because of work or other personal commitments that made this option impractical, the remaining 3 asked to be interviewed elsewhere. One person requested to be interviewed in EKHDA's offices within the centre of East Kilbride, another was interviewed at Glasgow University and the remaining interview took place in the respondent's own workplace.

aims to allow them to experience a sense of ownership of the interview. Within recent scholarship on oral histories, much has been made about the intersubjective aspects of the interview and about power relations in interview scenarios, particularly those conducted as part of academic research. The interviewing done for this project was conducted with full awareness that these issues can be construed as problematic and that a responsibility lies with the researchers to strike a balance between the needs of research and the ethical interests and autonomy of the research contributors. By taking an open and informative yet informal and respectful approach to interviewing, and by acknowledging that interviewees are generously giving time and effort towards the gathering of research evidence, it was hoped that trust would be established between the researchers and the respondents. All members of the interview group were offered a copy of their recording on CD-r, and all were encouraged to interrupt the recording at any time they wished. Interviewees' names have been anonymised in this report.

The scope of the questions asked of respondents was designed to be flexible and semi-structured. Although a list of themes and particular questions about housing, home-making, community activity and neighbourhood relations was prepared in advance of the interviews, it was never intended that this would be adhered to rigidly or exclusively since this would be antithetical to the conversational approach of oral history interviews. It did however act as an aide memoir for the interviewer if required; but more usually questioning followed a roughly chronological route through the person's life and could be responsive to the content of discussion provided by the interviewee. Indeed, it was accepted that within a session lasting an approximate maximum of two hours, it might not be practical to ask questions on all of the themes under enquiry. The length of interviews was governed by several contingencies that were more important than simply covering all of the areas of interest to the researchers. However, it is the case, that in a longer research project there would have been scope for conducting interviews over more than one session. Restrictions in terms of time available and budget precluded this.

Interviewees who moved into the town from elsewhere were asked about their previous experiences in terms of housing and the specific neighbourhoods in which they lived. They were also encouraged to talk about their motivations for moving to East Kilbride and about how they planned and arranged this relocation. For those who had been born in the town, some discussion took place about their knowledge of why their families had moved there. Proceeding from this, the interviewer asked questions about specific experiences of houses lived in within the town, about activities within the home such as housework and DIY, and about impressions of neighbourhoods, local facilities and community interactions in East Kilbride. In addition, there were particular issues raised by interviewees, which were outwith the scope of the semi-structured format but seemed of interest to the broad subject of research. The interviews that resulted are a rich resource on the materiality of people's domestic, family and community lives in East Kilbride and on the reasons why they chose to move to a new town and have continued to live in one.

### **The Interviewees**

The fifteen individuals who generously agreed to provide an interview were recruited from the town's residents with the only criteria set for their inclusion being that they had spent a significant part of their adult lives in East Kilbride. This naturally privileged older people who

could meet this remit of long-standing residence. The ages within the group range from 82 years to 46 years, the average age being just under 66 years. All the neighbourhoods of East Kilbride are represented in their stories. Oral history studies unlike sampling, surveys or structured interviews, do not seek to obtain quantitative data or to elicit answers that definitively confirm or contradict a particular hypothesis. Instead, the aim of oral history methodology is simply to obtain evidence that widens our understanding of the particular areas of experience being studied through listening to and analysing narrators' descriptions of their own involvement with those areas. However, along the way, we may obtain specific types of information that might seem to validate, augment, or indeed counter other types of evidence. As can be seen in Table 1, over half of the group was born and raised within the boundaries of Glasgow city. A further two people came from the greater Glasgow conurbation; four spent their childhood in East Kilbride, and although in some instances moved away for a time, returned to live in the town permanently. Only one interviewee came from outside of the west of Scotland, but even in this instance, also had a period of several years' settlement in Glasgow before moving to the new town. Therefore, whilst there was no question of aiming to form a representative sample in recruiting interviewees, interestingly, the interviews as a collection do provide information that quite fairly reflects much that is general about the population of East Kilbride. This is perhaps not as coincidental as might be supposed since we know that the overwhelming majority of people who moved to the town did come from Glasgow and its environs, and this was quickly supplemented by the next generation who were born in the town; these characteristics remain prominent even within a randomly selected group.

