

St Patrick's Isle

CULLEN: Peel 1

May, 1971

PEEL

Department of Town and Country Planning, Isle of Man Local Government Board

National Works
Civil Defence Corps
H Q

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEEL, ISLE OF MAN

A preliminary outline of proposals intended for consultation only.

The reader of this report should not expect proposals for wholesale clearance and fashionable town centre renewal. The report is based on an understanding of the character or personality of the town and it seeks to coax this individuality into the new world of tourism, cars and coaches without essential damage. We believe that Peel has a unique character which is a great asset. Do not destroy it.

DESCRIPTION

The essential heart of the town is contained inside the envelope marked on Plan 1. (Red line).

This heart consists of twelve segments of irregular shape which are built up on their perimeters and have empty or derelict centres.

The roads which run through these segments fall into two categories.

1. Public thoroughfares having shops and which link together the main places of the town such as Atholl Place and Market Place.
2. The warren of narrow domestic streets running down from the main streets to quayside and promenade.

In both cases there is a strong atmosphere of interior life inaccessible to outsiders.

Peel is obscure. You cannot adequately describe Peel by photographs; it is a tale told in Braille. It is more like a collective animal than a town, the warren of streets like internal organs emerging from time to time at one orifice or another with a view of sea, castle or shops only to turn away again. One can only think that this was a Celtic Village like the original Claddach at Galway, whose form became fixed

in stone instead of being demolished. The amazing thing is that in spite of a good deal of empty property this pattern seems to work and certainly coincides with a strong sense of interior life. What it lacks is any visual style to match this intense Peel-ness. Only Charles Street, with its strange combination of brown stone and red paint, manages to translate the character into three dimensions: an overpowering effect too, not so much an outdoor room as an outdoor cupboard. But not claustrophobic, whisk, or be whisked, round the corner and there is the sea.

SHOPPING

The shopping facilities appear to be adequate and not great addition is suggested.

HOUSING

Changing habits of the holidaymakers suggest that the freedom and flexibility of self-contained flats linked to communal amenities would prove a popular attraction. More popular than the boarding house at any rate. This suggests that much substandard property could be put into good repair adequate for the summer season and that new housing could be undertaken for residents with possibly a top floor for holidaymakers.

AMENITIES

The centres of the segments are often empty and these could be put to use to provide the communal facilities for holidaymakers mentioned above. The most obvious requirement seem to be —

1. Coach centre and car parking facilities.
2. All weather family recreation.
3. Catering for families i.e. a mixture of restaurant and hot food sales; soup, chips and simple dishes as at a good French camping site.
4. Amusements and displays.

TRAFFIC

No special road building programme is envisaged. Private cars should be allowed to penetrate where they will but AU PAS¹ in the central area. The seasonal influx of coaches should be organised so that the narrow streets are not choked. To assist this it is suggested that the four radial roads should all feed into a main coach park off Atholl Street. This entails a short stretch of new road from Glenfaba Road to Douglas Street and the provision of an entrance to the interior. This vehicle park is envisaged not simply as a transport centre but also as a social place and a part of the life of the town. From this commanding position tourists and shoppers can reach any part of the small town on foot.

A cable transporter carrying half a dozen people might be slung across the harbour entrance to get people conveniently to the Castle.

TOWNSCAPE

It is important that the role of a town's charm and attractiveness should not be underestimated. People say "You know, I like Peel, I don't know why but . . . etc." And this is a vital reaction.

In this section of the report we try to understand this aspect of the town.

At the moment the town has a strong character but it lacks the vital spark at significant points that would bring it to life.

Its main characteristic, secretiveness, is almost obsessive and generates an energy that can be sensed and which is a brilliant contrast to the wide horizon of the sea and the isolated sculpture of the castle.

This is the first townscape situation, the sudden contrast between narrow winding roads and lanes and the open sea or, inland, the wider shopping streets.

