

HERITAGE CITATION BACK BEACH ROAD PRECINCT

Heritage Overlay number: HO470

HERMES No. XXXXXX
Place Name: Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct
Address: Back Beach Road, Blair Court, Delgany Avenue, Blair Avenue.
Place Type: Residential precinct
Level of Significance: LOCAL
Recommendation: To be included in HO schedule

Map:



Table: Individually significant and contributory properties-

Number	Street	Grading
8-10	Back Beach Road	Individual HO7
12	Back Beach Road	Individual HO8
20	Back Beach Road	Individual HO9
26	Back Beach Road	Individual HO471
30	Back Beach Road	Contributory
34	Back Beach Road	Contributory
41	Back Beach Road	Contributory
52	Back Beach Road	Individual HO11
57	Back Beach Road	Contributory
66	Blair Court	Contributory
44	Blair Road	Individual HO24
55	Blair Road	Contributory
57	Blair Road	Individual HO25
58	Blair Road	Individual HO10
36	Delgany Avenue	Contributory
3789	Point Nepean Road	Individual HO204
3795	Point Nepean Road	Individual HO205

Description:

The boundary of the precinct begins at 3789 Point Nepean Road and 3795 Point Nepean Road and runs along the rear of the properties along the west side of Back Beach Road, to include 36 Delgany Avenue. The precinct includes 66 Blair Court and extends down Back Beach Road to number 52.

The precinct runs along the east side of Back Beach Road from number 57 to Blair Road where it includes number 44 and 58, number 16 Back Beach Road and then along the road to the intersection of Point Nepean Road again.

At the intersection of Back Beach Road with Point Nepean Road is a collection of significant residences, with the largest being the two storey landmark building, Marlborough House. Facing the Bay on Point Nepean Road are two smaller limestone residences. Further along Back Beach Road are two Federation buildings in limestone, with non-contributory properties between them, and two 1950s Post-War houses at number 26 and 30.

On the corner of Blair Road and Back Beach Road is another concentrated area of historic buildings ranging from small Late Victorian cottages such as number 52 Back Beach Road to large Late Victorian villas such as 58 Blair Road. In between are a number of Federation houses in timber and brick, such as 44, 55 and 56 Blair Road and 34 Back Beach Road and 66 Blair Court. On the east side of Back Beach Road is the Federation cottage at number 57, re-clad in cement sheet, and the Federation cottage at number 41 Back Beach Road.

The precinct is largely formed of a residential street, Back Beach Road which runs almost due north-south and follows the original alignment of the farm track from the Ford farm on Farnsworth Avenue to the jetty on the Bay. Back Beach Road is a narrow and undulating road from Point Nepean Road to number 52. At the Point Nepean Road end the street is open and has a mix of unformed kerbs and crossovers and formed pavements on only the west side. Closer to Blair Road, the properties are hard to see from the roadside as there is dense vegetation in front gardens and along the street verge with a number of large and old deciduous trees in gardens. Setbacks and allotments vary enormously, but the original layout and arrangement of allotments of the subdivision is still recognisable.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is significant to the Shire of Mornington Peninsula. It contains a well-preserved collection of housing which demonstrates the important phases and historical development of Portsea from the 1880s to 1950s.

The precinct retains the early alignment and arrangement of Back Beach Road and contains significant buildings from the earliest period of development of the township to the present day. The buildings and streetscape contribute to the significance of the precinct.

How is it significant?

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is of local historical, aesthetic and architectural significance to the Shire of Mornington Peninsula.

Why is it significant?

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is of aesthetic significance as a precinct with particularly fine examples of Late Victorian, Federation and Post-War housing that are representative of their period. Many of the houses exhibit a high degree of intactness. Some of these buildings are constructed from locally sourced limestone and form a vernacular building tradition on the Peninsula which is unique and highly significant. (Criteria B & E)

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is of aesthetic significance for the combination of natural topography, historic buildings, streetscape qualities, and vegetation. The undulating nature of Back Beach Road and the alignment from Ford's farm to the pier is significant. The entrance to Back Beach Road is particularly distinctive with the limestone buildings on the Point Nepean Road corner. Buildings from the 1860s to 1950s also contribute to this aesthetic value. The streetscape qualities include the vegetation to the street, the meandering pavements, partially unformed kerbs and crossovers and scale of development. (Criterion E)

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct demonstrates the principal characteristics of the Late Victorian, Federation and Post-War periods of development of Portsea. These range from grand limestone villas to small limestone cottages, from the Late Victorian and Federation period, to timber Federation cottages, bungalows and significant Post-War holiday homes of the 1950s which demonstrate typical forms, siting and features. (Criterion D)

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is of historical significance as a tangible illustration of the history of first settlement, first subdivision, development and change over a 150 year period in Portsea. The intactness of the precinct and its ability to demonstrate this key theme through early buildings and later buildings, the streetscape and setting is rare on the Mornington Peninsula. The precinct demonstrates a continuity of occupation and development of Portsea from the 1860s until the 1950s that is highly valued by the community. (Criteria A, B & G)

