SUB AREA 23: THORNTON HILL

Map of Sub Area 23, Thornton Hill

Extent and Justification

Thornton Hill is the westernmost of the three parallel roads that lead from St John’s Road down the escarpment to the southern boundary of the Conservation Area along Worple Road.

As with the other two roads, Spencer Hill and Denmark Avenue, it is included in the Conservation Area largely because of the architectural quality of the buildings along it.

Also, like the other Sub Areas, its boundaries are clearly defined by the backs of the gardens to the east and west, and the roads to the north and south.

Character

The attractive vista from the northern end of the road is similar to those of Spencer Hill and Denmark Road, its slight curve adding to its charm. The road is lined on both sides by residential property whose character is typical of those in other parts of the Conservation Area in quality and period. In its report, the VicSoc mentioned that:
it has particularly fine trees and shrubs which have matured over the years in its front gardens, which are longer than those in neighbouring roads.

And the WimSoc’s Environmental Assessment noted that most of the granite kerbs and setts have been retained, although partly obscured by recent resurfacing. Because of the speed of the traffic it suggested the installation of traffic calming measures.

Location Map of Sub Area 23

The north-eastern corner of Thornton Hill is bordered by what appears to have been a continuation of the walkway further east leading from Oldfield Road to Ridgeway Place, but which may have been obliterated by the development of St John’s Road. It is a narrow picturesque pathway lined with high fences and leads south-west into Darlaston Road. According to Milward, it was created by the Jesuit owners of Nos. 14 and 16 Darlaston Road (Sub Area 27B) to enable them to reach their offices in Thornton Hill, and became a right of way only after they sold it to the Council in 1919 [Milward 1991, p.5].

Buildings: Nos. 1 and 3 Thornton Hill and the passageway to Darlaston Road

The VicSoc report admitted that the restraint of its houses makes it difficult to submit proposals for (local) listing, and of six selected for specific mention, it recommended only two – Nos. 32 and 34 – for the local list. Three of the 32 properties have been added to the local list, 24 of them make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, and only two – the two blocks of flats on the eastern side - have a negative effect. The VicSoc’s fear that this road too cries out for deliverance from the developers, whose interest in it is all too visible may therefore have been overstating the case.

Odd numbers, west side, from north to south

Nos. 1 and 3: These two late nineteenth century detached houses at the top of Thornton Hill are set at an angle to the road to exploit the views over the valley to the south-west. They are largely obscured from the road and the adjoining pedestrian pathway by mature trees and a high fence, providing attractive secluded surroundings. They are simple two storey houses with a semi-basement and a second floor in the roof lit by rooflights and windows in the gables, built of yellow stocks with red brick to the string courses and window lintels.

No. 5: A detached two storey cottage built in 1925 in white painted brick and a heavy tiled roof, with a cat-slide roof to the southern end accommodating a pitched dormer, in heavily treed grounds largely concealed behind a high fence.
No. 7: A detached three storey double-fronted mid nineteenth century house plus basement in pale stock brick with white painted window surrounds, string courses and projecting porch with Tuscan columns, the second floor windows forming semi-dormers. The house has been converted into two properties with separate back gardens, and partly because of alterations to the semi-dormers and ugly pipework to the front elevation, it was rejected for local listing.

No. 9: A detached late nineteenth century two storey double fronted house in stock brick with a red string course and white painted ground floor bay windows, which the Wim Soc environmental assessment regarded as potentially listable.

No. 11a: A detached two-storey house in white render which appears to have been inserted into the side garden of No. 11 in the 1930’s.

Nos. 11 to 25: Four pairs mid nineteenth century semi-detached four storey houses of group value, being of similar design in stock brick with the front doors at piano nobile level reached by grand flights of steps, semi-circular windows at second floor level and ornamental brackets to the eaves. Nos. 11, 13 and 15 are locally listed, and Nos. 11 to 17 differ in detailed treatment from Nos. 19 to 25. The window and door surrounds to Nos. 11 to 17 are in crème stucco, the porch having simple Tuscan columns and ornamental bases to the second floor window arches. Nos. 19 to 25 are more elaborate, with ground and first floor bay windows and the semi-circular arches to the front door and second floor windows being in red ornamented brickwork connected by similarly decorated string courses.

Nos. 13, 17, 21 and 25 all have major side extensions, a recent addition to that of No. 25 taking it above eaves level to the detriment of the building and street scene. All the houses have been sub-divided into between three and eight separate apartments at various times. The front gardens to Nos. 19 to 25 are largely devoted to car parking and a pair of garages at the rear of No. 19 is reached by a separate side entrance.

