Sub Area 27B, Darlaston Road

Character

Darlaston Road forms a dog-leg. The eastern part, aligned north-south, originally comprised all but one of the sixteen houses built in the late 1880s, partly by Horace Cooper, of which ten survive. The northern section, running east-west, is bordered to the north by No. 16, built in 1883, and the Sacred Heart Church, both in Sub Area 26A, and on the south by No. 14 Edge Hill and – untypically – six bungalows. The VicSoc report refers to the road as an architectural luck dip, and it may have been omitted from the Conservation Area partly because of its lack of cohesion, the rows of original villas being interrupted by modern infill development of varying architectural quality.

Buildings

Of the eighteen properties in Sub Area 27B, seven make a positive contribution to the area, another seven have a neutral impact, and the other four have a negative effect.

EGE HILL

No. 2: A four storey block of 1970s flats in red brick with projecting balconies and a flat roof which has been excluded from the Conservation Area because its character conflicts with the other properties in Edge Hill.

DARLASTON ROAD

Most of the fourteen villas built in Darlaston Road in the 1880s were of similar design, and seven of them survive: Nos. 5, 11 and 13 on the west side, and Nos. 6 to 12 on the east. They consist of detached, double-fronted two storey houses plus semi-basements in red brick with semi-circular arches over the front porches springing from ornamental capitals, approached up flights of steps. Each villa has a three storey canted bay with ornamental capitals to the mullions and to the right of the entrance topped by a gable accommodating an additional floor.

Odd numbers, west side, south to north

No. 5: The architectural integrity of the villa has been eroded by the addition of a large box dormer, and the rear garden is largely devoted to car parking.

The aggressive De Vere Court (Nos. 7 & 9) and the mundane Malcolm Lodge (No. 15)

Nos. 7 and 9, De Vere Court: A mid twentieth century four storey block of flats designed in a series of horizontal stripes, the ground and first floor being of red brick with the first floor cantilevered forward, white glazed tiles between the second floor windows, and the top floor and recessed windows encased in blue slates, the whole topped by a monopitch roof. The
designer may have considered his creation to be a fine example of its period, but it now
seems an aggressive composition which conflicts in scale and character with the 1880s villas.

Nos. 11 and 13: These two villas appear to be unaltered.

No. 15, Malcolm Lodge: A three-storey block of modern flats in stock brick of extremely mundane design which has a negative effect on the character of the area.

Even numbers, east side, south to north

Nos. 4 and 4a: A rather mundane three storey block of mid 20th C. flats in stock brick with projecting balconies and white panels beneath windows, to which a three storey extension has been added at the northern end in a similar style but with a pair of semi-dormers breaking the eaves line.

Nos. 6 to 12: Four of the original 1880 villas, which appear to be basically unchanged except for an oversize box dormer to No. 12.

No. 14, Buckingham Court: A two storey L-shaped block of mid twentieth century flats in brown brick and red tile hanging, the ground floor to the central bay being open to provide access to garages at the rear. Its impact on the area is neutral since it has been simply but carefully designed to be subservient to the adjoining villas, and appears to have been influenced by the developments at Blackheath, Ham Common and Cambridge by Eric Lyons.

Odd numbers, south side, east to west

Nos. 17 to 27: Six detached mid twentieth century bungalows in brown brick, Nos. 25 and 27 having roof extensions. The buildings appear incongruous in an area of otherwise fairly high density, particularly since their position at a lower level than the road exposes their extensive areas of brown tiled roofs. They are not objectionable and tend to make a neutral impact on their surroundings. However, their low density may make them attractive to developers, and care should be taken to ensure that any future proposals enhance the setting of the grade II listed Sacred Heart Church, in Sub Area 26A, on the other side of Darlaston Road. The original No. 17 was the home of the Mann family from 1931 until they turned it into a guest house at about the time of the Second World War. According to Milward:

For £1,200 they got a sixteen-roomed house with parquet floors, panelling in the main rooms, a suite of bathrooms (hot air room, steam room, bath and shower room) and a large garden, complete with tennis court and orchard. To look after the house and family, they had four living-in servants (who had to change from morning and afternoon uniform), a nanny, three dailies, a gardener and a chauffeur [p.20]

Nos. 19 to 27 presumably occupy the Mann’s tennis court and orchard and although the original house is no more, traces of the type of internal features it contained may survive in the other 1880 houses in Darlaston Road.
Nos. 4 and 4a, and Nos. 17 to 27, which tend to have a neutral impact on the area

Odd numbers, north side, east to west

No. 16 and the grade II Sacred Heart Church, on the north side of Darlington Road, lie within Sub Area 26A.

SAVONA CLOSE

Consecutive numbers, southern side

Nos. 1 and 2: A semi-detached pair of two storey houses of stock brick with panels of white painted horizontal boarding to the first floor, No. 2 having been extended in a similar style to the west. They are of unassuming modern design and have a neutral impact on the character of the area.