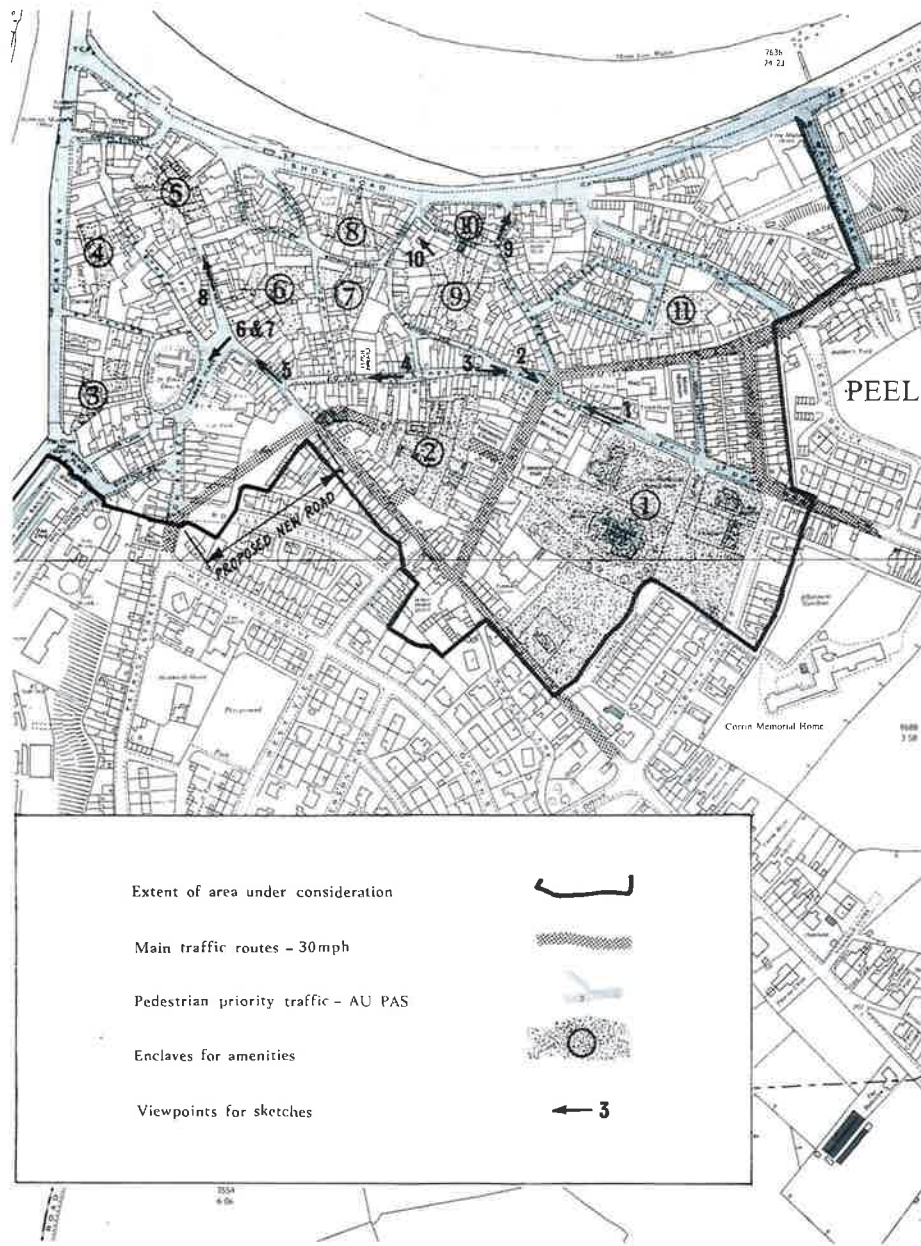
Coming down to more detail we feel that the heart of the town is not, at the moment, sufficiently well defined. The visitor tends to slide in or out of the centre without a real awareness of his position and consequently it is suggested that the entrance roads should be arched over with habitable rooms to mark the centre, to mark the inside and the outside. These would be at Atholl Place and Market Place.





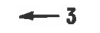
Arising from this it is clear that both these places, which now are only wide road junctions, would become civic entities by the enclosure thus provided so that a rudimentary civic framework is constructed along the spine of the town.

