

# **AIRTH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL 2000 (Updated at 2006 and 2010)**

## **1. LOCATIONAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Airth is located on the historic route linking Grangemouth to Stirling parallel to and inland from the River Forth (A 905). It is the main urban settlement in a small area characterised by a number of important building footprints. These are

- 15<sup>th</sup> Century:           Airth Castle (major alterations/ extensions in 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the adjacent Old Parish Church (ruin) and original market cross (integrated into recent housing estate). These buildings are located above the escarpment to the south west of the village.
- 18<sup>th</sup> Century:           Dunmore Pineapple the 18<sup>th</sup> Century folly of national importance, restored and refurbished by the Landmark Trust and lying to the north west of the village
- 19<sup>th</sup> Century:           the former estates worker village of Dunmore, a mile to the north ( a conservation area designated “outstanding”) and Dunmore estate to the west including Dunmore Park, a former stately home and Dunmore Tower ( original Elphinstone or Airth castle from 14<sup>th</sup> Century, both now ruinous.

The original site of the medieval burgh of Airth was situated in the grounds of Airth Castle but, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the village moved downhill to its present site, nearer to the site of the 16<sup>th</sup> century royal dockyard, where a limited port operation continued.

The Mercat Cross was built in 1697 and is the earliest reliably dated structure of the present village. The link between the old and new settlements was finally severed when in 1820 the North Church within the village replaced the Old Parish Church. The remaining elements from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century village are located around the Mercat Cross and along Shore Road (its purpose and direction implicit).

The Mercat Cross is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Category A Listed Building. Other listed buildings from the historic village are:

- Mercat Cross/ High Street:   View Villa (cat. B), Elphinstone Inn (cat.C)  
Shore Road:               Nos. 16&18 (cat. B), Rothesay Villa (cat.C), the Captains House (cat. B).

## **2. CONSERVATION AREA 1974**

The Town and Country Planning Act 1972 required planning authorities to designate areas of special architectural and historic interest as Conservation Areas. This designation would mean that planning permission, not normally required, would be necessary for the demolition or the unsympathetic alteration of any building within the area.

In the case of Airth, the building conservation appraisal of the time acknowledged the attractive character of the village, which, despite “...insensitive demolition ...” continued to “... give a tantalising impression of what the decayed sea port was like in its heyday...”. The new conservation area controls would help to protect this character as well as ensuring that “...any new development would be “...carefully designed to bring back the architectural unity of the village”. They would supplement the powers already available in relation to individual listed buildings defining the 18<sup>th</sup> Century village core.

In 1974 a Conservation Area was designated by Stirling County Council consisting of the Mercat Cross and Shore Road/ Crawford Square extending to the Wilderness. As a supplement to this an Article 4 Direction was approved by the Secretary of State to give more detailed protection relating to

- (i) development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse
- (ii) sundry minor items ( e.g. fence heights)
- (iii) development by local authorities

### **3. CONSERVATION AREA 1984**

Along the edges of the historic core of Airth village are small groups of terrace houses built by the local authority in the late 1950's and designed specifically to reinforce and harmonise with the architectural character of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century buildings. Traditional features include steeply pitched and pantiled roofs and vertically proportioned openings with sash and case timber windows, sub-divided into smaller panes by glazing bars or "astragals".

Following the passing of legislation in the early 1980s which allowed council tenants to purchase their houses it became apparent that some new owners were beginning to carry out external alterations, unsympathetic to the character of the original houses and adversely affecting the visual setting of the older Conservation Area, most notably in the Paul Drive cul-de-sac. An example of such an alteration was the replacement of the original timber sash and case windows in these properties with aluminium top hopper types.

In 1984 Falkirk District Council agreed to extend and re-designate the boundary of the Conservation Area to include these newer houses in Paul Drive, Millar Place, Main Street and High Street. It is worth noting that Crawford Square, consisting entirely of 1950's houses, was already part of the original 1974 Conservation Area. An Article 4 Direction, addressing the same development classes as before, was approved by the Secretary of State to cover the extended area.

