

## **Planning Strategy for Ayr Town Centre**

### **Introduction**

National Planning Policy Guideline 8 'Town Centres & Retailing' emphasises the need to ensure that the vitality and viability of town centres are maintained and enhanced. One such recommended means of doing so is to develop town centre strategies to indicate the scope for change, renewal and diversification. The Planning Strategy for Ayr Town Centre provides an overview of the manner in which the Council wishes to see the town centre develop. The Strategy presents a framework for ensuring that investment in the town centre is maximised and that it is in a manner most able to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre. This strategy is essentially land based but it also provides a coherent context for investment in the town and is intended to endure to the year 2012.

The Planning Strategy for Ayr Town Centre is a policy document and should be read in conjunction with the Local Plan. The Strategy provides a guiding context for the assessment of proposals against the retail policies of the Plan. The strategy is promotional in terms of encouraging particular types of investment into particular areas and also by providing detail on a range of development opportunities in the town centre.

### **Ayr Town Centre**

Ayr is an historic town, and a recognised Historic Burgh, with many listed buildings and a townscape of considerable quality. Most of the town centre is an Outstanding Conservation Area. The town centre is one of the largest in the West of Scotland, and has a relatively widespread catchment area. It contains the full range of retail provisions, represented by both national multiple retailers and small local independent retailers. In terms of other town centre provisions, the town has a cinema, 10 pin bowling, a range of other leisure facilities, and some substantial office areas. The town is accessible by a range of means of transport, having a railway station and a bus terminal and a range of car parking facilities.

The seafront of Ayr is situated 500 metres from the town centre and there is an important close relationship between the town centre and the seafront, providing attractions to tourists, visitors and residents.

Regular surveys are undertaken by the Council on the 'health' of the town centre, using a range of indicators such as vacancy rates, rental changes and pedestrian flows. Monitoring information, gathered in 2002 reveals that there is a relatively, and unacceptably high level of vacancy in the town centre, at 14% of all floorspace. Other indicators also suggest that the health of the town centre has stagnated in recent years and has lost trade to other competing shopping locations such as Glasgow and Braehead. It is evident that there is currently insufficient money coming into the town centre to support the existing level of retail provision. It is intended that the policy framework of this strategy will go some way to improving the 'health' of the town.

It is important to continue to monitor the health of the town in order to assess whether policies remain appropriate and whether new measures require to be introduced. Regular monitoring will therefore be undertaken throughout the life of the strategy.

### **Vision for Ayr Town Centre**

The Strategy has been prepared with a Vision of the town centre in mind. That Vision is as follows:

"That Ayr town centre maximises its potential as a vibrant and attractive centre in which to shop, work, live and spend leisure time, by providing a shopping environment that ensures that the town centre continues to be a significant attraction in its own right, for visitors and tourists to South Ayrshire".

The following statements represent the aims of the Strategy:

- By the year 2012 the town centre will provide a balanced mix of retail, leisure, cultural, tourist, housing and office facilities.
- By the year 2012 the town centre will have a clear and coherent retail core, which will contain a critical mass of facilities that are attractive to shoppers and visitors, and which will be capable of sustaining the vitality and viability of the town centre as a whole.

The following objectives have been framed to assist in realising the above vision and its aims:

- To re-establish Ayr town centre as the premier shopping and leisure destination, outwith of Glasgow, in the West of Scotland.
- Ensure that an environment is created which will attract new investment in the town centre that will reclaim the leakage of expenditure going to other shopping centres.
- To build on the town centre's existing strengths, safeguard and promote its heritage and create a townscape of enduring strength and quality.
- Maximise the linkages between the town centre and the seafront and the close relationship of the resources and facilities provided in each area.
- Enable the town centre to perform as a vital and vibrant town centre in the evening, in a manner that is conducive with protecting residential amenity.