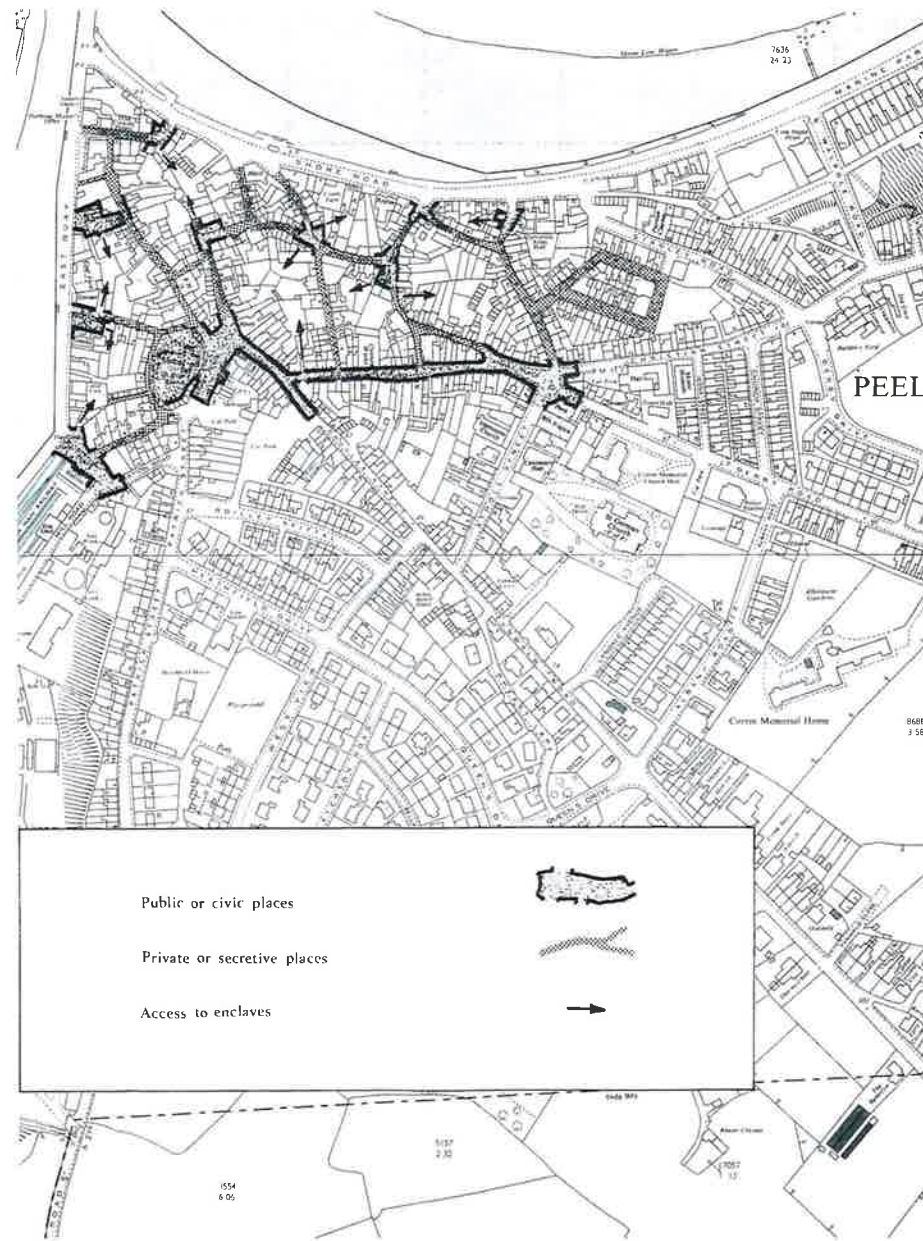
Now, consider the situation. Surrounding this newly-formed logical system of civic places and focal points we have the splendid secret world of narrow streets inside which will be located the new enclaves, the new amenities. And these will lie hidden behind the mute facades of the houses.




How to make contact? Obviously we do not want to destroy the essential qualities of secretness and energy of the narrow streets by opening the centres up to the outside. But if these lanes could lead us to the centres instead of merely baffling us then the whole town would achieve a new organic balance and purpose. If we were to take a route from say, Atholl Place to Centre No. 5 the new pattern could be demonstrated in words and pictures.

