Map of Sub Area 28B, the southern section of The Downs

Buildings  East side, even numbers, north to south (there is no No. 18)
Of the thirty or so properties in the Sub Area, three are locally listed, four would positively enhance the area if the Sub Area were included in the Conservation Area, seven would have a negative impact, and the effect of the remainder would be neutral.

**Nos. 14 and 14a, St Anne’s Convent:** A group of buildings erected from the 1950s onwards centred around a late nineteenth century two storey villa of grey brick with red brick string courses. The villa has an ornate roof line with projecting dormers and ornamental chimneys, and the canted bays and tall arched windows give it a strong vertical emphasis, so that it makes a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. However, the later two storey flat roofed box-like additions detract significantly from the villa’s setting.

**No. 16, Ursuline Convent Preparatory School:** Another late nineteenth century villa surrounded by later buildings, of similar character and materials to No. 14. To the rear of the villa is a two storey outhouse of similar date and several modern single storey utilitarian structures, and between the villa and the road several more single storey timber structures housing teaching accommodation. To the north of the villa is a more permanent two and three storey building in red brick. Although No. 16 also makes a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, the contribution of the various buildings surrounding it varies from neutral to negative. However, their impact on the setting of the villa is softened by the extensive, heavily landscaped, grounds to the Convent.

**The front of No. 20, Downs Court, and the rear, showing The Cottage**

**No. 20: Downs Court:** A block of four storey flats in red brick with canted bays, a rusticated stonework central entrance and pseudo mansard roofs to the end sections, which was built in 1934 and echoes the design of the flats which make up Wimbledon Close, at the north end of the Downs. It contains 12 flats and the rear part of the block is in white render and includes a two-storey block with a pseudo mansard named The Cottage. Downs Court has been excluded from the Conservation Area because its unsuitable scale and character.

**No. 22: Ravenscar Lodge:** Another four storey block of 16 flats in stock brick built in 1961 with a pseudo mansard, which would also have a negative impact if included in the Conservation Area.

**No. 22 The Downs from the rear, and No. 24 from the front**
No. 24: A two storey late nineteenth century house in stock brick with red brick string courses and a glazed entrance porch which makes a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

Nos. 26 and 28, Rydal Court and Savona Court: Two more blocks of four storey flats with shared entrance and rear garages. Rydal Court was built in 1961 and consists of eight flats. Although the front elevation consists merely of strips of glazing and white coloured panels framed by stock brick side walls, with a central entrance and recessed top storey, it shows how a simple straightforward design can be enhanced by its carefully balanced proportions. Savona Court, which was built in 1963 and has eleven flats, is a variation on No. 26 with a partly stock brick façade projecting balconies faced with white horizontal boarding. Its balanced proportions, subtle articulation and crisp detailing combine to form a high quality piece of modern architecture. They are of greater architectural distinction than most of the other post-war buildings in The Downs and, despite their obviously greater scale than the historic buildings in the Conservation Area, their impact is sufficiently offset by their architectural quality for their overall effect to be neutral. They have therefore been included.

Above: Nos. 26, Rydal Court, and 28, Savona Court.
Below: No. 30, Wrenshaw Place, and No. 32, Swinburn Court.

No. 30, Wrenshaw Place: A block of eight flats in stock brick built in 1994, the front garden of which is gravelled to provide eight parking spaces. It is in a pseudo traditional style, with a wavy barge board to the left hand three storey gable which is fronted by a two storey canted bay in rusticated render topped by ornamental balusters; the two storey right wing has a single storey bay topped by a pair of dormers with wavy barge-boards; and the central entrance porch is also in rusticated render topped by an ornamental balustrade. Security is provided by ornamental railings and gates in black and gold. Its pastiche design would tend to detract from the more genuine character of the other buildings included in the Conservation Area, and it has therefore been excluded.

No. 32, Swinburn Court: A two storey block of six flats built in 1960 fronting on to Worple Road, in red brick and white render, with garaging for six cars, whose utilitarian character would have tend to have a negative impact if included in the Conservation Area.

West side, odd numbers, north to south (there is no No. 33)
Nos. 29: A mid twentieth century two storey cottage in red brick and grey tile hanging, located at the rear of No. 31, which has a neutral effect on the character of the Conservation Area.

Nos. 31, 35, 37, 39 and 41: Four two storey detached residences dating from the first half to the middle of the twentieth century set in generous well landscaped gardens. No. 31 is in white render; the first floor of No. 35 is a cottage with tiled mansard and projecting dormers to the first floor; No. 37 is a double fronted house in red brick and white render; No. 39 is post-war in brick with fake timber framing to a dominant gable over the garage; and No. 41 is also of more recent construction in white render with ornamental arches over the ground floor bay windows and recessed porch, pitched dormers and fake louvers to the first floor windows. The first four houses make a neutral contribution to the character of the Conservation Area and No. 1 makes a positive contribution.

No. 41a: A two storey late twentieth century two storey cottage built at the rear of No. 43 which has a neutral impact on the Conservation Area.

Above and top right: No. 15, Claremont Lodge, showing the north-east corner of the original Villa, and the south end of the southern wing, with the new extension to the Ursuline Convent School in Crescent Road beyond.

Above right: No. 43, at the entrance to the picturesque lane leading to The Crescent.

No. 43: A picturesque two storey cottage with single storey extensions in white render which makes a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

(Entrance to a lane leading to the Ursuline High School and the Crescent, in Sub Area 30B.)