## **Planning Policy Framework for Ayr Town Centre**

### **Policy for Directing Investment into Ayr Town Centre**

Town centres are not only places in which to shop but they also provide the focus for cultural, social and employment activities. Moreover, they are historical centres of services, with established townscapes and infrastructure and are in locations that are accessible to all the community. Recognising all these benefits of town centres, this Strategy seeks to protect town centres from the impacts of out of centre developments, and to direct investment in retailing and associated activities to town centres in preference to any other location. This aim is embodied in a strategic policy of the Plan (policy RET1). It is this protection that is the most significant measure which can assist the vitality and viability of the town, but it is not the only policy measure that needs to be followed.

A vital and vibrant town centre is one that maximises opportunities in which to shop, spend leisure time, to work and to live in. Central to the policy framework is the recognition of the role to be played by the full range of interrelated activities and land uses in the town centre, including shops, leisure and tourist facilities, offices and houses and flats. The role of tourism to the vitality of Ayr town centre can not be underestimated. It is within this context that the following policy framework for the town centre has been prepared.

### **Policies for a Vital and Vibrant Ayr Town Centre**

The area of the town centre, within which the strategy operates, is a relatively extensive area, (1km end to end). Within this area there is much diversity in the town environment in terms of the activities to be found, the scale and type of investment interest and the roles performed by different streets and 'micro areas'. This diversity has evolved through a combination of past land use policies and commercial market pressures. It is thought that, in the most part, this existing land use pattern provides the best template to further encourage similar types of activities, encouraging 'critical mass attractions' that do not detract from the 'shopping experience' and which are convenient for shoppers to visit without walking uncomfortable distances.

However, it is also recognised that there is potential to introduce a wider range of activities

into particular areas, especially where there is evidence of stress in the local environment and where the objectives of the Town Centre Strategy are best able to be realised. Recognising these differing characteristics, and to provide a policy framework that assists in realising these aims, the town centre has been categorised into 'Core Areas' and 'Peripheral Areas' (as defined on the Strategy Map)

### **A. The Core Retail Area**

The core retail area is that area which is clearly recognisable as being the heart of the town centre. It is where most of the comparison shops can be found (e.g. shoe shops, clothes etc) within a short walk from each other and where the concentration of these shops is not reduced by competing uses. In essence, this is the areas that shoppers and traders regard as the core of shopping activity and as such, command the most prestigious properties and rental incomes. Within this areas there is a concentration of national multiple retailers such Marks and Spencers, BHS and Next. The policy for the Core Area is to encourage investment for town centre uses, including shops, restaurants/cafes, public houses, hotels, other leisure and offices. Policy RET 4 of the Local Plan provides criteria against which proposal for such uses will be assessed.

#### **Guidance for Micro Areas of the Retail Core**

Within the core area there is a mosaic of micro-areas. Reflecting existing patterns, and the desire to create areas providing 'critical- mass' attraction, and also having regard to the ability of areas to absorb different use types, three types of areas have been identified. Within each of the areas, the following guidance has been developed to assist in directing development proposals to the most appropriate areas, capable of accommodating such a use. All of the three areas referred to are detailed in the map appended to this Strategy. This guidance is not intended to be prescriptive, and there will be scope for diversity and the accommodation of other uses within each area. It is the intention of this guidance to detail the preferred development for each area and to provide a context for considering planning applications against the criteria of policy RET4.

#### **Guidance Area 1 - The High Street & Kyle Centre**

The guiding principle for this area is to retain shopping as the predominant use type, particularly in the High Street and in the Kyle Centre. However, a limited presence of uses such as restaurants, cafes and bars that could further enhance the vitality of the area, may also be acceptable.

#### **Guidance Area 2 - Kyle Street, Alloway Street, Sandgate, Burns Statue Square, Nile Court, Lorne Arcade & Smith Street**

The guiding principle for this area is to encourage the full range of the town centre uses specified previously. However, where there is evidence of a decline in the local environmental quality arising from the over concentration of similar types of uses, for instance public houses, then further proliferation will be discouraged in favour of other uses or activities.