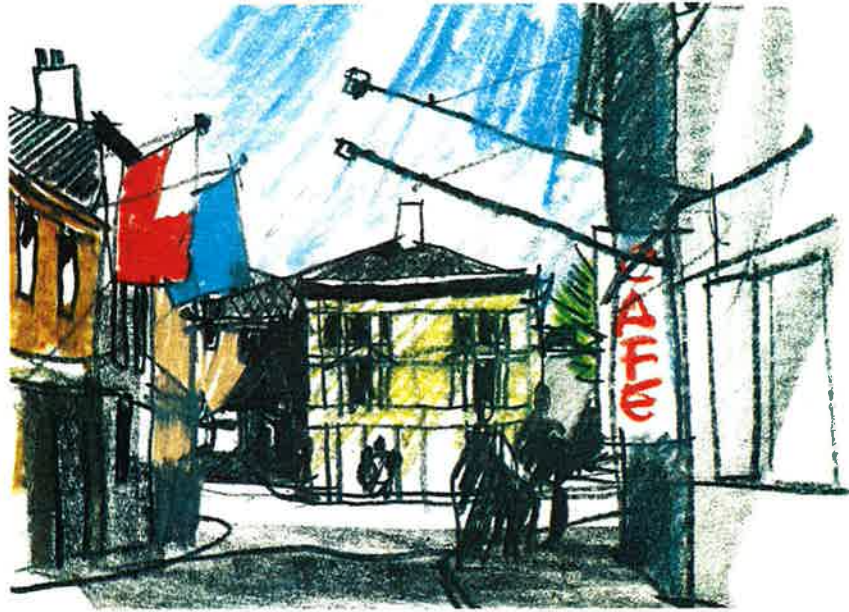
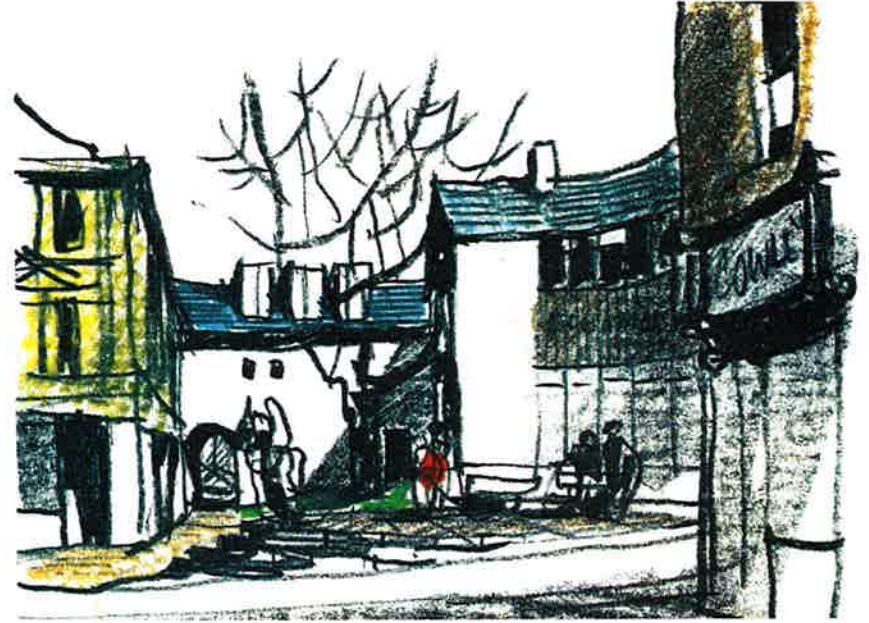
¹at walking pace — a standard French sign in old and cramped towns.



Extent of area under consideration	
Main traffic routes - 30mph	
Pedestrian priority traffic - AU PAS	
Enclaves for amenities	
Viewpoints for sketches	



