



DOUGLAS PROMENADES

CONSERVATION AREA
CHARACTER APPRAISAL

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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AND
OPERA-HOUSE

INTRODUCTION

In order to justify the selection of an area for Conservation Area status, it is necessary to undertake an appraisal of such an area's character and appearance. The intention of this procedure is to clearly set out the justification for Conservation Area designation, with the added aim of summarising a practical, distinct and factual assessment of the area in a working document. The character appraisal of Douglas Promenade has been formulated following careful and in-depth study and the proposal to designate the conservation area has been the subject of consultation with The Advisory Council on Planning and the Environment, The Douglas Corporation and many other interested parties.

LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

The Douglas Promenades Conservation Area takes in the majority of the Douglas Promenade frontage. Of interest is the fact that following the wide consultation process which was undertaken, boundaries have been extended to include additional areas at both the Northern and Southern ends of the Promenades. The Falcon Glen, Lower Broadway and the lower section of Summer Hill have all also been included, as have sections of new buildings which go to make up the complete sweep of the Promenades. The extremity of the Southern boundary commences at the root of the Victoria Pier and extends Westwards to embrace the Sea Terminal Building and Peveril Square; also included are new and older buildings which abut upon Walpole Avenue. Jubilee Buildings and other properties fronting onto the Eastern end of Victoria Street, make up the frontage which faces the new Royal Bank of Scotland building; these will all fall within the conservation area boundary.

N.B. the physical limit of the boundary is deemed to be the outer edge of the black line on the map of the Conservation Area, which forms part of this designation.

The seaward boundary follows the line of the promenade walkway Northwards to include the Manx Electric Railway Terminus buildings and progresses inland, initially following the boundary of the Borough of Douglas. The inclusion of the Summerland development and the MER buildings again responds to the outcome of consultation. The Western boundary generally follows the physical confines of properties with Promenade or road frontages and where appropriate, it follows the physical line which includes the rear access lanes, or the top of the broogs.



ORIGINS

A review of the historic development of the Promenades is important in order to understand how the area has reached its present form and character. (For a more detailed historic assessment see Appendix I hereto).

The development of Douglas could be said to be partly attributable to the wreck of the Herring Fleet in 1789. The subsequent funding in 1799 for a new stone pier saw the development of the Red Pier Complex. This provided a safe anchorage and thus improved the harbour at a time when travel in Europe was being curtailed by the Napoleonic wars. There was also a flourishing interest in visiting romantic and wild landscapes, which led to an increase in visitor levels to the Island. The promenade for its one and a half mile length has developed in gradual stages and is made up of the following main sections:-

Strathallan Crescent; *comprises some of the earliest of the promenade architecture, being developed by the Duke of Atholl in the early part of the Nineteenth Century;*

Clarence Terrace, The Esplanade and Derby Terrace; *this early development of terraces form the built frontage which was later completed as a promenade with the construction of Central Promenade below;*

Harris Promenade; *completed in 1864;*

Loch Promenade; *officially opened in 1875;*

Queens Promenade; *opened in July 1890;*

Central Promenade; *formally opened in 1896.*

One of the most important buildings to be erected on the sea front was the Castle Mona, one of the Island's finest Registered buildings and now operated as a hotel. The building was erected in 1805 as the official residence of the Governor of the Isle of Man at that time, the Fourth Duke of Atholl. The Duke was responsible for building some of the first seafront holiday villas to house the well-to-do, who came to visit during the summer season. Such properties were in the general area of Strathallan Crescent and at the Northern end of the bay. With the increasing attraction of the town as a resort and as a place to live, further properties such as the Queen's Hotel and its neighbour Erin Brae, were constructed. Samuel Pollock, a retired military man, was responsible for building Strathallan Lodge (Terminus Tavern) and Derby Castle Mansion. In 1876, the latter was converted to a hotel and pleasure park with extensions to follow, which provided a much needed entertainment complex. Marie Lloyd, Vesta Tilley, Florrie Ford and Harry Lauder were some of the names who entertained the crowds and in due course the facility saw the advent of moving pictures. During the 1960s the property changed hands with the development of the ill-fated Summerland leisure complex and aquadrome. The name Derby Castle is still used as the termini for both the Horse Trams and the Manx Electric Railway.

