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Ideas

For A New Town

An Absurdist Manifesto

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This is a manifesto for a New Town which will never exist.

The New Town in question is modelled on the existing town of Livingston, West Lothian.

Livingston is a result of the UK government's poorly executed New Towns Act. The New Towns Act did not improve lives - it was almost social genocide, clearing the poorest residents from cities into poorly built, isolated towns with no art, nor culture, to speak of.

The New Towns are now known for their deprivation, their poverty, crime rates and unemployment. They're also desperately boring - there's still nothing to do here except consume, go shopping in indoor shopping centres full of chain stores or maybe see a movie. There's no live music venues, no galleries, nearly no independently owned places to visit.

Some of the proposals in this Manifesto would be easily implemented, others are impossible. It is a rallying cry against beigeness, homogenisation, cookie cutter new build houses and chain coffee stores. It's a request to think of what a town is and what it could be.

1.

*I propose that we paint all of the
high rise social housing flats with
brightly coloured, smog absorbing
paint.*

2.

I propose that we line the ruins of the ancient house with candles and flowers in the style of a memorial, and see if anyone adds to it.

3.

I propose that the New Town will have bee hives along the top of the Civic buildings and will use the honey collected to donate to local food banks. We will teach primary school children to be beekeepers.

4.

*I propose that the New Town
installs large, 18 feet high
sculptures of children's rock pool
nets along the River at regular
intervals for no apparent reason,
tell everyone it represents catching
dreams.*

5.

I propose that we install plaques on all of the burnt out remnants of public litter bins that proclaim "Here Lies A Bin".

6.

I propose that we remove all of the 1970's "public art" and replace it with selfie opportunities in the style of the Selfie Museum pop-up. We can publish Selfie Route maps so people can find each selfie location.

7.

I propose that the New Town will remove all of the archaic “public art” in the middle of roundabouts and replace it with giant light up signs in the style of Nathan Colley, displaying messages such as “Please Use Your Fucking Indicators”, and “It Has Been X Days Since The Last Crash Here”.

8.

I propose that the inside of the underpasses are painted with mirror paint so that people don't need to keep looking behind them when they walk through them at night.

9.

I propose that we undertake a performance in the park, which involves us rolling down the hill as many times as we can before someone stops us. Ask people passing by to join in, and claim the performance is an attempt at bringing joy to the area.

10.

I propose that we paint all of the fences on a given street rainbow colours and campaign to have the street renamed Rainbow Road.

11.

I propose that we attach memorial plaques stating the lifespan and a Rest In Peace message to all the stumps left behind from cutting down trees.

12.

I propose that we arrange for all the elderly residents of the New Town to be invited to record their memories orally in a “memory bank” for the ages.

13.

I propose that we collect all the shoes left by the side of the Interchange roads, and drill a hole in them, fill them with soil and plant hardy seeds in them. We will then return the plant pot shoes to the location they were found on the kerb.

14.

I propose that we go around town late at night and spray paint obscenities around all the potholes so that the authorities are actually forced to fix them.

15.

I propose that exactly 40 days and 40 nights after executing Proposal #14, we spray paint obscenities around all of the broken drains, so we force the authorities to fix them too.

16.

I propose that a group of us walk around the woods and whenever we find a tree which has had a low level branch removed to prevent children climbing, attach a plaque that says "Ouch!"

17.

I propose that we turn all the small, abandoned convenience stores dotted around the schemes into 24-hour miniature recreations of iconic nightclubs, such as Taboo, Blitz Club, Studio 54, Batcave, for one weekend.

18.

*I propose that we recreate a 1960's
New York Happening in the middle
of the indoor shopping centre at
precisely 12:30 on a Sunday
afternoon.*

19.

I propose that we paint the Council offices beige, in representation of the beige-ness of their decision making. Should they begin to make decisions which are less beige, they get one square foot of colour painted for each non-beige decision. A committee of 13 people will be formed to vote on the beigeness of each decision they make.

20.

I propose that we convert the empty-for-years office complexes in the industrial estates into rehabilitation centres for people with mental health problems and addiction, featuring 24 hour on call support.

21.