Public or civic places	
Private or secretive places	
Access to enclaves	



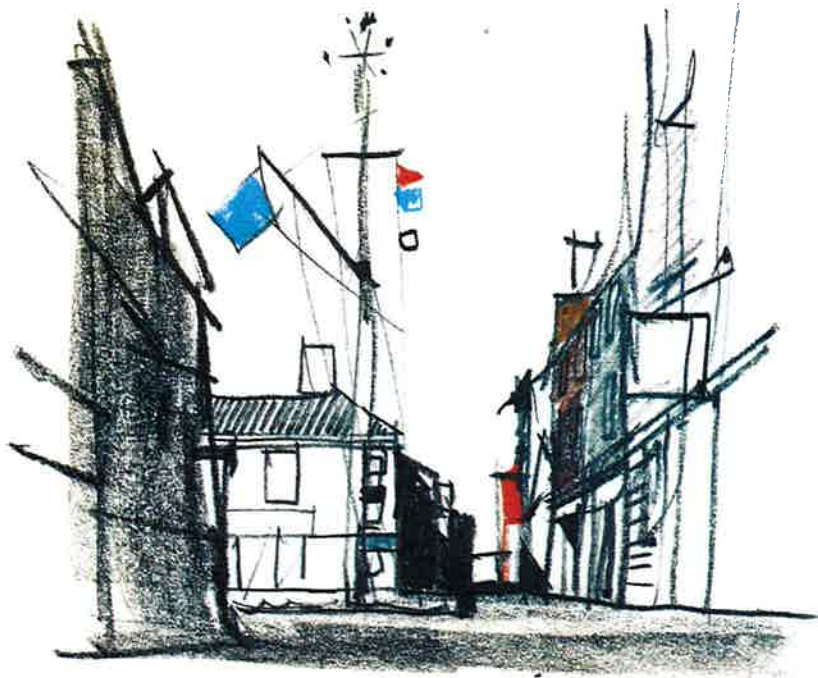
We enter Atholl Place from either Christian Street or Derby Road and as we pass under the arch we move decisively from the outside to the inside of Peel. Atholl Place is a collection of six streets and by cutting off two of them visually it begins to take on the air of a civic place rather than a cross roads. Buses and coaches will still pass through it and so it will retain contact with the main circulation and trade. Having created a place the next step is to give it focal points so that it comes to life. For the sake of argument we will assume such things as flagpoles, ships' figureheads and paving as focal points. (Some towns have sculpture or clocks etc.) To the east the extremely awkward quadrant of the Bank could be exploited to give a paved area which, by being horizontal on the sloping site would command the

place. It would have a ship's figurehead and seats and behind, in the quiet courtyard, a tree could be planted so that this end of the square becomes stabilised.

The Place is waisted and this narrowness could well be made more pronounced by projecting flagpoles out over the street. To the right the lanes lead off into the housing areas but Michael Street continues the civic progression onwards towards Market Place. Unfortunately the junction is not properly achieved, Michael Street drifts aimlessly into Douglas Street and consequently we suggest that Michael Street be blocked off (traffic underneath of course) at the end so that a clear statement is achieved. Michael Street simply stops. Finish. End.

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- 1.** *Entrance to Atholl Place from Derby Road now closed except for pedestrians. The heart of the shopping centre revealed. Tree and paved area give stability and repose.*
- 2.** *Looking back to the same scene. The square is now enclosed and the figurehead gives the paved space its own personality.*
- 3.** *In order to increase the 'civic' effect of the main public places it is necessary to emphasise the square's characteristics. At the narrow part of Atholl Place projecting flags would underline this and add festivity.*
- 4.** *Michael Street is narrow but it peters out rather sadly at the far end. Much better to keep its energy and vitality intact by blocking it off and passing under the arch to a new phase in the civic sequence.*



Passing underneath we emerge to a new scene, the focal point standing in Market Place and this guides us into the space that is dominated by the ruined church.

There is an intensely dramatic situation latent in this place. The red sandstone tower seen against the unspoilt and wild hillside.