#### **Guidance Area 3 - Newmarket Street, Hope Street & Arran Mall**

All three of these streets are pedestrianised areas, are relatively remote from residential areas and are considered to have potential for restaurant and café uses. In view of the historic townscape quality of Newmarket Street and Hope Street it is considered that these streets are particularly suitable for restaurants, cafes and public houses. A range of other town centre uses may also be acceptable.

### **B. The Retail Periphery - All Other Areas of the Town Centre**

Whilst the retail core is that area that generates highest rents, arguably the area with most character is the retail periphery. It is considered that this area functions as an integral part of the town centre but it is recognised that there is potential for a range of other complementary functions, such as residential, tourist and leisure uses. The introduction of such uses may also assist in extending the life of the centre beyond regular shop hours and encourage 'natural surveillance'. Within this area a diverse range uses will be encouraged as defined in Policy RET5.

## Development Opportunity Sites

Although the monitoring evidence mentioned above suggests that as at 2002 there is an over-provision of floorspace relative to money currently being spent in the town centre, it is nonetheless essential to the continued vitality and viability of the town centre to encourage further ongoing investment in the town centre. This includes, not only investment in existing provisions but also the encouragement of opportunities to develop new and modern forms of retailing that are capable of offering new choice to customers, and therefore recapture trade that is leaking to other town centres. It is considered that there are five such sites that offer opportunities for new large scale town centre development. Each of the sites are annotated in the Map appended to the Strategy. These sites will be promoted as development opportunities, and schedules providing details of assistance to developers will be available from the Council.

**Beresford Terrace** - A site of 1.0 hectares, at the extreme southern end of the town. The site is in the ownership of two parties that are willing to redevelop the site for town centre use. Given the scale, dimension and location of the site the opportunities for the comprehensive redevelopment of the site will be safeguarded. In particular, a large foodstore or a town centre retail warehouse park are appropriate opportunities that will be encouraged.

**Mill Street** - A site of 1.6 hectares, well located to the centre town and the Core Area. The site is in single ownership. Given the scale, dimension and location of the site the opportunities for comprehensive redevelopment of the site will be safeguarded. In particular, a large foodstore or a town centre retail warehouse park are appropriate opportunities that will be encouraged.

