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Magistrates and Council of the City of Edinburgh.**

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REPORT

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE

LORD PROVOST, MAGISTRATES,

AND

COUNCIL

OF THE

CITY OF EDINBURGH,

THE

GOVERNORS OF HERIOT'S HOSPITAL,
&c. &c.

ON A

PLAN .

FOR LAYING OUT THE NEW TOWN BETWEEN
EDINBURGH AND LEITH.

Submitted to them on 12th April 1819.

By W. H. PLAYFAIR, Esq. ARCHITECT.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by Alex. Smellie.

1819.

REPORT, &c.

On the 8th. of May 1818, I had the honour to report to the Right Honourable the Committee, respecting the level to be observed in the formation of the Hillside Road, and also concerning several particulars, which were generally applicable to the plan I was then about to commence. Since that period I have bestowed upon this difficult subject a very great share of my attention, carefully viewing it in all its aspects, and preparing the drawing, which I now have the honour to bring forward for inspection.

The lower corner of Baxter's Buildings may be considered as the point of union between the present New Town and that proposed to be built. Beginning, therefore, at that point, and looking along the Hillside Road, it will be observed that, on the northern side, is a large crescent, with three main streets spreading out into the town, and opening up a variety of views into the interior. The southern side of the same road being partly left

unbuilt, excellent situations are obtained for the public buildings shewn in the plan; one being opposite, and forming an appropriate termination to each of the principal streets just mentioned. The shoulder of the Calton Hill, at the bottom of which these public buildings stand, being judiciously planted, will form a rich and variegated back ground, and will afford that happy union of foliage and of building, which all admire, but of which we here, unfortunately, possess so few examples.

Above these public buildings, and rising from among the trees, is a handsome row or terrace, sufficiently elevated to give a prospect over the tops of the houses immediately below, and enjoying an extensive view of the more distant country. Easy, and by no means circuitous approaches, can be obtained, as shewn in the drawing. Going on towards the east, the terrace sweeps round with an easy curve into a long line of building proposed to be built by the side of the Regent Road. The large tract of ground lying behind these buildings I would convert into gardens, which, when properly arranged and planted, will become an agreeable and inviting retirement; and, at the same time, present a pleasing foreground to the enchanting landscape which is to be seen from the public walks above. This, then, is all the building I would venture to place upon the Calton Hill, and which, by being kept quite subordinate, will, I trust, throw an additional charm over the surrounding scenery.

Leaving this part of the plan, and returning to Baxter's Buildings, Leith-Walk comes next to be considered. This magnificent approach, from the great and judicious pains that have already been bestowed upon it, and from its being the great line of communication between the two cities, deserves to be well studied, and holds out great opportunities for a variety of beautiful effects.

Going down the Walk, we first come to that part of Mr Allan's property, which is so much adorned by a double row of elms. These I would most carefully preserve, railing them in, and setting back the buildings so far as to allow sufficient space for a road. Somewhat farther down is a place or square, one side of which is occupied by a public building, from whose ends branch out two streets, one of them terminating with a view of the Calton Hill. In the centre of this square might be placed with great propriety an obelisk or column, in memory of some remarkable person or event. Still farther on, about half way down the Walk, is a large crescent, the management of which I consider of as much importance as the arrangement of the buildings on the Calton Hill. I propose that this crescent should be of great size, and that four public buildings should be placed in its circumference. These, grouping together, will form a striking foreground to the three large streets leading off in various directions. One of these terminates upon a public building and the Calton Hill; the other two lead

into squares. The good effect of this divergency of several streets from a central point has been long felt and acknowledged, particularly in the Piazza del Popolo at Rome. In the centre of the crescent, might be placed the proposed national monument intended to commemorate the victory at Waterloo. A building of this description and magnitude if skilfully designed, would give to Leith and the adjoining town a magnificence that nothing else could impart; and, at the same time, would itself be seen to the utmost advantage, standing as it would do, in an open airy space, by the side of a great and well frequented thoroughfare, and seen from a distance in every direction. Should this arrangement not take place, an obelisk, column, or some ornamental building of great dimensions should be placed there. Other buildings occupy the remaining part of the Walk, with a variety of cross streets placed at convenient distances.

I would next propose that the Eastern Road, which is another great line of communication between Edinburgh and Leith, should be considerably widened, and that four rows of trees should be planted along its whole length, having a paved road in the centre, and a metalled road on each side. In this way, would be procured a picturesque and agreeable ride, or carriage drive, a luxury hitherto unknown to the inhabitants of Edinburgh.

It will be seen, upon looking at the drawing, that the remaining parts of the town are laid out in a simple manner, as suggested by the nature of the ground, and according to the great leading points which have just been described. A large market-place is provided, having an easy and direct communication with all parts.

In making out the plan which I have now generally gone over, I have been influenced by a variety of circumstances. In all cases, I have paid the strictest attention to the nature of the ground, and none whatever to the neatness of the plan, as it appears on paper. It is quite evident that a uniform arrangement of streets and squares, which would be particularly pleasing to the eye in a drawing, might, in execution, be attended with the worst effect, and the greatest irregularity. From inattention to the levels, broken cornices, steep streets, and every species of disagreeable, would be produced, while a tame monotony will be sure to result from a complete uniformity of plan; a fact but too well exemplified in many parts of the New Town of Edinburgh. I have also, wherever it was possible, introduced large public gardens, trusting that, by judicious and careful planting, an assemblage of trees and buildings may be obtained, without which, architecture is deprived of half its beauty. This principle I have carried to a great extent on the Calton Hill, both before and behind the Hillside terrace. I am aware

that, in leaving one side of the Hillside road partly unbuilt, I have departed from all the plans which have been hitherto laid down, and from many of the opinions entertained on this subject; but, in doing this, I trust that I have been actuated by a due respect for the beauty of the Calton Hill, and of the plan in general, and by a proper regard for the interests of the proprietors.

A person standing on the terrace in question, instead of looking at the bare and ugly back of the street below, will now see the whole town lying at his feet, with a noble crescent and extensive gardens immediately below him. This arrangement will not only add to the beauty of the scene, but will, I am sure, render all the adjoining houses much more valuable, beauty of situation being now so much and justly prized in Edinburgh. Who would not regret, if the gardens below Queen Street were to be swept away, and their place occupied by an insipid and monotonous pile of buildings?

On the other hand, the steep acclivity of the ground at the back of the terrace precludes all possibility of building in that quarter with any prospect of success. And, indeed, were this not the case, the necessity of preserving the beautiful view, seen from the walks so lately made, would, I trust, shut out every idea of erecting houses on this part of the Hill. This, however, is a point that remains to

be determined by the Governors of Heriot's Hospital, to whom this property belongs.

To sum up all, I would presume to hope, that, after due consideration, it will be found;—That I have attended to the beauty of the proposed town, without interfering with its more important interests, by preserving unhurt the views of the Calton Hill—by the introduction of public gardens—and by the grouping together of trees, and of buildings;—That I have, as much as possible, adapted the several parts to the nature of the ground;—And, finally, that I have, in no instance, wantonly sacrificed to picturesque effect the interests of the several proprietors.

W. H. PLAYFAIR.