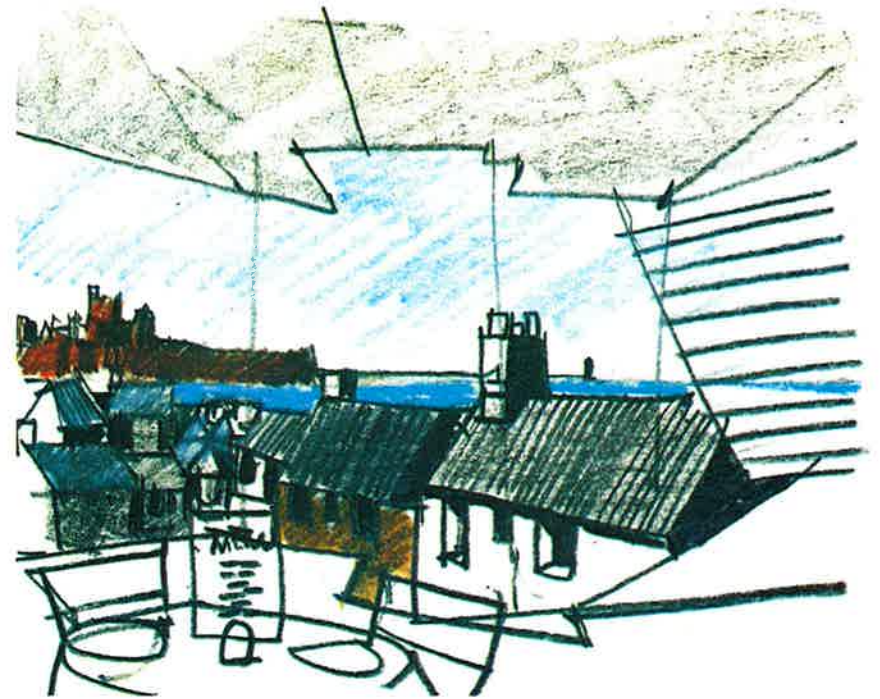
We have tried to realise this drama in the development of the place. A ruin seen against the hillside from an enclosed square or auditorium with the proscenium curtains half drawn. This is the place for son et lumiere using floodlights

on the bare hillside, it is the place for pageants and outdoor cinema on the whitewashed walls and all firmly based on the public house which dominates the square. (And why not a moving pageant with the crowd following the players from place to place in order to exploit hill, sea and castle?)

From Market Place we dive off down Market Street into the Kasbah and the civic or formal framework of the town pushes out a tentative finger into the secret world in the form of a tiny piazza, a little forecourt to the Mathematical School and this marks the narrow entrance to Centre No. 5.

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- 5.** *Market Place. The full significance of the scene cannot be realised from Douglas Street and so a focal point, a flagpole in front of the Hotel, is introduced to lead the eye onwards.*
- 6.** *The reorganised Market Place. A square which is like the auditorium of a theatre. We are standing with our back to the bar, the larger buildings contain the space whilst the smaller buildings and stairways form the proscenium arch to the dramatic stage scenery. The floor should run right through to grass. The arch to the left is deliberately tall ('giant') to achieve civic scale. The blank wall . . .*
- 7.** *. . . is for film projection when festivals and pageants at night bring crowds to watch the dramatic unfolding of sagas in sound and floodlighting of incidents on the hills beyond. What a natural asset for tourism!*
- 8.** *But this is the end of the civic sequence. From Market Place we dive into the intestine-like narrow streets; the wonderful, secretive contrast which is punctuated from time to time by tiny extensions of the formal or civic pattern. Here the Mathematical School, with its tiny paved courtyard, marks the entrance to the internal amenity, Centre 5.*



It will be seen that we are manipulating the interaction of the three characters, public and civic spaces, narrow and secretive lanes and the hidden centres which are like rooms having, often, extensive views over sea and castle.

Finally a note on the use of colour and texture. The paint range in Peel is unusual: red, brown and black with white and ochre for contrast, or rather reinforcement. Most property is now simply drab, grey unpainted stucco. It would be possible to create powerful combinations within this colour range, a Civic Trust free-for-all would be worse than nothing. Charles Street is already one note in the scale,

brown and scarlet. Brown and black, dull red and grey, ochre and brown like an old-style pub gone out of doors. All colours need to be something that won't look silly in a February gale. This applies to the narrow housing areas. By contrast the public spaces and shopping streets should be painted in a more delicate and sophisticated manner like some of the streets in Castletown which are predominantly light in tone and consist of paler (more horizon) colours and all high gloss so that the winding streets have a colour 'echo'. This would be in contrast to the more savage, intestinal and matt colouring of the secret parts of the town.

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- 9.** *And here it is just a carved doorway, to the right, a fragment of the great civic tradition which marks the entrance to another centre.*
- 10.** *We cannot, at this early stage, give much idea about the internal arrangement of the enclaves except to show the kind of effect we would like to achieve.*