I propose that we should paint the main Interchange roads with rainbow colours, using the aforementioned smog absorbing paint.

22.

I propose that we should construct a to-scale replica of Saint Basil's Cathedral (large enough that an average sized three year old could walk inside), in the middle of the park, then apply for city status citing our new cathedral. Should they refuse, claim they are discriminating against toddlers.

23.

I propose that, upon receiving our city status, we should apply for City of Culture. Upon winning, we should upgrade all small bodies of water to hydro-powered hot springs.

24.

I propose that we renovate the local duck pond, make it cleaner and bigger, and build a large duck house in it. We will then employ someone to look after the ducks, and sell free range duck eggs through a food co-operative to encourage the ethical consumption of animal products.

25.

I propose that we collect all of the rubbish from the River, wearing hazmat suits to do so due to the industrial waste in the River. We will then lay them out in neat rows outside of the Council buildings very early in the morning so that no one can get to work without stepping in leaking car batteries, to see if this prompts them to start enforcing restrictions about illegal dumping in the waterways.

26.

I propose that now that we should paint all of the metal semi-sheltered seating in parks known colloquially as “Blue Huts” UV reactive green, and monitor how long it takes for teenagers to stop referring to their meeting place as “The Blue Hut”.

27.

I propose that now that we have cleaned the River, we should expand, deepen, widen and create locks in the River as necessary to make it a part of the Union Canal system.

28.

I propose that since there's now houseboats in the New Town, let's go a step further and dig up almost all the roads and replace them with canals, in the style of Venice. Every resident will receive an electric powered boat and water safety lessons. The canals will reduce accidents caused by drunk driving, be a more child friendly alternative to fast speed roads, and attract tourists because it will be like Venice without such nice weather.

29.

I propose that all enclosed, indoor shopping centres in the New Town must be demolished and replaced with a traditional, outdoor High Street.

30.

I propose that the New Town will force local high schools to publish the rate of student suicides every year, and display the numbers publicly. We will not stop forcing them to do this until the number is zero.

31.

I propose that the New Town will construct a bandstand in the new outdoor High Street and allow teenage bands to come along and play 45 minute slots every weekend. The bands will receive payment and some food/drinks.

32.

I propose that the New Town will host a punk rock festival at the duck pond formerly occupied every evening by the “alternative kids”, called Punk On The Pier.

33.

I propose that the New Town should create a Travelling Record Library, which will visit one area of town each evening and from which residents can borrow records they haven't heard before, or donate ones they did not like. The Library will host listening parties every Saturday.

34.

I propose that the New Town should have the local branch of the Women's Institute collaborate with artists to make woolly sweaters for the streetlights, because they look cold.

35.

*I propose that the New Town erects
a scaffold outside the Council
offices.*

36.

I propose that the New Town should use some wasteland to construct a mock-Tudor village which will function as a living museum. People will live and work in the village - with training provided - and job opportunities will be extended to those who are long-term unemployed, recovering from addiction or released from prison. All who work there will be given a mock-Tudor cottage, and the largest "Village Hall" building will serve as a community hub. The village will be self-sustaining as a tourist attraction, and by selling the products produced there, as there will be a blacksmiths, beehives, and a farm shop.

37.

I propose that the New Town will abolish the current police constabulary, and renovate the police station into a brightly coloured, community oriented place. Upon calling 999 in the New Town, you will be asked what your emergency is, and instead of one-size-fits-all officers, the dispatcher will instead send specifically trained teams of people - for example, if someone is drunk and at risk, they'd send a team with experience with addiction counselling.

38.

I propose that on the main thoroughfares of the town, the New Town will construct police box style structures which will provide free drug counselling, free drug testing and sexual health guidance. These will be police amnesty zones, where no one will be prosecuted for possessing drugs, and will provide clean needles, sharps disposal and medical attention for those wishing to use intravenous drugs.

39.

I propose that the residents of the New Town will be invited to create a group modelled on Man Chat in Aberdeen, which will meet to anonymously talk about their mental health and provide peer support. They will meet several times a week, at different times, so that no one cannot attend at all due to work or family commitments. This group will directly tackle the high rates of male suicide and mental health problems.

