

THE ROYAL BURGH OF AYR



Seven Hundred and Fifty Years of History

Edited by

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CHAPTER 20

MODERN DEVELOPMENT OF THE BURGH

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AYR, like most towns, has grown and expanded down the years without any recognised plan of development. There are examples of good planning to be found in many parts of the town, but the great mass of building has taken place in an unrelated fashion. This was, perhaps, unavoidable as the local authority did not possess the powers necessary to control development. It was not until 1909 that legislation was passed to enable local authorities to exercise a negative measure of control. That is to say, power was given to prevent certain developments, rather than to ensure that development followed an agreed plan. The passing of the 1909 act was the culmination of a long period of agitation by many prominent people to convince Parliament that something more than the by-law regulations under Public Health or Local Government Acts was required to ensure satisfactory development.

Apart from the general provisions of the latter acts it was open to local authorities to proceed by way of private bills to secure improvements. Ayr Town Council in their Water Act, 1885, included in the measure proposals for widening High Street and Kyle Street. The proposals were extremely modest, however, and power to acquire land was limited to a distance of 80 feet from the centre of the roadway. How little use was made of these powers we know to-day when modern traffic conditions compel us to visualise much wider streets.

Although the 1909 act gave local authorities powers to make planning schemes, no steps were taken in Ayr to give effective operation to the act. This was no doubt due to the cumbersome procedure which the act entailed. A further serious consideration was the heavy compensation which the local authority had to pay whenever the planning scheme prevented land being developed.

The next development in planning control was contained in the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919, where planning was more closely associated with housing developments which followed after the First World War. In 1925, however, housing and town planning became separate subjects for legislation by the Town Planning Act of that year. The next major development was the passing of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1932, and it was under this act that Ayr Town Council began to prepare an over-all plan for the town.

The first enterprise where planning provision had to be made was the building of the Woodfield housing scheme. Here, however, it was found all was not plain sailing. In the economic and financial conditions following the First World War, restrictions were imposed on local authorities. At Woodfield it was found that to economise on costs roadways had to be curtailed, provision for a shopping centre omitted, and buildings pruned to severe limits. These features continued to be apparent throughout all housing schemes between the wars.

A measure of planning was introduced in the re-development schemes carried out in the Wallacetown and Newton Green areas. Here clearance areas had to be scheduled and old properties and ruinous buildings cleared away. On the sites so cleared new houses were erected of the flatted or modern tenement type. An interesting—though pathetic—feature of the Newton Green re-development was the number of cases in which the old houses were owned by descendants of well-known Ayr families who were unable to maintain the properties in good order through lack of funds. In some cases the families had been connected with the fishing industry which was a feature of the burgh in earlier years. These properties were purchased for site values only.

At a later stage there was developed at Taylor Street a new type of housing in the shape of a hostel for elderly people. The plan provided twelve single-storey one-apartment houses with bathroom and kitchenette, built in a row of six houses on two sides of a square. Another side of the square contained a caretaker's house and a large common room furnished as a lounge and reading-room. The internal area of the square was laid out as a garden, and when completed the scheme was

recommended as a model to be followed by other housing authorities.

As these housing developments were proceeding, steps were being taken under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1932, to prepare a scheme for the burgh. A Joint Planning Committee representing the burghs of Ayr and Prestwick and the County Council was set up, and continued in office until the County Council withdrew after the burgh of Ayr secured an extension of boundaries in 1935.

Ayr proceeded with a scheme confined to the burgh. Conferences were held with proprietors of land which was undeveloped and general agreement was reached as to the type of development to be permitted. The draft clauses in the scheme were nearing completion for submission to the Secretary of State for his approval when war broke out in 1939. During the war it was not possible to go forward with the negotiations, and with the passing of the Town and Country Planning (Interim Development) (Scotland) Act, 1943, which applied control of development to the whole of the country, a new situation arose which rendered it necessary to prepare a plan on different lines.

The passing of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act, 1947, brought up-to-date the powers of planning authorities which now consist of large burghs and county councils in Scotland with the exception of the small burghs of St. Andrews and Thurso which have retained their old rights. The comprehensive powers given to planning authorities under the 1947 act now permit of adequate control over development. Not only can the authority prohibit development without incurring the burden of compensation, but it can insist that development be carried out in accordance with a plan prepared and approved.

Under the provisions of the act a comprehensive survey has to be made to ascertain the general condition of properties in the town, and these have to be classified as first, second, and third class. Upon this survey is based the future re-development. The plan must contain in broad outline the main features in road work, public services, zones for industry and residential areas. To ensure flexibility the plan has to be reviewed every five years and modifications made to suit the requirements of the time.

Fortunately much of the preliminary work carried out on the original plan conforms to what is required to-day, and it is now possible to see a little way ahead. At present the town has been divided into eight areas in priority of development. Area No. 1 is the Newton Green west of the railway serving the goods station. It is proposed that this should form an industrial zone so that those industrial units which are scattered throughout business and residential areas may be concentrated in one district. The site is ideal in that it is served by road, rail and sea. Road facilities are to be improved by the widening of Hall's Vennel bridge, which will have a new approach constructed on the west side. On the east side improvements will be made to enable ingoing and outgoing traffic to be handled by different routes. Another industrial zone has been sited adjacent to the railway at Lochside, and this is intended for light industrial processes. This should in large measure provide sufficient area for expanding industry for some time to come.