**Table 1: Details of interviewees' previous places of residence.**

<b>INTERVIEW REFERENCE NUMBER</b>	<b>AGE AT INTERVIEW</b>	<b>WHERE BORN/GREW UP*</b>	<b>PREVIOUS PLACE OF RESIDENCE**</b>	<b>DATE OF MOVE TO EK/LENGTH OF RESIDENCE</b>
LtM/01	70	Glasgow City	Other Lanarkshire	1966/45 yrs
LtM/02	66	Glasgow City	Renfrewshire	1974/37 yrs
LtM/03	65	Glasgow City	Glasgow City	1971/40 yrs
LtM/04	72	Glasgow City	Glasgow City	1960/51 yrs
LtM/05	54	East Kilbride	n/a	n/a
LtM/06	67	Glasgow City	Ayrshire	1991/20 yrs
LtM/07	81	Glasgow City	Other Lanarkshire	1971/40 yrs
LtM/08	67	Glasgow City	Glasgow City	1975/36 yrs
LtM/09	62	East Kilbride	n/a	n/a
LtM/10	57	East Kilbride	Non UK	1982/29 yrs
LtM/11	82	Other Lanarkshire	Other Lanarkshire	1951/50 yrs
LtM/12	53	East Kilbride	England	1983/28 yrs
LtM/13	46	Other Lanarkshire	Other Lanarkshire	1992/19 yrs
LtM/14	67	Glasgow City	Glasgow City	1975/36 yrs
LtM/15	77	Non-UK	Glasgow City	1968/43 yrs

\*These individuals were either born in the town or moved there at an early age.

\*\*Refers to respondents' place of residence immediately prior to moving/returning to East Kilbride.

Similarly reflecting the general experience of the majority of those who moved to the town between 1950 and 1990, all but one of the interviewees had been a tenant or the child of a tenant within East Kilbride's public housing at some point in their lives. It is also pertinent to state that of those in the group who currently own their own homes, a linear progression from renting in the social housing sector to homeownership of previously rented housing stock under the right to buy policy, and from there to ownership of privately developed housing, cannot be assumed. Although three individuals do conform to this type of housing progression, most do not. Indeed, four interviewees had previous experience of homeownership in either East Kilbride or elsewhere, but at the time of interview, for a variety of reasons, were renting properties; a further two had earlier experience of owning privately developed housing again either in the town or elsewhere, but had later purchased ex-Development Corporation properties.

This illustrates the mixed pattern of tenure and housing choices that have developed even while homeownership has increased in East Kilbride and in other parts of Scotland. Table 2 shows some of the characteristics of this group's interactions with different housing occupancies over time. As can be seen, most had multiple and varied experiences across their life courses of both renting and homeownership. At the time of interview, nine respondents were homeowners. Of the remaining six, three were at present tenants of EKDHA and three of South Lanarkshire Council. Only three respondents have always been tenants. Less representative of general experience is the fact that none of the interviewees is living in a privately let tenancy, although many have experience of this before moving to the town. This type of tenure would be seen more commonly in a group that included younger respondents.

**TABLE 2: Characteristics of tenure among the interviewees.**

Respondent	Development Corp Tenant/ or grew up in DC tenancy		South Lanarkshire Council Tenant		Homeowner of house previously designated social housing		Homeowner of privately developed housing (in EK or elsewhere)		Tenant of EKDHA	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
LTM/01	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
/02	✓			✓	✓		✓			✓
/03	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	
/04	✓		✓			✓		✓		✓
/05	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	
/06		✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
/07	✓			✓	✓		✓			✓
/08	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
/09	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓
/10	✓		✓		✓			✓		✓
/11	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓
/12	✓			✓	✓		✓			✓
/13		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
/14	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
/15	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>

### Recording and Deposit details

A digital voice recorder (Olympus WS-310 M) and microphone attachment was used to record the interviews. Subsequently, they were transferred to cd-r and will be stored in this format by the researchers and in time through donation to archives (see Appendix B for deposit permissions). In addition, digital copies of the recordings in WMA file format were returned to all respondents who requested this. Further copies of the digital recordings along with a summary sheet providing key words and abbreviated information of the topics covered in each recording can be consulted at the following depository:

South Lanarkshire Council Records Centre, College Milton Industrial Estate, East Kilbride, Tel 01335 239193

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