Terraces further south, such as Clarence Terrace and the Esplanade, are early examples of fashionable terraces built in the elegant late-Regency style, circa 1840. They are located at a point on the seafront, which was accessible from the newer part of the town behind and located on an area large enough to accommodate a rear mews for carriages. The properties were also positioned sufficiently distant from the jumble of streets which made up the old town. The terms "Promenade" and "Esplanade" originate from this time when it became fashionable to walk along the seashore or seaside lawns to take the air. This pastime resulted in a construction of a paved area along the seashore onto which new buildings faced.

The construction of further sections of the promenade saw firstly the laying out of Harris Promenade (originally known as Colonel's Road) in 1868. The reclamation of hundreds of square yards of the Douglas foreshore resulted in the opening of the Loch Promenade by Governor Henry Loch and Mrs Loch in 1875. A celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee saw the building of Queens Promenade in 1887; this was officially opened in July 1890 by Governor Sir Spencer Walpole. The last of the Douglas Promenades to be completed was Central Promenade being formally opened by Lieutenant Governor Henniker in 1896. The grand opening for this promenade was one of the first functions carried out by the newly formed Town Council.

As each stretch of the promenade was completed, building plots with seafront locations became highly sought-after and the sale of such plots served to assist in financing completion and enhancement of the promenades themselves.

The next public scheme was commenced in 1929 and brought the promenade to its present form. The project, a joint undertaking between the Corporation and the Isle of Man Government, was a means of relieving the critical unemployment situation of the time and was carried out over a period of six winters between the months of November and April. The result is the fine roadway, walkway and sunken gardens, which we see today.

Finally, changes in tastes and higher levels of expectation led to the replacement in the 1960s of the Victorian arcaded pavilion, which marked the entrance to the promenades. The new Sea Terminal building was heralded for its aesthetic quality and soon became a landmark building in its own right.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTER AND TOWNSCAPE

The continuous edge of built form which makes up the Douglas Promenades is one of the most distinguished and notable elements of townscape in the Island and elegantly defines the margin where town meets the sea. This is also the first impression of the Island offered to many thousands of visitors to our shores and is justly deserving of protection and enhancement.

Whilst there are local variations in character within the area, the architectural concept and form of the Promenades owes much to the Victorian period, with some of the earlier elements retaining their original Late-Georgian and Regency elegance. The buildings of the Promenade share many similarities with other residential parts of the town, being built at the same time, but they do have special characteristics particularly attributable to their location on the seafront. Their original function, which was usually to provide accommodation for short-term visitors to the Island, produced a particularly high building form which strongly contrasted the most attractive frontages facing the sea with their rear outlets, which are often squeezed tightly up against the foot of the cliff. The contrast between these structures and those of the town behind them is also particularly marked. The scale is characteristic and particularly appropriate in terms of the extensive length of the promenade and provides a striking facade, which can be viewed to advantage along its entire frontage.

The approach to architectural form and detailing varies from terrace to terrace according to the period of construction. (For a more detailed assessment see Appendix 2 hereto).

The Douglas Promenade has developed in response to the demands and requirements of the Tourist Industry in the Island, from a time going back to the early nineteenth century. Whatever the date of construction, it is evident that there has been an intuitive, but clear response, to the natural topography of the area, when buildings along the sea frontage were being designed. The natural crescent of the bay can be viewed to great advantage from the south at Douglas Head and to a slightly lesser degree, from Onchan Head to the north.

Although a major arterial traffic route into the town, the substantial width of promenade roadway and walkway adds elegance to the streetscape and enables building frontages to be appreciated from a convenient distance by passers-by. The variety of architecture and uses of materials provides a stimulating composition as one progresses along the length of the sea front. The changing styles of architectural frontages are a tangible testimony to the chronological development of this area and illustrate the important part which tourism once played in the vitality and sustainability of the Island's economy.

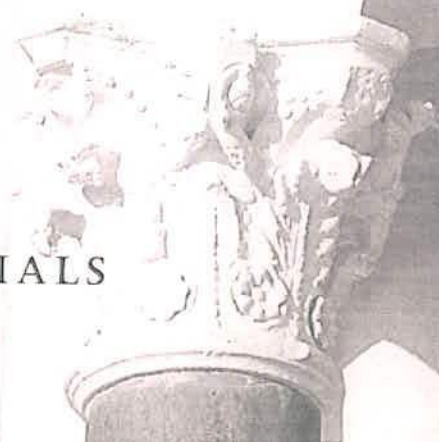
Synonymous with the image of the Promenades - as they became known when the tourist industry was at its height (from the latter years of the Nineteenth Century until the 1950s) - is the unique system of Horse Trams which run the entire length during the summer months. It is judged that this feature makes an important contribution to the special character of the Conservation Area.