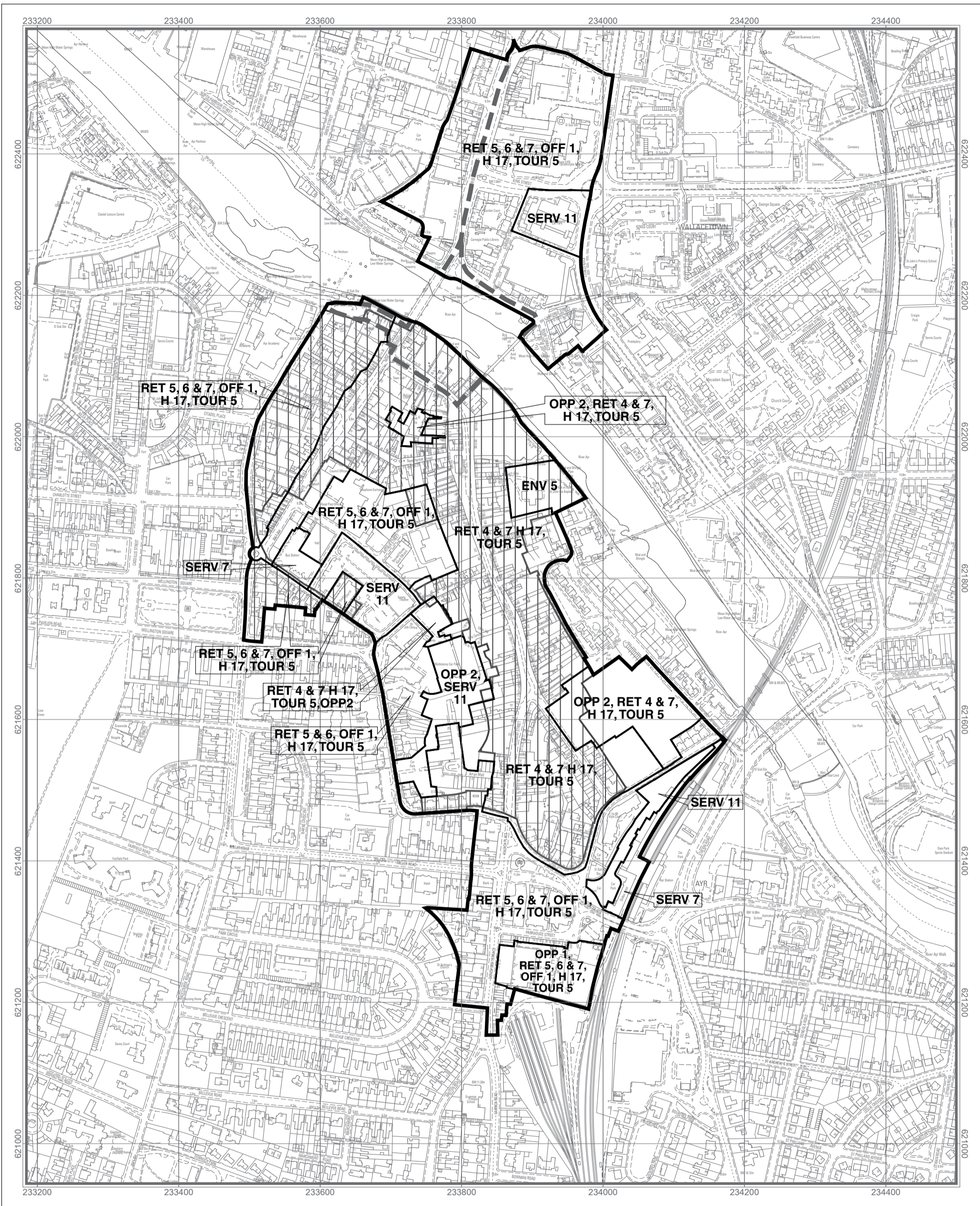
**Afflecks** - A site of 0.2 hectares, well located in the heart of the town centre, that is currently a derelict building over four floors. The building is in the ownership of the Council. The site could be developed for a mixed use development, in a traditional built form.

**Kyle Centre Extension** - Planning consent has been granted for retail floorspace of 2200m<sup>2</sup> involving the redevelopment of the existing car park and the development of the former Carrick Street Halls.

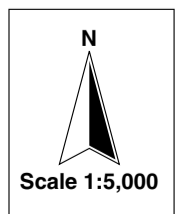
**Damside North** - A site of 0.6 hectares at the extreme northern end of the town, outwith but adjoining, the defined town centre. The site is adjacent to a twin retail warehouse development currently operated by a discount food operator and a non-food user. The site is also considered to be suitable for a retail warehouse development of one or two units.




## Environmental Improvements

Ayr town centre has a townscape of considerable quality, however there is evidence of stress at some locations, and at significant 'gateway' locations. Whilst environmental improvements will be encouraged throughout the town centre, a priority area has been identified at South Harbour Street. As well as the historical and architectural significance of the buildings in this area, and the important visual impression of the street at this key gateway location, it is also considered that this area has an important role to play in linking the recent, and ongoing, developments at the Citadel (located on the seafront), with the town centre. It is, therefore, proposed that this area be considered as a priority for environmental improvements that will enhance the visual environment and the linkage between the two areas.