No. 15, Claremont Lodge: A substantial late nineteenth or early twentieth century villa used as a convent which the VicSoc report described as being in a romantic Italianate style with remarkable chimneys. In 1997 it was converted to five flats and considerably extended to the north and south to provide a total of 25 flats and basement car parking. The original two and three storey building is locally listed and has tremendous character, with facades of its red brick broken by stone string courses which pick up the semi-circular arches over the double
and triple windows the bases of ornamental projecting and recessed balconies. The riot of ornament is topped by deeply overhung roofs supported on ornate brackets below tall ornamental chimneys.

The extensions are sympathetically designed in similar brickwork and string courses, other features being echoed in the detailing of the window heads and ironwork to the projecting balconies, so that the whole ensemble does not detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

(Entrance to Ursuline High School, which is located in Sub Area 30B).

No. 17, Hall School: A locally listed group of educational buildings the central section of which was built in 1879. It is the former premises of Rokeby School, and between 1967 and 1986 it was used as an adult education centre, during which time it was described by Pevsner as large and eclectic, with some Gothic detail and a polygonal turret over the entrance. The VicSoc report was particularly enthusiastic:

The Downs Adult Education and Teachers’ Centre at 17 is in a ripe Gothic style. Presumably it began life as a large private villa. It remains a most pleasing piece of Victoriana (with tactful later additions) – every trick, turret and pinnacle in the trade, but adding up to a harmonious and self-assured building.

The present Hall School now has three storey extensions to the north and south in similar coloured red brickwork and stone string courses, so that their rather bland design does not seriously diminish the setting of the central block. The planted forecourt is mainly used as a play area.

Hall School, 17 The Downs and Lantern Court, 99 Worple Road

No. 99 Worple Road, Lantern Court: Although Lantern Court fronts on to Worple Road, two of its three blocks face on to The Downs and therefore make an impact on its southern end. These recently constructed blocks of flats are highly articulated and imaginatively designed in dark red brick with a variety of stepped, oriel and tall rounded-headed windows. Although they are of significantly greater scale than most of the properties in the West Wimbledon Conservation Area, they do not conflict with the scale of Hall School, and are of sufficient architectural quality to merit inclusion.

Inclusion or Exclusion

Most of the spaces in the Sub Area are either attractively landscaped or heavily wooded, so that its suitability for inclusion in the Conservation Area depended on the architectural and historic interest of the buildings. Their quality varies considerably, with the western part retaining something of its historic character, while a majority of the properties on the opposite side have been replaced by modern blocks of flats.

The western side contains two locally listed buildings, two other buildings that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, and the rest have a neutral impact, including the three blocks which make up Lantern Court, on Worple Road. Therefore, on balance, the western
side merits inclusion to protect the existing buildings and prevent their replacement with more four storey blocks of flats.

By contrast, the eastern section contains one locally listed building, the Ursuline Convent Preparatory School, two – Nos. 14 and 24 - that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, five that have a neutral effect (including Rydal Court and Savona Court), and another seven or so which detract from the Conservation Area’s character. Identifying those parts of the west side of The Downs worthy of inclusion required fine judgement, and differences of opinion were expressed by local organisation:

- Although St Anne’s Convent (No. 14) is well worth including, the adjoining modern buildings to the east and west compromise its setting. Overall, its inclusion is marginally justified because of its setting.
- The setting of the Ursuline Convent (No. 16), on the other hand, is so dominated by mature woodland that the impact of the undistinguished modern buildings within its grounds is considerably reduced, and it merits inclusion to protect both the locally listed building and its woodland character.
- Downs Court and Ravenscar Lodge (Nos. 20 and 22) are typical of the bland modern buildings which have been excluded elsewhere, and their inclusion cannot be justified.
- No. 24 is the type of nineteenth century villa which should obviously be included.
- Although Rydal Court and Savona Court (Nos. 26 and 28) are similar in scale to Nos. 20 and 22 they are of considerably greater architectural quality and such straightforward examples of well proportioned and detailed architecture should be encouraged. Although buildings of this scale would not normally be appropriate within the Conservation Area their architectural quality justifies their inclusion.
- Wrenshaw Place (No. 30) is an example of the type of pseudo-traditional pastiche which is tending to erode the genuine historic character of the Conservation Area and should therefore be excluded.
- The inclusion of Swinburn Court (No. 32) cannot be justified because of its lack of historic interest or architectural distinction.

The boundary line resulting from these decisions is therefore be as follows: starting at the northern boundary of the Sub Area, Nos. 14, 14a, 16 and the Ursuline Convent are included; Downs Court (No. 20) and Ravenscar Lodge are excluded; No. 24, Rydal Court and Savona Court are included; and Wrenshaw Place (No. 30) and Swinburn Court (No. 32) are excluded. This arrangement, although something of a zigzag, is logical and avoids any “holes” or “islands” in the Conservation Area, since the areas included would link across to the Conservation Area extension on the western side of The Downs, and those excluded would connect with Sub Areas 26B and 26C, outside the Conservation Area.

Positive and Negative Features

The rural character of The Downs – its landscaping and wealth of mature trees – is similar to other roads in this part of Wimbledon, and on superficial inspection the reasons for the original exclusion of the southern part from the Conservation Area are not obvious, particularly in summer when the trees obscure many of the buildings. However, the replacement of a large proportion of its original villas by four storey flats has been sufficient to justify the exclusion of the northern half. The inclusion of most of the southern half is justified because it has managed to retain a significant proportion of its attractive historic character and because of differences in attitudes to conservation since the Area’s designation.

Preservation and Enhancement

To prevent further erosion of its original character, replacement of any more of The Down’s historic or domestic scale property with larger buildings or those designed in pseudo-historic styles should be strongly discouraged, and further development within the plots and between buildings should be resisted, particularly if this would involve the destruction of mature trees or landscaped areas.