BUILDING MATERIALS

Early developments, for the most part, adopt the neo-classical, flat-fronted style of the late-Georgian and Regency periods: these would often have had decorative wrought and cast iron balconies at first-floor, some of which do remain and provide a pattern upon which reinstatement may be based. This would not only enhance the appearance of the buildings, but provide an enjoyable facility for the occupiers of such properties.

The addition of bays, combined with the variety of ornate stucco; robust brickwork and decorative terracotta, is typical of the Victorian period and these rich but contrasting features exist side by side in the most intensively developed terraces. Twentieth Century developments, such as the Villa Marina complex, the Marine Gardens and the Sea Terminal Building, adopt various forms of cement rendered finishes and reinforced concrete technology, adding to the lively mix of buildings which characterize the area. The roof forms are predominantly pitched and finished in traditional blue/grey slate, or slate-like material: this helps unify the entire architectural statement.

Although the construction of the entire promenade matured over a period approaching one hundred years and each section has its own identity, the unified and cohesive architectural concept is of overriding importance. It is this which emphasises the group value of the individual promenades, whilst the dramatic sweep of the group is itself of major significance as a townscape of outstanding quality.



OPPORTUNITIES

Recent years have seen the loss of some very important buildings. Nevertheless, much of quality remains and it is fortunate that in many cases, replacement buildings have responded in appropriate materials and style. It will be of fundamental importance that, where development is judged appropriate in the future, such as on existing vacant or visually negative sites, the standard of design must be of the highest order and not detract from the existing form, quality and scale of the Promenade group. Thus, the continuous and former unbroken frontage may be restored and maintained, adopting the scale and architectural rhythm which is so important to the overall townscape of this part of Douglas.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTS

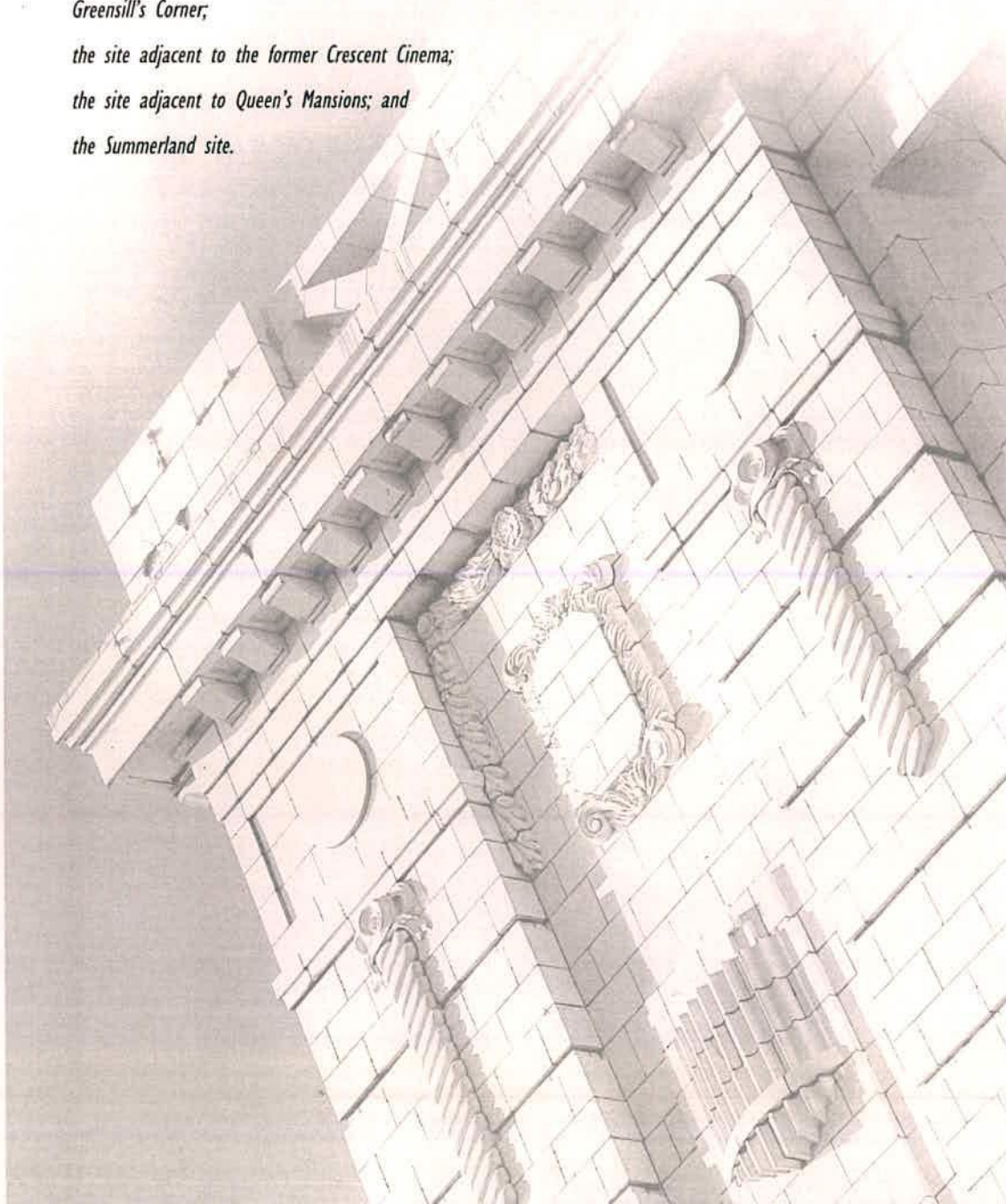
There are opportunities for enhancement presented in individual sites such as:-