The Back Beach Road, Portsea Precinct is of significance for its associations with a number of people and families who played an important role in the development of Portsea and/or had strong associations with shaping the fabric and character of the area, including: the Ford, Farnsworth, Foran, Knight, Harding, Stirling and Watson families. (Criterion H)

History:

Portsea

The land of which Portsea is a part is Boon wurrung/Bunurong country. The Boon wurrung/Bunurong are a predominantly coastal people whose traditional lands encompass some 7,800 square kilometres of territory around Western Port Bay and the Mornington Peninsula. The Boon wurrung/Bunurong are members of the Kulin nation who have lived in and managed their country for thousands of years. The Boon wurrung/Bunurong traditional way of life was interrupted at the turn of the nineteenth century when they made contact with sealers from Van Diemens Land and then in 1802, British sailors on board the *Lady Nelson* who were exploring Port Phillip Bay. [Butler & Context, 2012:14-19]

In September 1836, under pressure from the number of illegal occupations and squatting which had occurred, the Port Phillip land district was proclaimed open for settlement, allowing for the sale of Boon wurrung/Bunurong lands, claimed by the Crown, to be sold at auction to Europeans. Portsea was occupied by European settlers quarrying and burning lime, fishing and practising limited agriculture. Settlers in this part of the Peninsula were practising a diverse primary industry, due mainly to their isolation from supplies and markets. The earliest European settlers were Daniel Sullivan 1840, James Sandle Ford 1846, John Devine 1844, Bunting Johnstone 1843 and Edward Skelton 1842. The isolation of the Nepean Peninsula between 1830 and 1870 and the porous, calcareous soils, reduced the economic viability of agriculture, but by combining small scale farming, fishing and lime burning, early settlers like James Sandle Ford, could make a good living. [Butler & Context, 2012:53-56]

Limestone was not only an important industry on the Nepean Peninsula it has also had a lasting impact on the heritage of the area with small cottages, large public buildings, schools, hotels and mansions built from local limestone. Nepean limestone is a vernacular tradition on the Nepean Peninsula with two distinct styles of limestone construction; all-limestone and limestone with red brick quoining. Local builders developed great skills and techniques in designing and building with the local limestone. The earliest limestone building on the Peninsula is known as the Shepherds Hut built by Dennis Sullivan who operated a lime kiln nearby.

In 1852 the northern shore of Point Nepean, which had been selected by the Sullivans, was resumed for a Quarantine Station. Jetties, a cemetery, a hospital, accommodation huts and fencing were constructed between 1852 and 1978. In the 1880s, fortifications and gun emplacements were built on the tip of Point Nepean to defend the heads. In the 1940s much of the Quarantine Station was taken over by an Officer Cadet School and the Army School of Health until they closed in circa 1980. Many Portsea residents worked at the Station and built houses in the surrounding areas. A school was established to educate the children of workers and inmates, and the Station's doctors provided valuable services to the local community. [Butler & Context 2012:120-122]

By the 1860s, Nepean Peninsula was recognised as not only a sublimely beautiful landscape with easy access to the Bay and the Ocean, but as a place for holidaying and respite from Melbourne. The first gentlemen owners on the Peninsula arrived in the 1870s and recognizing its potential began to build villas and hotels, acquire lime kilns and land for subdivision. The most prestigious coastal areas, as sites for gentlemen's villas extended from Sorrento to Portsea along the cliff top with views of the Bay, and many of these large nineteenth century homes still exist. [Butler & Context, 2012:26]

Portsea's origins as a place of limeburners and fishermen and then as a place for holiday makers, occasioned the need for a pier. The pier was crucial for Portsea's development and it is no coincidence that the shops and hotels of Portsea, and the earliest roads such as Back Beach Road lead to the Pier. Many local families had businesses servicing tourists or worked at the Quarantine Station or Fort Franklin. Quamby, 44 Blair Road was built for Edwin Dobie who worked at the Quarantine station, as was Glasnevern, 34-36 Back Beach Road, for boatman Patrick Foran. Many residents did and probably still do, provide services to holiday makers. Some of the most prominent non-residential buildings in Portsea are associated with early tourist developments - such as Marlborough House and the Portsea Hotel.

In the 1870s, John Watson had built a six room limestone house on the beach near Point Franklin, as well as fishing huts on the foreshore. The land was compulsorily acquired in 1885. Fort Franklin was constructed between 1885 and 1889 and consisted of a series of gun emplacements, barracks and accommodation buildings. The Fort was operated by the Victorian Colonial Government until Federation when it was taken over by the Commonwealth. It was constructed along with Queenscliff and Point Nepean Forts to defend Port Phillip from Russian invaders, and protect the south channel shipping lanes. [Butler & Context, 2012:126]

The Fort was used during the Second World War as an observation post and then as a migrant camp after World War Two. It was then taken over as the Lord Mayors Camp providing holidays for underprivileged children. It continues to be a children's camp to this day. [Butler & Context, 2012:168]