In 1992 Falkirk District Council approved the "Design Guidelines for Airth Conservation Area". The purpose of this guide was explained as follows:

"All the key heritage bodies are agreed about the unique character of the older parts of Airth and also the importance of the later council housing groups in reinforcing the Conservation Area. Furthermore such heritage areas are being increasingly sought after as places to live and so are coming to have an economic as well as an architectural and historic value. It is therefore hoped that the residents of the Conservation Area will themselves wish to have their local environment protected from the destructive effects of the indiscriminate and unsympathetic external alterations, most particularly to doors and windows. The design advice given in this guide has therefore been prepared to help achieve this aim."

#### **4. CONSERVATION AREA 2000**

The continuing evidence of unauthorised and unsympathetic external alterations taking place led to an agreement by Falkirk Council in 1998 to carry out a review of Airth Conservation Area. In the first place this involved consultation with residents of the area by way of a Community Questionnaire sent to all households followed by a Community Workshop to discuss the issue and the findings from the individual responses.

The questionnaire sought to establish the following:

- 1 The extent of local knowledge of the Conservation Area as designated.
- 2 The extent of local approval of the Conservation Area in whole or part.
- 3 Views on the enhancement requirements of the Conservation Area.

In brief a majority recognised the special character of the village's historic buildings and core streets and spaces. Less favoured was the inclusion of the adjoining 1950's council houses with particular concern being expressed by some of the 15 householders from the Paul Drive cul-de-sac where the first unsympathetic window and door replacements triggered the 1984 extension.

Notwithstanding the concerns expressed by certain respondees to the questionnaire the conclusion was made that the Conservation Area, as existing, should be retained because:

- (i) The core area remained undisputedly special for both architectural and historic reasons and stricter controls on the adjacent street spaces would better protect the listed buildings.
- (ii) The Wilderness retains a picturesque character which continues to merit stricter planning controls.
- (iii) The 1950's council houses were deliberately designed to reflect the character of the older buildings and this function and the associated aspiration should be respected.

The report setting out the conclusions of the Airth Conservation Area Review was agreed at the Falkirk Council committee of 5th December 2000 with proposals to:

- retain Airth Conservation Area with a modest extension to the west to include the North Church and Rosebank Cottage and their relevant curtilages, both already protected by category B listings.
- consider an Enhancement Plan for the Conservation Area
- amend the 1992 design guidelines in terms of window and door replacements in unlisted buildings and reduced controls in concealed rear areas and within the Paul Drive cul-de-sac.