Greensill's Corner;

the site adjacent to the former Crescent Cinema;

the site adjacent to Queen's Mansions; and

the Summerland site.



TRAFFIC RATIONALISATION

Rationalisation of traffic management could also significantly enhance the appearance and usage of the promenade in some sections. The consultation process served to highlight issues relating to parking and traffic management. Such issues are already the subject of examination by the Department of Transport and Conservation Area status will further justify joint initiatives which may lead to enhancements at:-

Derby Castle Tram Terminus area;

the junction of Broadway with the Promenades;

Harris Promenade; and

the very Southern end of the promenade, in the area of 'the Bottle Neck' car park.

ENHANCEMENTS

The following measures should all be seen as means of realising the true potential of this important area, whatever the ultimate use of the buildings in planning terms:-

Reinstatement of original architectural features and repair of existing;

guidance on the design of signage and entrance canopies;

external architectural and street lighting;

re-design of features or frontages which have suffered from inappropriate alterations in the past;

appropriate street furniture and materials used in hard landscaping; and suitable colour schemes which can enhance the appearance of the buildings.



CONSERVATION POLICY

Planning Policy Statement 1/01 Policy and Guidance Notes for the Conservation of the Historic Environment of the Isle of Man sets out general policies which apply in Conservation Areas, including the provision that any building within the Conservation Area may not be demolished without the consent of the Planning Authority. The Douglas Local Plan 1998 – Written Statement, under Section 5.0 Tourism, Leisure and Recreation, also contains policies relating to the Promenades:-

POLICY D/TLR/PIA

5.4 Any change of use, it should be made clear, is just that. There is no implication or intent that any building could be demolished and rebuilt for alternative purposes nor that any alteration should be made to facades. The intent is to preserve, protect, and encourage re-investment in the buildings themselves.

Change of use to residential purposes will be supported and may include:

Apartments or maisonettes

Town houses

Sheltered housing

POLICY D/TLR/P2

5.5 In the case of hotels on the Promenades, residential uses may be augmented by office or business use but these uses should, in nett floor space, be subsidiary to the residential use.

POLICY D/TLR/P3

5.6 In the area of the Drives behind the Promenades, change of use from hotel to offices in their entirety, as a possible means of retaining and refurbishing properties which have limited potential for other uses, may be permitted. Residential use will however be encouraged as an option.

POLICY D/TLR/P4

5.7 Encouragement will also be given to the preparation of external colour schemes where appropriate. In particular this applies to the Loch Promenade, where covenants for this purpose previously existed, and which were applied by the Douglas Corporation.

These policies will still apply and serve to reinforce the importance of retaining the historic fabric of the majority of the buildings within the Conservation Area.

