

The Principles of Town Planning

By BASIL HOOPER, A.R.I.B.A.

The following Paper was read before a meeting of the Town Planning Branch of the Dunedin Amenities Society last month.

This brief paper is written with the object of putting before our members, in a short and compact way, the position of town planning and some of its main principles. I take it that many of us still have a somewhat hazy idea of our objects, and perhaps these few remarks may make them a little clearer. I trust they will also provoke some discussion. I am indebted to Mr. W. R. Davidge, A.R.I.B.A., of London, for a great deal of the matter contained therein.

1. The Need for Town Planning.—The first principle will be accepted by all who have thought about the subject in any way. Whether the special need is to sweep away the slums or provide for the future growth of the town, whether parks and open spaces are called for or roads to give rapid transit and business facilities, all are agreed that, if it is reasonable to plan the alterations to a house, it is still more desirable to plan the town and its extensions.

2. Individuality.—A town is not a stock article, but must be made to the measure of the district. Localities differ very widely in their special needs and views as to development, therefore a town's plan must be its own.

3. Community Control.—This is essential if any real good is to be done, and it is quite evident that authority, in the form of a comprehensive Town Planning Act, is absolutely necessary.

4. The Zone System and Commercial Districts.—From the point of view of protection of property-owners in residential districts some form of restraint as to the location of commercial buildings is clearly necessary. Separate areas for factories and other commercial purposes should be clearly defined, but there must be ample space provided for expansion, or the business side of the town will overflow into the residential quarters. This alteration of use is continually before our eyes. Even in our own town we find factories, shops, etc., mixed up with dwellings in very unpleasant ways. It is interesting to notice that in nearly all towns, even the oldest, the heart of the business community is centred in the areas of the original settlement. This has caused an endeavour to crowd as many office buildings as possible near this commercial centre, and hence the great increase in the height of business premises.

5. Control of Building Heights.—It is most important in the interests of traffic facilities, public health, and public economy that the height of buildings should be kept within reasonable limits. This limit is now usually determined by the width of the

thoroughfare, buildings on wide streets being allowed greater height.

6. Limitations of Houses Per Acre.—A limitation of this kind tends first to spread the town, and consequently the values, over a larger area, and, by restricting the use to which land is put, must to that extent decrease the value per acre of land which is already ripe for building. At the same time, it will tend to give corresponding increase of value to land further from the town. Its effect on the already overbuilt city areas cannot fail to be beneficial, for by fixing a standard of suburban development, a high standard of amenity, and a comparatively low standard of price, it will be financially impracticable to force up values in the built-up areas above a reasonable limit, and for the same reason it will not pay to increase unduly the congestion of building. It is difficult to fix a suitable "land unit," but 12 houses to the acre seems to be accepted as a reasonable maximum.

7. The Influence of Geographical Position.—Private residents will not be attracted to a town which is a blot on the landscape, and businesses will not come unless there is business to be done. Any town plan, therefore, for the development of the town must aim first at making the utmost of all natural and geographical advantages, and then at guiding the development into the most advantageous lines for the benefit of the town and its residents.

8. Transit Facilities.—It is certain that, in the absence of any special commercial or natural advantages, or of facilities for the easy communication with existing centres, a community cannot expect development. Rapid transit, therefore, is all-important to the success of any town.

9. Arterial Roads.—The most important parts of a town plan are the main roads into and out of the town. This really is the skeleton on which the plan will hang together. The routes for arterial roads should be laid down at an early stage in the town plan, and definitely secured from other uses. Many of the large towns in England are now considering this problem, and also there is a tendency towards circular or ring roads of special width encircling the town. It is generally agreed, however, that main roads are the property of the nation, and should be a national matter.

10. Roads and Road Widths.—Two general principles must be borne in mind. It is necessary (1) to secure easy and rapid transit by making provision for fast and slow traffic, sufficient width, etc.; (2) to secure the amenities by preserving view-