40.

I propose that the New Town will turn one of the now abandoned churches into the New Town's first and only LGBTQIA+ night club, which will host live drag shows, performances from the LGBTQIA+ community, serve as a community led support centre and host live music.

41.

I propose that the New Town will turn the now abandoned paper mill facilities within the industrial estates into 74 studios for artists, rented at an affordable rate. This will increase the likelihood of creatives staying in the town, and will also a feature a large project space that can be used as a gallery space, performance space, dance space, fitness space, etc.

42.

I propose that the stairs within the shopping centre of the New Town should be removed, and replace with adult-sized slides leading into large ball pits.

43.

I propose that, using the honey produced by the local beehives from previous proposals, the New Town will construct a traditional mead factory on the banks of the River, which will sell artisan mead at affordable prices and offer tours of the factory to visitors.

44.

I propose that, in acknowledgement of the cultural history of those who came from the Glasgow “slums” to the New Town, and that many of those families would have originally hailed from the Western Isles, we construct a Gaelic language and culture centre, including an all-Gaelic nursery, and free Gaelic language and culture lessons for all.

45.

I propose that we should install colour changing lightbulbs in the streetlights of the New Town. They will use different colours at different times - for example, blue has been proven to reduce anger and aggression, so they could be used on weekend evenings.

46.

I propose that the New Town should have busking squares which are bookable (for free) for certain periods of time dotted throughout the main thoroughfares of the town - at a suitable distance from each other so to prevent noise overlap - to provide musicians with a platform and encourage people to walk more.

47.

I propose that during Summer, a large screen should be erected in the local park, to show short films made by local visual artists, animators and filmmakers.

48.

I propose that all nurseries in the New Town should be relocated to be nearer care homes, to provide inter-generational socialisation for the elderly residents who perhaps don't have family, and for the children who perhaps don't have grandparents.

49.

I propose that in the New Town, each area of the town will have its own Community Garden. These Community Gardens will offer further employment for the areas, as well as providing life-skill workshops and teaching people how to grow their own food. They will also provide a safe social space, and an opportunity for residents without their own gardens to have affordable allotments.

50.

I propose that the we, the residents of the New Town, campaign the Scottish Parliament to allow us to change the town's education curriculum. The changes will remove antiquated classes, and replace them with practical life skills such as reading contracts, budgeting, running a small business, tenants rights and other hands-on life skills so many teenagers leave high school without.

51.

I propose that the New Town will pass a local bylaw which states that for every one corporation or franchise store on our High Street, there must be two locally owned businesses. This bylaw will also apply to pubs, cafés and restaurants.

52.

I propose that the New Town will introduce the Eric Scott Memorial Fund, which will be a start-up grant for new businesses, and which will provide help securing them a place to trade, and also provide free advice and legal counsel for their first three years in business.

53.

I propose that the New Town should install a heated pool upon the Boulevard, and have a competitive synchronised swimming team which will give nightly performances each evening during summer, wearing matching floral swim caps.

54.

I propose that the New Town should enlist the help of graphic designers, who will help every household in the town create a Standard to fly on their electric boats upon the new canals.

55.

I propose that the New Town should demolish all the hideous multi-storey car parks, because we don't need them anymore, and replace them with surrealist themed mini-golf courses.

56.

I propose that, in the style of the pyramid schemes which have trapped so many residents of the New Town, we create a get-rich-quick scheme centred around panning for gold in the local burns. See if anyone is greedy enough to show up.

57.

I propose that the New Town will pass a bylaw making it mandatory for every household to carve and display a turnip during October. Turnips will be provided.

58.

I propose that the New Town will have a ban on all Christmas decorations of any variety, in any location - including households, shops and public spaces - until exactly 12 days before Christmas. They must be removed before Hogmanay. Failure to do so will result in your Christmas decorations being destroyed in front of your family.

59.

I propose that we revamp the nightlife in the New Town, and cash in on having the first custom-built nightclub in the country. Ban all Montagues and Capulets. Allow only banging tunes, and DJ sets, and dirty dancefloors, and dreams of naughtiness...

60.