**MAP 23**



-  Town Centre Boundary (Policy RET 1)
-  Ayr Central Conservation Area
-  National Cycle Route

(NOTE: Refer to Main Policy Legend for full policy list)

South Ayrshire Local Plan

**AYR TOWN CENTRE**



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## **Newton Strategy**

### **Background Information**

The Newton area of Ayr, situated on the north bank of the River Ayr across from Ayr Town Centre, had a history independent from the Burgh of Ayr until comparatively recently, developing as a small urban area centred around mining, and later industrial and port related activities. The independence from Ayr until it became part of Ayr Burgh in 1874 contributed to the requirement for a wide range of local facilities, including housing, shops and schools.

Post War development within Newton has seen a reduction in residential use and railway land, with a proportionate increase in business and industrial uses, although some new flatted dwellings have now been built along the River Ayr frontage.

Buildings within Newton range from late 19th Century and early 20th Century institutional, warehousing and small scale domestic properties, to large industrial premises. A number of properties are in need of repair or enhancement, with some vacant buildings and sites in evidence. Vacant premises are most evident along the retail and business frontages of the Main Street area.

### **Requirement for a Strategy**

Newton makes a valuable contribution to the local economy of South Ayrshire. There is a wealth of small workshop premises for new start businesses and small companies, which form an essential service as an integral part of the overall economic well-being of South Ayrshire.

Whilst the role of the area as an industrial seed bed is important, the relatively low land values and loss of housing has, in some cases, resulted in low levels of investment in building maintenance and an insufficient population base to support associated service activities and facilities. The overall environmental quality of Newton has become an additional cause of concern.

### **Purpose of the Strategy**

The purpose of this strategy is to offer supplementary guidance to the policies of the Plan for this unique area, through a flexible approach to the promotion of the area's potential and to provide detailed guidance to resolve land use conflicts. It is hoped that the successful implementation of this land use strategy will arrest physical decline and re-affirm Newton's vitality and viability.

The strategy requires to be read in conjunction with the overall policies of the local plan, and the policies and proposals map for the Newton area in particular.

### **Potential Development Constraints**

Newton has few constraints precluding development, although a range of minor, potential constraints may create localised difficulties.

#### **Transport infrastructure:**

Roads infrastructure in Newton comprises a grid of minor distribution roads, which are not suited to large numbers of heavy goods vehicle movements. The Council will seek, and respond favourably, to proposals which assist in the resolution of this issue. Parking and service arrangements create additional problems and localised congestion. Rail lines serving the Ayr port physically separate Newton from the sea shore and dominate land use to the north of the area.

#### **Environment:**

Former and current industrial processes have, in some cases, created site clearance and

contamination issues, which may make redevelopment options for certain uses (e.g. housing) uneconomic. Although there are some vacant areas of land, few offer any large scale redevelopment opportunities due to their surrounding environment or site dimensions. The overall low environmental quality of Newton and some land use conflicts may act as a disincentive for potential investment.

### **Flood Risk:**

Whilst Newton is not considered to be at specific risk from rainfall related flooding, adverse weather conditions are known to cause coastal/salt water flooding on land and premises adjacent to the coast.

### **The Strategy**

One of the most important features of Newton is its changing character which has enabled it to adapt to a wide range of different uses and activities. The strategy therefore aims to address potential constraints to development whilst pursuing the numerous opportunities available - without compromising the existing functions and vitality of the area.

### **Port Related Uses**

The proximity of Ayr Harbour has resulted in a range of inter-dependent and related activities within the locality, many being large scale land uses, including a major port company, coal movements and scrap operations. These activities should continue as an important element of the port's function, and where areas exist for further port related development or the intensification of these uses, they will be protected from intrusion of development uses unrelated to the operation of the port.

### **Industrial Uses**

Industrial uses range from large-scale land uses to a wide and varied workshop distribution, providing accommodation for a mix of skills and services, serving the wider economy. It is important to maintain and encourage the continued viability of all these activities in the locality through the protection of land and premises for industrial uses.

