

# NEW LEIGH CREEK TOWNSHIP

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## Site Selection Process

ETSA Management appointed a Committee in 1976 from Leigh Creek personnel to help select an appropriate site for the new township. The Site Selection Advisory Committee was formed, of which I was a member. This was later expanded to form the Town Advisory Committee. The Committee worked with the Monarto Development Commission which was engaged as the town planning consultant. The old town of Leigh Creek was too small for the expansion of the coalfield workforce, also inappropriately sited for the mining process required to meet the demands of the new power station at Port Augusta, as most of the town site would form part of the mine expansion. A total of 18 possible new town sites were listed and examined, and three were considered in detail. (1) Tobacco Bush Creek (upstream from the Railway line at Telford Station) and which was part of the Leigh Creek Station property, (2) at Aroona Dam, along the entry road from the main Highway and following the hills with the proposed town site flowing towards the South and into Beltana Station property, and (3) Windy Creek, the site eventually chosen which offered excellent views, a sense of natural enclosure, a rocky ridge for the Town Centre and the tree lined creek to the South known as Morgan's Creek. The Aroona Dam site offered some amazing views and opportunities, but it was revealed that a body of ore in the hills abutting the Dam and adjacent to the proposed site, was being considered for development by the Electrolytic Zinc mining company, which would have impacted on the new town very heavily, so that site was rejected. It also posed some access issues with both Windy Creek and Emu Creek crossing the only access road to the Coalfield. Many deliberations were considered for each site, including proximity to the mining sites, views for inhabitants, water and electricity supply arrangements, soil types and structure, airport placement and accessibility, appropriate size for any expansion, etc.

## Housing Types and Town Design

The Committee also had a say in the selection of housing designs & sizes, the placement of shops and amenities in relation to the housing, the social structure and sporting facilities to enable all residents easy access to everything. The Monarto Development Commission had just designed the new town of Monarto, but of course that never eventuated, but many of their design features and town management components were incorporated in the Leigh Creek South structure.

All the residents of the old town were invited to select the new home of their choice to suit their family size, and also the site of the particular house design allocated. The house types and designs, and their site location in the new town, were displayed in the old Community Hall for all residents to choose from. It was quite an experience, knowing where the blocks were, and choosing the type of home to suit your family needs, and the best location for all concerned.

One of the most important and successful features in the new town, was the placement of each individual house with the length of the building in the East / West orientation, which helped keep the room temperatures down during the hot summers. Another important idea was the placement of the Town Centre on the rocky ridge overlooking all the town streets and housing, with the recreational, sporting, commercial, medical, administration, education, church, canteen and other facilities within easy access for the entire town. The idea was to enable and encourage all residents to utilise walking access to the shops and amenities, and so limiting the need to use vehicles. One unique feature was the placing of footpaths on one side only of the main streets, with the cul-de-sacs having no footpaths, emphasising that they were an extension of the individual driveways. All possible walkway access from each section of the town was incorporated and utilised, and this certainly made it easy to move about on foot.

The streets with their rock mulch arrangements and native tree plantings were another Monarto design feature from which we benefitted. I had a lot of involvement in the street and perimeter buffer zone planting design and selection process along with the Horticulturists of the day, and was so pleased to see the end results years after. Approximately 300-400 native species were assessed as most suitable for the new town environment, with about 100,000 plants per year being produced from seeds and cuttings by the hard-working staff at the ETSA Nursery. Many of the plants selected were native to Western Australia where the climate and rainfall was similar to Leigh Creek. All plants were available to residents from the "self-serve" area at the Nursery, and advice given regarding the most suitable plantings for their situation. The Nursery also produced and provided plants to the new town of Roxby Downs, Mintabie, Hawker and others that required specialist trees. Our Horticulturist and Gardeners also gave on site assistance with design and planting issues at Roxby Downs and Mintabie. The new town street names came from the tree species selected for the town and perimeter plantings, and samples of those were eventually included in the street landscapes.

Water usage was an important issue, and with the new town expanding in size, usage would at least double from the old town consumption. House lawn sizes were limited to help prevent over-use and wastage. The use of rock mulch in the street landscapes was something new to us, but certainly assisted with water conservation, and many residents were encouraged to also use the mulch in their home gardens. The buffer zones around the town were also planted with native species, and watered with recycled sewage water, as were the town ovals. These plantings really helped blend the town structure into the landscape, and the re-use of treated effluent water certainly reduced the demand on Aroona Dam. The water supply issues for the new town were strengthened with the construction of the Reverse Osmosis Plant and the usage of underground water, which also provided a guarantee of continuing water in times of drought and depleted Aroona Dam supply.

## Construction of the Town

Civil works commenced in April 1979, with housing construction beginning in the following November, and the first house completed and occupied in July 1980. The town was divided into 4 stages of development, with the final Stage 4 completed in June 1983. Homes were designed and built by Blunts Homes, and Wender & Duerholt. Many were built on site, and others were transportable and relocated to the town sites. The Town Centre architects were Hassell & Partners. Fricker Brothers were the construction managers. Civil and road works were designed by Hosking, Oborn & Partners, and McMahon Constructions carried out the major civil works. As the development of the site commenced, it was astounding to see all the dozers, graders, trucks and other equipment on the move all over the area, and with the road construction underway, you could envisage the final layout of the town. The works also included the drainage system, sewerage system, electricity supply, water supply system, and communications, and an amazing amount of soil and rocks were excavated across the site. The surveyors were also busy making sure the right arrangements and site measurements were accurate. Many sub-contractors were employed on the site, and at the height of activities there were over 400 men working in the township and at the airport. They were housed and fed at a special contractor's camp set up just North of Copley, across the Leigh's Creek.