As has been stated, the other development areas in order of priority are arranged in eight areas for the purpose of determining the priority stages in which the re-development will be carried out. These areas are as follows:

Area 2. Main Street east side, New Road east side, Viewfield Road south and west sides, George Street west side, and River Street north side.

Area 3. George Street south-east side, on the east by the railway to Craigie Avenue, Craigie Avenue south side, Craigie Road west side to river, and on the west and south by the river Ayr.

Area 4. New Bridge, river Ayr to east corner Ayr County Hospital, Holmston Road north side, Station Bridge, Burns Statue Square north side, Alloway Street east side, High Street east and north sides, and New Bridge Street east side. This area includes Burns Statue Square and surrounding plot.

Area 5. New Bridge Street west side, Sandgate west side, Alloway Place west side, Fairfield Road north side to sea, Esplanade to river Ayr, and river Ayr to New Bridge west side.

Area 6. High Street south and west sides, Alloway Street west side, Killoch Place west side, Miller Road north side; Alloway Place east side, Sandgate east side to junction of Sandgate, and High Street.

Area 7. From sea to Fairfield Road south side, Racecourse Road, Miller Road south side, Burns Statue Square south side, Station Bridge south side, Castlehill Road west side to junction with Inverkar Road, Bowman Road west side, Chalmers Road south side, Carrick Road, Broomfield Road north side, Southpark Road north side, Racecourse Road west side, Blackburn Road north side to sea, and esplanade to point opposite Fairfield Road; and

Area 8. Burgh boundary on the north from sea to Prestwick Road east side, Prestwick Road east side, Seaforth Road south side, Hunter's Avenue east side, Northfield Avenue north side, West Sanquhar Road east side, Back Hawkhill Avenue north and east sides, Whitletts Road north side to the railway, along railway to Viewfield Road north side, Waggon Road north side to railway, railway east side to Saltpans Road, Saltpans Road south side to sea.

These proposed areas were adopted by the Town Council on 8th September 1947, and work has gone steadily forward with the preparation of the Development Plan. At the time of writing, however, only areas 1 and 2 have been extensively considered. In area 2 there has been proposed a civic development in the district bounded by River Street, Garden Street, Wallace Street and King Street. It is suggested that a new Town Hall capable of seating 2,500 should be sited facing the river, and that an indoor swimming bath and modern office accommodation could be provided here.

The area from the west side of Garden Street to the Library lends itself to re-development also. The expanding needs of the Library call for extension, and a well-designed building could provide for this and for meetings of the various cultural bodies in connexion with the Library. It would be appropriate, too, that provision should be made for the church hall activities of the Darlington Church as the existing hall would be demolished in the reconstruction suggested above.

Under a Provisional Order the Town Council were authorised to construct a dam across the river west of the new railway bridge carrying the railway to the south side of the river. When offers were taken to proceed with the work, however, it was decided the cost was too high and consideration of the scheme was deferred. With the outbreak of war in 1939 it was

impossible to take further steps in the matter, but the period granted by the Provisional Order to complete the work was extended from time to time. Unfortunately the work could not be started because of national restrictions on capital expenditure, and the statutory powers have lapsed.

It is desirable, however, that provision of the dam should be one of the features in the Development Plan. New Parliamentary powers will be required to proceed with the construction of the dam, but in view of the agreement reached with all interested parties on the previous occasion it may be assumed that these powers would be obtained.

With the construction of the dam there would be made available a fine stretch of safe water for boating. A natural corollary is the proposal to open up broad pathways on each side of the river between the Auld Brig and Victoria Bridge. This would bring into use an amenity of great value to the citizens. The vast increase in modern road traffic has brought problems which demand immediate attention. The first consideration should be the relief of traffic using the New Bridge which has now reached a volume imposing excessive strain on the fabric.

The best method, I think, to achieve this relief is by the erection of a new traffic bridge across the river. The natural site for such a bridge is on the line of the existing Turner's Bridge, which bridge, gifted to the town by Mr. Turner, a local businessman, has served pedestrian traffic admirably for many years. It could, with care, be dismantled and reconstructed somewhere on the upper reaches of the river, and make possible an access to Craigie estate for those resident in the Holmston-Castlehill areas. In conjunction with the new traffic bridge is involved the widening of the lower portion of Mill Street and also Carrick Street. This would in turn require the formation of a traffic circus round the Wallace Tower which has now become a major obstruction to the flow of traffic. The re-alignment of buildings on the east side of High Street, north and south of the Tower, which this scheme will entail will also improve traffic conditions and increase amenity.

The planning of the area between High Street and the river will not be an easy task owing to the nature of the ground levels. Taking the long term view, the removal of the old

electricity works buildings, the abattoir, mills and other commercial undertakings would seem necessary if the best use is to be made of the area. The Tam o' Shanter Inn will be preserved, and, in accordance with the undertaking given by the Town Council when the property was purchased, be maintained as a museum.