Positive and Negative Features

Despite the addition of box dormers to two of the seven remaining 1880s villas, they are of sufficient architectural and historic interest to be incorporated into the Conservation Area. However, the integrity of the Sub Area has been seriously eroded by the replacement of the rest by modern development:

- Nos. 4 and 4a are at best of neutral impact, and are not in themselves worthy of inclusion in a conservation area;
- De Vere Court (Nos. 7 and 9) conflicts seriously in scale and character with its neighbours and its inclusion within a conservation would be inappropriate.
- Buckingham Court (No. 14) is by far the most sympathetic development in the Sub Area and suitable for inclusion within the Conservation Area.
- Malcolm Lodge (No. 15) is seriously lacking in architectural character and pays no regard to its historic neighbours.
- Although the bungalows at Nos. 17 to 27 are incongruous within the context of this part of West Wimbledon, they have mellowed over the past half century or so, so that their impact on the area tends to be neutral rather than negative.
- No. 2 Edge Hill also has a negative impact on the adjoining villas and has been excluded from the Conservation Area.

Possible inclusion within the Conservation Area

The part of Sub Area 27B most worthy of inclusion lies at its centre, with highly inappropriate development to the south, adjoining Worple Road, and rather less so to the north.

The most appropriate southern boundary is therefore between Nos. 4a and 6 on the east side of Darlaston Road, and between De Vere Court and No. 11 on the west side. Although this excludes No. 6 from the Conservation Area, the house suffers from an over-large dormer and the inclusion of a single isolated building beyond the Conservation Area would not be practical. A northern boundary which excluded the properties north of the 1880 villas would
create a “hole” in the Conservation Area and expose buildings which generally have a neutral impact to possible redevelopment, and this could detrimentally effect the setting of the Sacred Heart Church. On balance, therefore, it has been decided to include this area within the Conservation Area.

**Sub Area 27C, Thackery Close and Savona Close**

Sub Area 27C is situated on a steep escarpment which was presumably created when the flat playing fields to Wimbledon College, immediately to the north, were laid out. Because of its steeply rising ground, this part of the Conservation Area was one of the last to be developed, and the collection of somewhat suburban detached, semi-detached and terrace properties contrast unfavourably with the areas of historic buildings which surround them.

**Buildings**

Of the twenty-two properties in the Sub Area, seven have a neutral effect on its character (Nos. 1 to 7 Savona Close), 14 have a negative effect (Nos. 8 to 14 Savona Close and Nos. 2 to 12 Thackery Close), and one has a seriously negative impact (No.1a, Hilly Mead).

**SAVONA CLOSE**

Because of the steepness of the site and the need to gain access to the rear of this area of backland, Savona Close rises and curves sharply from the northern end of Thornton Hill before joining Thackery Close.

**Consecutive numbers, north and east sides, west to east**

**Nos. 3 to 7:** A terrace of five two-storey houses with integral garages, in stock brick with painted brickwork and white painted horizontal boarding to the first floor. They are also of unassuming modern design and have a similarly neutral impact on the character of the area.

**Nos. 8 to 11 and 12 to 14:** Two terraces of four and three 3-storey houses with recessed porches, and projecting integral garages and first floor bays, in stock brick and white painted horizontal boarding at first and second floor levels. The assertiveness resulting from their greater height and more articulated elevations exposes their contrast to their historic surroundings, so that they tend to have a negative impact on the character of the area.

**No. 1a, Hilly Mead:** A flat roofed four and five storey block of flats with projecting balconies in stock brick and white painted timber boarding, with garages below accessed off Savona Close. The block, which is an integral part of the development of Nos. 3 to 14, was presumably designed to form a focal point at the junction of Savona Close, Thornton Road and Thornton Hill, and its position on a steeply sloping site gives it great prominence. Unfortunately, it does not have sufficient architectural distinction to fulfill this important role, and is merely a prominent eyesore, particularly when viewed from the south and west. It
therefore has a seriously negative impact over a wide area, detrimentally affecting the setting of houses to the south in Thornton Hill and in St. John's Road, to the east.

**THACKERY CLOSE**

Even numbers, north side, east to west

**Nos. 2 to 12:** A row of six three storey detached houses with integral garages, in stock brick and horizontal timber boarding to the second floor painted in various colours, with full width balconies to the first floor. They are arranged in pairs, the roofs forming asymmetrical gables, with one side of shallow pitch and the other almost vertical, as though they had slipped sideways. The result is of an extremely assertive and eccentric profile along the length of the row which might be regarded as “architectural bad manners”. They were no doubt conceived as architecturally very special and, while they may now be regarded as positively negative (!) in time they could be regarded as an eccentricity of their period worth conserving.

**No. 14:** A detached three storey house of similar design to Nos. 2 to 12, but larger and within its own grounds.

**Positive and Negative Features**

The most positive feature of the Sub Area is the extent of mature landscaping, particularly since this helps to obscure much of the more aggressively designed housing from their surroundings. Except for Hilly Mead, which is seriously negative because of its dominance, the housing in Savona Close varies from neutral to mildly negative, while those in Savona Close are certainly positive, although not normal conservation area material.

**Exclusion from the Conservation Area**

The order in which the Sub Areas in this part of the Assessment have been considered partly reflects their architectural and historic importance, the quality of those within the Conservation Area having been examined first to establish a standard against which to compare the Sub Areas outside, and this has resulted in the recommendation to include the majority of Darlaston Road. Sub Area 27C is the last to be considered because it is the most problematical. If part of 27B is included, the exclusion of Sub Area 27C will create a “hole” in the Conservation Area, thereby weakening control over the setting of the adjoining areas. Although Nos. 2 to 14 Savona Close might one day be regarded as an architectural curiosity, they cannot at present be considered as conservation area material, so that, despite creating a “hole”, Sub Area 27C does not justify inclusion in the Conservation Area.