Nos. 23 and 25 Thornton Hill, showing the dominant extension to No. 23; and No. 29 showing its plastic windows, shutters and fences to the garden and semi-basement.

Nos. 27 and 29: Two detached two storey double fronted houses of classic proportions in stock brick, the ground floor bays each side of the entrance to No. 27 having been rendered. Features include semi-circular arches to the recessed entrance porches, and a semi-basement to the south side of the raised entrance to No. 29. Because of their attractive proportions they might have been considered for local listing, but unfortunately, the windows to both houses have been replaced with plastic and shutters added to those on the first floor. The front gardens of both houses are largely devoted to car parking, No. 29 has been divided into five flats and a pair of garages at the rear is accessed from Worple Road.

Even numbers, east side, north to south

Nos. 2 and 4: A pair of mid nineteenth century semi-detached four storey houses in stock brick with full height canted bays, rusticated quoins at the corners and party wall and heavily overhanging eaves. The entrance is at piano nobile level reached up a full flight of steps. Both houses are divided into flats and the front gardens are heavily overgrown.
No. 6, Farriers Court, and Nos. 8 and 10 Thornton Hill

No. 6, Farriers Court: Two linked three storey blocks of twelve flats built in 1964 in stock brick with white painted projecting balconies and panels over the central entrances, which appear to have had later projecting porches added. The flats and the open lawns in front are of a somewhat bland design which is unrelated in scale and character to the adjoining buildings, so that they and the blocks of garages at the rear detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

Nos. 8 and 10: A pair of mid nineteenth century semi-detached four storey houses of similar design to Nos. 2 and 4 but rendered in white. They have been converted to flats and the front gardens are largely devoted to car parking.

Nos. 12 and 14 Thornton Hill and the entrance drive to No. 14, showing the security hedge/railings and the modern and traditional conservatory extensions.

Nos. 12 and 14: A pair of locally listed four storey mid nineteenth century houses in buff painted brick and white rusticated quoins to the corners and party wall. The entrance is at piano nobile level approached up a full flight of steps; the first floor has ornate arched triple windows and the second floor a pair of ornate arched windows with ornamental window boxes. Side extensions consist of a high tech semi-circular glazed conservatory to No. 12 and a more traditional ornate conservatory above a garage to No. 14 approached by a York Stone paved driveway. The front gardens are concealed behind high railings backed by neatly pruned hedges, presumably for security as well as appearance.

Nos. 16 to 22: A terrace of four four-storey houses in stock brick with canted bays to the ground and first floors in stock brick and red rubbers to the arched windows, with full height steps to the entrances at piano nobile level. The houses originally consisted of two semi-detached pairs but were linked in the 1930s with a four storey block and all four and the link have been converted into flats. The original character has been seriously eroded: the link block and part of No. 20 has been rendered white and possesses fenestration which bears no relation to its neighbours, the staircase to No. 18 has been unsympathetically removed, and a vehicle access has been provided under the link block to four garages in the rear gardens.
Nos. 18 to 22 Thornton Hill, showing the unsuitable link and other alterations

Nos. 24 to 26, Thornton Lodge: Two linked blocks of post-war four storey flats containing 27 apartments, in stock bricks with red brick shoulder lintels. The fenestration is particularly bland and poorly proportioned, so that the building conflicts in scale and design with neighbouring houses, particularly those to the south, and has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

Nos. 28 to 34, together with Nos. 27 and 28 opposite, form a group, being of similar design.

No. 28: A detached two-storey double fronted mid nineteenth century house in white stucco and a ground floor bay south of the entrance.

No. 30: A detached two storey double fronted mid nineteenth century house in white stucco which appears to be basically similar to Nos. 28 and 32 but with extensive ornamentation (which may have been added) consisting of elaborate ground floor canted bays each side of a recessed porch under a baroque archway, all topped by a dominant string course, and ornamental eaves. The panes to the upper halves of the sash windows on both floors are subdivided. The only obvious recent alteration appears to be the shutters to the first floor windows, and because of its attractive and unusual design, No. 30 may merit local listing.

The ornamental façade of No. 30 Thornton Hill, and the elaborate boundary to No. 34.

No. 32: A detached two storey double fronted mid nineteenth house in white stucco whose central entrance, with its ornamental archway, has been filled in and a side extension in stock brick built to the south.