I propose that we invest in Party Boats for the canals. They'll serve New Town Mead and people will dress as Vikings.

61.

I propose that we scrap mail delivery people in the New Town, and instead train and use the first fleet of messenger pigeons in use in almost 100 years. If, after five years, the pigeons are doing okay, we can upgrade to messenger owls.

62.

I propose that, in protest of the country's first custom-built nightclub being used as a church, we assemble a large group of people outside to shout; "Lager, lager, lager, lager, mega, mega, white thing, mega, mega white thing, lager, lager, lager..."

63.

I propose that we replace the free advertising circulars with the New Town Good News Paper, which will only feature good news from the town; like dogs being adopted from rehoming centres and people finishing their course of chemotherapy.

64.

I propose that we install adult sized play parks throughout the New Town, to encourage exercise in a fun and social manner, and improve the mental health of the residents.

65.

I propose that we create a formalised New Town Skill Share Network, in which people exchange their skills for other skills. This could be anything from learning crochet in return for a Victoria Sponge Cake recipe to being taught programming in return for a dog grooming course.

66.

I propose that the underpasses in the New Town are converted into small art galleries, where local artists can show their works under Perspex for a few weeks at a time, thus turning non-places into places.

67.

I propose that we will install a cascade of rubber bath ducks in a manner that makes them appear to be falling from the top windows of the high-rise flats in Craigshill, just for a sense of whimsy.

68.

I propose that once a year in the New Town, we will hold a raffle, in which every permanent resident of the New Town under the age of 18 is entered into. A name will be pulled at random, and they will subsequently be the King/Queen of the New Town for one weekend, ruling by decree for the duration of their reign.

69.

I propose that if one has to drive on the few remaining roads in the town, that the only acceptable car to do so in is a 1980's Volvo Estate, which must be decorated.

70.

I propose that the currently unused land in the Bathgate Hills will be transformed into an organisation modelled on the Samadhi Living and Learning Centre in Nepal. We will invite the Buddhist Monastery in the Scottish Borders to contribute the plans and running of the organisation, and to use it for their retreats. The space will provide mindfulness and meditation guidance for all, as well as serving as a Multi-Faith centre to form community.

71.

I propose the introduction of an Open Doors Day that is truly an Open Doors Day - allowing the citizens to see inside the council chambers in which decisions are made, inside the psychiatric wards in which our most vulnerable fellow citizens are treated, inside the nurseries to see how the little children's education works, inside the police stations to see how prisoners are treated.

72.

I propose the reinstatement of free music lessons for all children under the age of 18 in the New Town.

73.

I propose the construction of a large darkroom complex in Howden Park Centre, which will be open to the public and will have a team dedicated to designing and building a 3D printable photographic processor to ensure the future of the film photography industry.

74.

I propose the opening of a strip club on the Boulevard, which will operate as a workers co-operative and will have a Union of Dancers.

75.

I propose that anyone found to be a member of a Multi-Level Marketing scheme that sells any type of “skinny tea” in the town will be forced to volunteer on the town’s Eating Disorders Unit for six consecutive weeks.

76.

I propose the opening of a publishing company called New Town Free Press, which will publish the works of unsigned and unrepresented authors, as well as upcoming magazines.

77.

I propose the employment of a town crier, who will walk the streets three times a week, carrying a bell and shouting "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!", before delivering good news updates. To keep with tradition, he will then affix his notice to the front door of the local Inn.

78.

*I propose the transformation of any
abandoned telephone boxes into
community fuelled “give one, take one”
public libraries.*

79.

I propose that we clean up and repair the small amphitheatre near the River Almond, and use it as a venue for TED Talk inspired lectures from international speakers.

80.

I propose that we find the plans for the old The Forum venue, where David Bowie and Aerosmith once played, and rebuild it.

81.

I propose a ban on any property developers from building those heinous, cookie-cutter identical new build homes that are all identical.

82.

I propose the construction of a planetarium in Dechmont Law, with a permanent exhibit to the only time in history an alien abduction has resulted in a police investigation.

83.

*I propose that we make World Goth Day
an official public holiday in the New
Town, complete with a fête.*

84.