## **5. CONSERVATION AREA 2006**

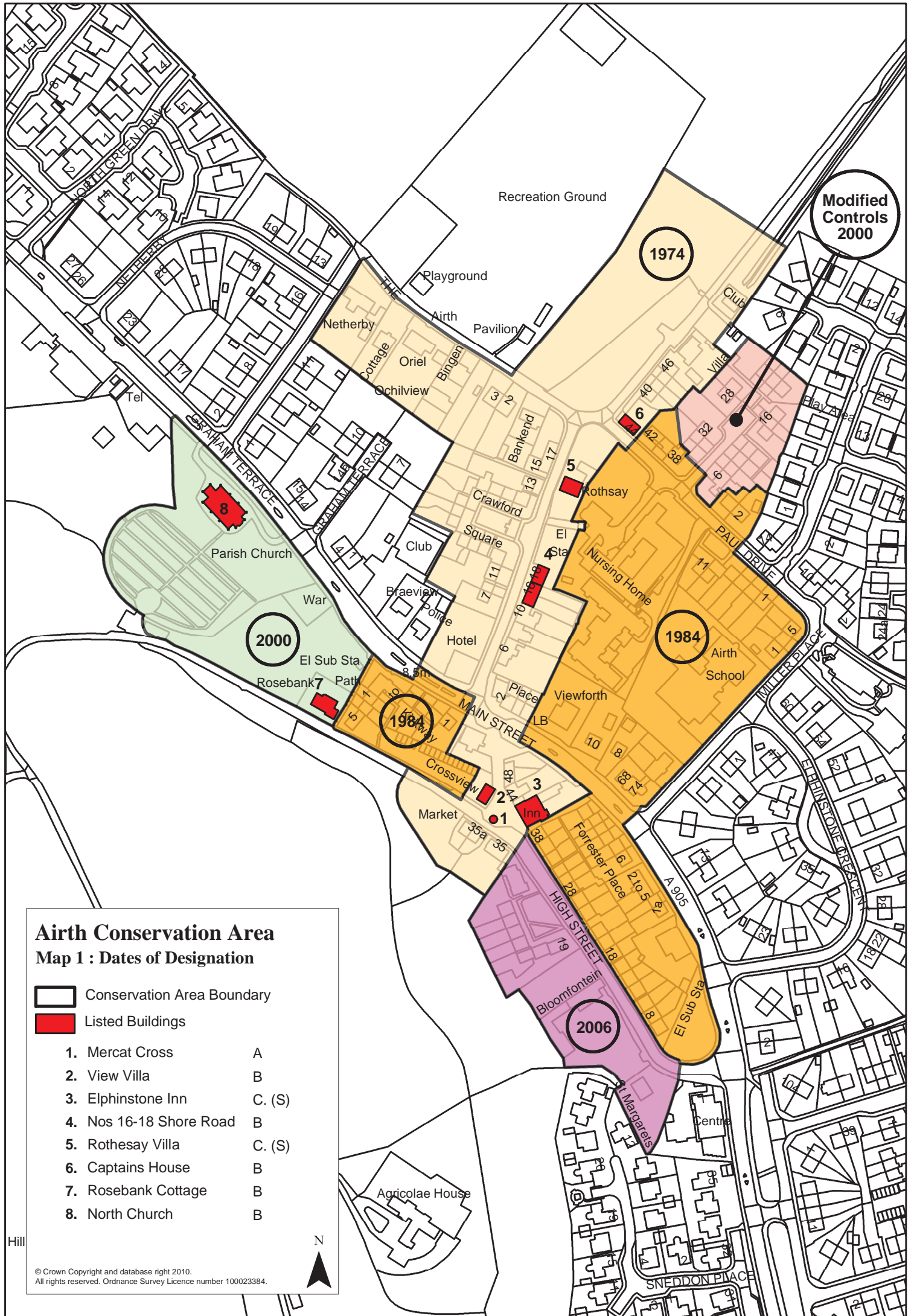
In December 2004 a proposal was considered to add the remaining western side of High Street extending south towards the boundary with the community centre. This further extension would serve to reinforce the protection of the approach to and context of the Mercat Cross, the most important structure within the village.

In accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 a letter was sent to all 10 properties in the area proposed for addition to the Conservation Area. Responses were more concerned with information seeking than raising objection and the minor extension along the south western edge of the Conservation Area on High Street (Bloemfontein House, Taisme Cottage and nos. 19-31) was therefore reported to and approved by Falkirk Council on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Proposals to notify Historic Scotland and to seek the approval of Scottish Ministers with regards to an Article 4 Direction for the new Conservation Area boundary were also endorsed.



The most recently designated boundary was advertised in the Falkirk Herald and Edinburgh Gazette the week commencing 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007. The history of the designation and extension of the Conservation Area itself is shown on the accompanying Map.

## **6. MERCAT CROSS PROJECT 2010**

In response to the 2000 proposal to consider an enhancement plan, a project was finally completed in May 2010 to restore the Mercat Cross area, including the pedestrianisation of High Street and other public realm improvements.



### Airth Conservation Area Map 1 : Dates of Designation

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings

- |                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1. Mercat Cross         | A      |
| 2. View Villa           | B      |
| 3. Elphinstone Inn      | C. (S) |
| 4. Nos 16-18 Shore Road | B      |
| 5. Rothesay Villa       | C. (S) |
| 6. Captains House       | B      |
| 7. Rosebank Cottage     | B      |
| 8. North Church         | B      |

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