How best to do this will no doubt be decided in due course in the light of existing circumstances. To my mind the development could be coupled with the re-development of Mill Street. The setting back of the building line on the west side of the street, and the building of blocks of flats for housing would give scope for architectural skill in both design and lay-out. An arcade from High Street to Mill Street using the present Tam o' Shanter Close, and with shops on either side, would provide an ideal shopping centre.

Another desirable facility required to cater for the increasing number of day trippers is a restaurant capable of seating 600 or 700 people. As the Town Council are now empowered by Statute to provide this service it seems a feasible proposition for this to be provided adjacent to the Tam o' Shanter Inn. By erecting the restaurant building as a cover for the arcade already mentioned it would be possible to make the inn a part of the general plan.

The development of the area between High Street and Dalblair Road does not present the same problems. The widening of the latter will do much to ease the traffic on High Street. The need for ample parking facilities suggests that this could be provided easily between High Street and Dalblair Road. Again the long term view suggests the removal of the seed stores to link up with the development taking place at Saltpans Road or alternatively to a site in the adjacent industrial zone. The buildings already purchased at the junction of Dalblair Road and Carrick Street for road widening purposes by the Town Council could be replaced by a crescent-shaped block of residential service flats facing west. The need for this provision is of some urgency, and could well form part of an early development.

To avoid interference with the flow of traffic the vehicle entrance to the proposed car park should be confined to Carrick Street. One or more exits for pedestrians, however,

should be made both to High Street and Dalblair Road.

The re-development of the area to the west of Sandgate from the river to Wellington Square will also require careful handling. The Academy and Loudoun Hall are two focal points.

These will have to be preserved and will, to a large extent, dominate the plan. Again it will be necessary to remove some commercial buildings to the industrial zones to permit of proper development. Added shopping facilities and residential accommodation could be provided in their place.

In this area the problem of combining commercial, industrial, and residential buildings will need careful planning. There are the buildings required for harbour trade, shipyard facilities, and the gasworks. The first and second of these will be less difficult than the third. It is to be hoped that the trade of the harbour will become increasingly important, and with the development of the Ayrshire coalfields export trade should increase. Imports should also develop with a return to normal international conditions, and most of the older dwelling-houses in South Harbour Street may need to be replaced by wharf accommodation. Storage space, too, for the fishing trade is needed and this could be provided on the sites occupied by these old houses. This would do much to clean up the unsightly accumulation of fishboxes along the river side.

The problem of the gasworks still remains, but it is to be hoped that the integration of the gas industry under the Gas Board will result in the elimination of the works in this area as well as those on the Newton side. It is not too much to hope that the industry will concentrate production nearer the coal area and pipe it to distribution centres similar to the supply of electricity. Planning permission has been given for the erection of a new gasometer in the industrial zone at Newton Green. This is of immense storage capacity and while its height will make it a prominent feature of that area it will not be out of keeping with the development of the area as a whole. If it is possible to remove the existing production plants as suggested the sea-front area of the Fort district will be greatly improved.

The concentration of civic administration calls for the conversion of shops to office accommodation in the Town Buildings. This seems to me preferable to the building of new premises for this purpose, though the latter has its attractions. The

existing buildings have architectural beauty which is destroyed by the painted stonework at the base, and have added dignity by the fine steeple which rises from them.

The final proposal which might be considered is the widening of the New Bridge. The volume of traffic using the bridge is already heavy and is likely to increase even although a new bridge has been erected at Mill Street. Properties were purchased and the area cleared on the north side of High Street as part of a plan for this widening. The extension of this clearance to the river and the widening of the New Bridge on the east side would also be of assistance in handling traffic. It would be possible to split traffic lines at the north end of the bridge to permit of High Street traffic taking the inner line, and Sandgate traffic the outer line. This would permit filtering of traffic into High Street, and avoid the delay which takes place at present.

The expansion of the residential areas of the town will in due time call for increased local bus services making connexions much easier than at present. The possibility of several circular routes being introduced is visualised in the road plan for the future. The widening and re-alignment of Heathfield Road is one of the most urgent improvements required towards this end. With the construction of the proposed new sewer with a southern outfall beyond the Doon, the development of this part of the burgh should not be long delayed. As this area is zoned as residential the need for cross-country bus routes to Castlehill and Craigie will be recognised.

CHAPTER 21

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THE reader who wishes to study the history of Ayr in greater detail will find that the following books will suffice for a superficial introduction to the subject. The list is not exhaustive, but it contains those books which have proved useful and are readily accessible. They are arranged in what most nearly approximates to chronological order.

The student, who will not be content with the published work of others but requires the source material for his research, is advised to consult the Ayrshire Collection at Ayr Carnegie Library and is also reminded of the Burgh Records in possession of the Town Clerk, the Kirk-session Records of the Auld Kirk and the Presbytery Records, the Registers of the Great and Privy Seals of Scotland, the publications of the Scottish History Society and other more specialised sources referred to in the foregoing chapters.

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