On account of the risk of piracy and other waterborne crime upon the new canals, create an anti-pirate navy which will fly the Jolly Roger to intimidate other pirates.

85.

I propose the introduction of airship construction facilities, and that airship parking will be provided in all public places to encourage travel by airship.

86.

I propose that there will be Bladerunner inspired neon screens installed across the town, on the sides of buildings and on roofs, which will show newsreels, clips of films and VJ sets to create a bit of atmosphere at nighttime.

87.

I propose that we build an elevated electromagnetic suspension rail network that will fly over the houses and thoroughfares below, providing an alternative means of transportation.

88.

I propose that - to prevent any disagreements coming to blows - all disagreements in the New Town must be settled with duelling until first blood at sunset on the third Thursday evening of every month. Anyone unwilling to face their opponent in duel automatically admits a dishonourable defeat.

89.

*I propose that all airships must be
registered and fly their assigned standard
- any airship in violation of this rule risks
being considered a pirate airship, and
therefore being shot down.*

90.

I propose that we create an aerial race course over the town, allowing us to not only become the inventors of Airship Rally Racing, but also hometown and best track for it in the world.

91.

I propose that we build a wind powered, heated blue lagoon in a local park, and create in the lagoon an artificial coral reef. We will give people glass bottomed boat tours of the coral.

92.

*I propose that we ban radio stations
being broadcast in the town from playing
the same song more than once in a 24
hour period.*

93.

I propose that we temporarily rename the town Brigadoon, and invest in an advertising campaign to see how many tourists will appear on the day we claim is the only day Brigadoon appears every 100 years.

94.

I propose that, in the New Town, it will be a legal requirement that on the last Friday of every month, and during all important astrological events, the town observes "Dark Skies Blackout". The only lights permitted during these Blackouts are those of emergency service vehicles.

95.

I propose that we reinstate capital punishment in the town for the following offences:

- Wearing brown shoes with a black belt*
- The use of any variation of the phrase "it is more than my job is worth"*
- Writing, stating or otherwise promoting the idea that Andrew Eldritch is a really charismatic man who writes terrible music*
- Any use, or variant, of the question "Have you heard of this band called Tame Impala?"*

Executions will be performed in a summary manner, and the right to Habeas Corpus will be denied.

96.

I propose that, in the New Town, we will encourage the use of Citizen's Band Radio, and provide an underground fund to set up transmitters in your home. Illegal music is killing the music licensing and recording industries, and we are here to help.

97.

I propose that, in the style of Speaker's Corner in London, the New Town will provide a Speaker's Corner on the town High Street, which will have a microphone set up, and at which any resident of the town is welcome to speak for 30 minutes in any topic.

98.

I propose that the New Town will have a known Red Light District, where sex work of all types is legal and regulated. The area will have security and attract a wide variety of people - like Montmatre or days gone by.

99.

I propose that in the New Town, the punishment for sharing hateful, xenophobic or misogynistic content online will be to stand in the centre of Almondvale Stadium at a microphone and read word for word every hateful thing you said, to an audience of as many followers you have, that will include your family and closest friends.

100.

I propose that, inspired by the Welsh tradition of Tŷ Unnos, any building or structure that is erected overnight on common land, and that has a fire burning in the hearth before sunrise, becomes the erectors legal and official residence.

101.

I propose that the town will become the first in the UK to grant all of its citizens Universal Basic Income. This Universal Basic Income will come in the form of vouchers for enough nutritious food for everyone in the household, clothing allowance to be spent at clothing stores, and additional needs vouchers to be spent on entertainment, books, etc. This should provide a comfortable level of living for everyone in the town. If you wish to work in addition to your Universal Basic Income, this will be given as additional income without detriment. This will allow citizens freedom to study, and explore their personal interests. Universal Basic Income will be funded by the tourism we bring to the town and the goods we export.

For Tom and everyone at The Vennie, for putting up with me, and for Andrew Miller, for making it possible and believing in what a town can be.

For Chris Fremantle, for believing in me when I didn't.

For Ben, who made sure I wasn't alone during all my research walks and for picking me up when I stumble.

And to the memory of Eric - it's for you, always.