The old town had a total of 220 houses and 150 Single Men's Quarters, and the new town was expanding to 504 houses, 62 Flats and 192 Single Person's accommodation units. Quite an increase of population.

## Population transfer from Old Leigh Creek

As the new town construction progressed, people were being re-located as their homes were finished, and the appropriate infrastructures were in place. However, some of the population had to travel daily from town to town to access things such as education, health assistance, work involvements, and all sorts of other things that were in the process of being transferred. A quite complicated time for some, and stressful for others, but the future looked bright and the prospect of the new town being there for all to enjoy was evident. The population and workforce numbers increased with the coalfield expansion, and a few temporary accommodation arrangements were in place, with many caravans in use in the old town until the new homes were completed at Leigh Creek South.

The new town saw the single person's accommodation upgraded so that they were more appropriate and provided a better personal environment for the occupants, and a better sense of individuality.

As the town filled with people, and all the activities expanded, the School and Pre-School functions were very obvious to all, as they were sited at the entrance to the town and the shopping facilities. The staff did an amazing job with all the kids, and their facilities and achievements were much appreciated by all, and with the expansion of the schooling to include Year 12, the education system couldn't have been better. The School was surrounded by all the needed sporting facilities and recreational opportunities. The shopping arrangements in the Town Centre were also developing as the population grew, and you certainly didn't need to go anywhere else for any shopping needs, or other services for day-to-day living. It was all there and easily accessible, including Banks, butcher, hairdressing, Post Office, book shop, two main stores, canteen, fuel outlet, public toilets, etc. The new Church provided for all denominations, and was well utilised, and with being in such a prominent site in the Town Centre, you could see the structure from most of the town. The new Hospital and Doctor's facilities and Ambulance provision, were an amazing up-date from the old town arrangements, and provided a new centralised health system, not only for the town residents and nearby communities, but also for the remote communities and pastoralists who required urgent services. The new airport also provided easy access for flights of RFDS aircraft and their patients, into and out of the town, and the other aircraft flights to and from all parts of Australia certainly appreciated the new and upgraded facilities. The National Parks and Wildlife Service Far North Office was also located in the Town Centre.

The town also provided a new experience for tourists to the area, and the placement of one of the fuel outlets at the town entrance was a great bonus, and guided tours of the Coalfield were introduced as part of the tourism structure. The Caravan Park which later occupied the old Highways Department Depot site on Acacia Road, also gave added tourist benefits to the town and community. The whole of the Town Centre traders benefited from tourism and their input into the area.

I was originally stationed at the new Building & Services Office and Workshop area and, along with many others, was involved totally in the whole arrangements for constructing and managing all the needs of the new town and the growing population. Amazingly, the "new" computer system for the town offices and ETSA at Leigh Creek was installed in the Building and Services office area. This took up a whole room and was intriguing in design and features at the time, and compared to nowadays, a single desk computer or laptop would provide the same services.

I later transferred to the Town Centre Administration Office, and finalised my time with ETSA in 1997 as Town Manager, having worked at both towns for a total of 34 years (17 in the old town and 17 in the new town). An amazing experience for both myself and my wife, who also enjoyed her work achievements with the Area School, the Community Welfare group, and finally as the Co-Ordinator for the Copley Aboriginal Community.

One of my tasks in the Building and Services Branch was as Curator of the Cemetery, starting in the old town in the early 1970s, and this role continued into the new town arrangements. I was extremely pleased to be involved in the site selection for the new Cemetery, and the design of the grave placements etc.

The people of Leigh Creek South helped to make the town a beautiful place to be living in. The social activities increased with the growing population, and there was always enough going on for everyone. The local parks were a drawcard for the kids and their parents, and the ovals and playground provided a fantastic range of opportunities for all. The sporting groups flourished with the additional indoor sporting facilities, the new golf course and pistol club arrangements, the dirt-bike track etc.

One annual feature of the new town was the Christmas Pageant, where all the participants took to the circular road (Blackoak Drive) which took them right around the Town Centre, and displayed all their interests and activities, with fancy dress and colourful floats, and an amazing number of kids and parents showing off their particular skills and vehicles, including the Fire Service truck, the Police vehicle, the Ambulance, especially decorated trucks and trailers, motorbikes, etc., and of course Father Christmas!

The RSL old gun that stood outside their Hall in the old town was also smartened-up and relocated to a new designated park in Leigh Creek South. I suggested that the old boiler from the first underground mining efforts in the late 1880s which was still in place at Telford on the edge of the old town, should also be saved from destruction as it was part of our history. I took many photographs of the boiler and the stone-works surrounding it, and these were utilized by the persons who re-constructed the stones when the boiler was relocated into the park in the new town. The works were largely all done by volunteers, and much appreciated.

The new town also saw the start of the KESAB programme introduced by the Government, and designed to assist with the removal of roadside rubbish throughout the State. Leigh Creekers certainly got involved and removed tons of rubbish that had been deposited over the years along the main Highway, and it was great to see the school-kids involved in the clean-up. The State Government's introduction of refunds of monies paid for drink bottles and cans also assisted in the removal of roadside rubbish, and a new depot for accepting refundable containers was opened adjacent to the Reverse Osmosis Plant.

On the whole, the new town of Leigh Creek South was a great place to work and live, and certainly added to the area's tourism attractions and access to all that any-one could need in the outback of South Australia.