DESIGNATION

The buildings which make up the frontage of the Douglas Promenade are noted for their architectural quality and value as a group beyond the shores of the Isle of Man, being described in the past by the late Sir John Betjeman as 'the Naples of the North'. As a group they form a part of our built heritage justly deserving of the protection and recognition afforded by Conservation Area designation.

CONSERVATION GRANTS

The Department of Local Government and the Environment operates the Historic Buildings Conservation Scheme 2000, which provides that financial assistance may be granted for appropriate works to the exterior of properties within Conservation Areas. In compliance with certain conditions contained within the scheme, up to 50% may be offered to help with works which are judged to enhance the character and appearance of the property and which will contribute to an improvement in the townscape. The amount of such grants may vary according to the merits of the particular case and the availability of funds.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC

It is important that having identified and acknowledged the importance of the area by designation as a Conservation Area, property owners are made more aware of the special qualities of their buildings and that emphasis should be on the repair rather than replacement of original fabric and features, as these contribute to the character of the area as a whole. Alterations will be subject to development control, but should be sympathetic to the original style and of an appropriate scale.



APPENDIX 1

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Strathallan Crescent

The stream running through Summer Hill Glen was utilised in 1833 to service the first Douglas reservoir, but more than 70 years earlier the same stream was driving the wheel of a mill which stood almost exactly on the site of the Min-y-Don, the house which now graces the centre of Strathallan Crescent. The Mill was burnt out sometime prior to 1768 but its memory was preserved in Burnt Mill Hill, the early name for Summerhill. As an extension to his Castle Mona Estate, the Duke of Atholl systematically purchased land along the sea front as far as the Derby Castle Tramway Terminus. Having acquired part of Bemahague in 1822, he arranged for four houses to be built on what became known as East Mona Crescent. These were erected by Thomas Dixon, at the north end, nearest the present Tram Station. The Duke left the Island for the last time in 1825, but his daughter Lady Emilia caused the name of the Crescent to be changed to Strathallan Crescent in an endeavour to perpetuate the Atholl influence on the Isle of Man: her husband held the title of Lord Strathallan. The Duke of Atholl was to die only three months after the departure of the Strathallans from the Island.

Clarence Terrace, The Esplanade and Derby Terrace

These three Terraces formed the core of the very early development of promenade buildings prior to formation of the promenade and walkway proper. Laid out in the 1840s, these buildings have deep garden frontages, which would, until the formation of Queens Promenade in 1890, have had almost direct access to the seashore. This would enable visitors and bathers to enjoy the benefits of the seaside location and early images show the buildings with numerous bathing machines on the beach in the foreground.

Harris Promenade

The first Promenade in this area was completed in 1864 along Colonel's Road, which fronted the original Villa Marina Mansion. The paved embankment was approximately 1,000 feet long and 74 feet wide, allowing space to form a lawn. It soon became popular with residents and visitors alike and had largely been paid for by public subscriptions led by Samuel Harris, who was destined to be the last High Bailiff of Douglas. In 1868 he granted the area to the Town Commissioners, who then renamed it the Harris Promenade in his honour. This promenade stopped at the foot of what is now Broadway and was then just 26 feet wide.

Loch Promenade

This was the next section of the promenade to be developed and this afforded direct access from the harbour area to the remainder of the sea frontage. In February 1877 the Loch Promenade was formally handed over to the Town Commissioners, having been officially opened in 1875 by Governor Loch, after whom it was named in recognition of the tremendous help and encouragement which he had given to the project. The old sea wall used to run in approximately the position of the rear back lane between the Promenade and Strand Street (a small section of the wall is still visible at the rear of W. H. Smith's). Following extensive reclamation, the resulting Loch Promenade was 80 feet wide and was said to extend 370 feet seaward of the 1870 shoreline. The opening of the Promenade was followed by a surge of development further along the seafront and away from the harbour area. This period also saw the building of some large individual hotels such as the Sefton, and places of amusement as in the adjoining Gaiety Theatre (formerly The Pavilion), together with the Palace and Falcon Cliff ballrooms elsewhere.

Queen's Promenade

This development was in celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and it brought together the terraces and crescents between Castle Mona and the Summerhill area under a common title. The work was completed by the Town Commissioners and was officially opened in July 1890 by Governor Sir Spencer Walpole.