### **Retail Uses**

Within the above context, and due to the proximity of Newton to Ayr Town Centre, it is important to ensure that premises, and land are not lost to retail uses, other than those exclusively serving trade customers, or where premises are located along the Main Road/New Street thoroughfare. Such development, especially large scale, could detrimentally affect the established shopping pattern and vitality of Ayr Town Centre as defined on the Proposals Map. Therefore, proposals for general retail development in Newton, whilst adjacent to the Town Centre would not be supported by the Council. Small convenience/corner shop or snack shop provision may be acceptable as a service for residential areas, or for local industrial/commercial employees.

Whilst the policy position is clear with regard to general retail sales to the public, there is some sympathy with the view that a limited level of sales may be acceptable (ie only a small proportion of the business, 20% being used as a guide) where this may help to keep the main element of the business viable, and where it would not compromise the aims of the Plan and Government guidance. In order to monitor and control the level of trading with the general public, where the Council is minded to approve a planning application, the consent will be for a limited period, and thereafter reviewed on a regular basis.

### **Office Uses**

Whilst it remains important to ensure that industrial premises are not lost to other uses, the provision of office space may be appropriate, especially where associated with, or ancillary to, industrial businesses.

### **Residential Uses**

Opportunities for residential development exist to consolidate existing residential areas,

although consideration must be given to the future amenity of these areas - including the provision of open space and recreation areas. Amenity areas at present are not well landscaped, are poorly located, and few in number. Any additional residential development in Newton should be directed to locations which are adjacent to existing residential areas.

### **Vacant Sites**

Vacant sites to the west of Main Street comprise small scale, gap or infill development opportunities - including property conversion.

### **Townscape**

Although recent investment in the built form of Newton has been limited, much of the townscape is attractive, especially along Main Street. In addition, a number of fine buildings are also located within the industrial area to the west of Main Street. The strategy identifies properties which act as visual focal points, especially those which are listed, or form a coherent group with listed buildings. Whilst only the listed buildings have statutory protection, the strategy seeks to protect all the focal point buildings in order to protect the visual and historic character of Newton in recognition of its importance in the development of the Ayr/Prestwick urban area.

### **Traffic**

Traffic congestion has been identified as a problem within Newton. Of particular concern, is the potential conflict of traffic requiring access to Ayr Harbour. This traffic uses a recognised haul route along Waggon Road and Saltpans where a bridge crosses the railway tracks. The bridge suffers from poor vertical and horizontal geometry and is expensive to maintain. The Council will seek to identify a possible solution to this problem and will investigate the possibility of a level crossing at this location.

### **Passive Open Space**

Newton Foreshore offers a large area of informal recreational open space. More effective use of this area could result from environmental improvement, including landscaping, upgraded children's play area, public art and walkways/cycle routes to link the area to residential areas in the vicinity and Ayr/Prestwick as a whole.

### **Strategy Diagram**

Whilst the Local Plan policies will remain the primary consideration in terms of land use or development applications, the Council, as previously stated, will adopt a flexible approach to the promotion of Newton's potential to accommodate changing business and property requirements. For this reason, the Strategy diagram is an adjunct to the Proposals Map which offers additional guidance for proposals. The diagram does not repeat the Local Plan policies (which should be read from the Proposals Map) but suggests how the Council may view development proposals.

Important townscape features have been highlighted where their retention is desirable. The Council will give favourable consideration to proposals for the sympathetic treatment of these properties and adopt a flexible attitude to proposals for changes of their use where this would ensure investment in, and a sensitive upgrading of them as a whole.

The buildings identified are:

<b>STREET</b>	<b>NUMBER/BUILDING</b>
River Terrace	2,4#
George Street	2-14* and Free Church*
River Street	7, 17-24
Main Street	Newton Cross*, Borderline Theatre*, Carnegie Library*, Newton Tower,* Orient Cinema, Newton on Ayr New Church,