A number of important individuals and their families have had an impact on the development of Portsea. John Farnsworth was a building contractor and designer from South Australia. He was commissioned to build the Sorrento Hotel and later he built the Nepean Hotel at Portsea for James Ford, whose children subdivided his farmland along Back Beach Road. Farnsworth built a large number of limestone houses along the cliff-top including, Mandalay, The Anchorage, St Aubins and Seacombe. Farnsworth himself lived in the original small house beside the Nepean Hotel and later at Wannaeue on Point Nepean Road. He managed the Nepean Hotel for a time and later he was the Portsea postmaster. John James Farnsworth, his grandson, started the Queenscliff-Sorrento ferry service and lived in Farnsworth Cottage an 1890s cottage built for Mrs McGrath, daughter of early settler, Dennis Sullivan. Local families intermarried and many have stayed on the Peninsula for generations. [Nepean Historical Society family history files - Farnsworth]

In the early 20th century, development of Portsea was impacted by the demise of steamer services, the declining use of the Quarantine Station and the rise of the motor car tourist. Construction of holiday homes and weekenders steadily increased in the Inter-War period and then again in the Post-World War Two years. Delgany Castle was designed by noted architect Harold Desbrowe Anear in 1925 for the Armytage family, and is the most elaborate of these buildings. Its size made it ideal to be used as an Army Camp Hospital in 1946 and then in 1947 was converted by the Dominican Sisters to the School for Deaf Children. It is now an exclusive residential estate and retreat. [Victorian Heritage Database - Delgany, Portsea]

A major building wave began in the Inter-War period, with the replication of suburban styles in the streets of Sorrento and Portsea. The later part of this period, after World War Two, saw some modernist designs for holiday homes resulting in a new trend of modernist beach houses by innovative designers for a wealthy clientele. Some important Victorian villas and homes were replaced in this era by new modernist houses. [Butler & Context, 2012:109-110]

The influence of modernist architecture in the Post-War period was felt not only among architects but influenced the local tradition of beach shacks through the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Even small fibro beach shacks borrowed design elements from architectural Modernism, to achieve a simplicity of living and relaxed form. They allowed their owners to live in 'place'; they generally sat on large blocks creating little disturbances to the surrounding topography or vegetation. [Butler & Context, 2012:111] By the 1980s and 1990s that had all changed and one of the marked elements of housing in the Peninsula since then is the development of very large suburban houses and apartments and battleaxe subdivisions which fit the entirety of the block and require the removal of most vegetation.

Portsea has a limited population, only 446 residents in the 2011 census declared Portsea was their home. 87.8% of Portsea dwellings were unoccupied on census night. [Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 census data] This seasonal population has given rise to limited service provision in the town and a limited number of public or civic buildings. Portsea no longer has a school, St Thomas' church is only used for infrequent weddings and funerals and only one or two shops are permanently in use. With the closure of the Officer Cadet School and the Army School of Health, the absorption of Fort Nepean and the former Quarantine Station into the Point Nepean National Park, there are fewer facilities and services and an even stronger focus on tourism to sustain the town.

Thematic History:

The Thematic History outlines the development of housing on the Nepean Peninsula to serve the changing nature of both permanent residents and holiday makers.

The early history of Portsea relates to lime, pastoral activities, fortifications, quarantines, and the fishing industry. Portsea was the first lime burning centre as the ships could anchor closer to the shore to load. Rye and West Rosebud surpassed Portsea and Sorrento in the 1850s as they had a larger area from which to locate the limestone although the cargo ships then had to anchor further from the shore. Back Beach Road, Portsea developed as a track for transporting lime from Ford's property to the Portsea foreshore. [Butler & Context, 2012:73]

As with Sorrento, Portsea is notable for its surviving limestone buildings: both those on a grand scale and the more modest dwellings of the lime burners and building artisans. Among surviving Portsea buildings of the 1870s are Ford Cottage built for and possibly by James Sandle Ford, lime burner, and Seacliffe built for Mrs Margaret McGrath, the daughter of Dennis Sullivan. Farnsworth Cottage, a limestone cottage built in the 1890s for Mrs McGrath, was at one time the home of John James Farnsworth who started the Sorrento-Queenscliff ferry service. His grandfather was a building contractor and designer from Adelaide who was associated with the construction of a number of important limestone houses in Portsea and Sorrento. John James Farnsworth lived at the cottage from 1940 until his death in 1984. [Butler & Context, 2012:91-92]

Marlborough House was constructed as a boarding house in 1902 for Matilda Reid by the Croad family builders, William Joseph Croad (1870-1934). Marlborough House was the only boarding house of this size to be built in Portsea. [Butler & Context, 2012:102]

The distinctive architectural character of many of the Peninsula's more prestigious houses suggests that, as well as the fine workmanship of local builders, skilled architects were associated with the designs of many of the buildings. From all periods of beachside housing, the two most significant domestic building types in the Shire are those large homes of various eras associated with principal figures in Victorian history and the many modernist holiday homes.

Modern holiday homes are among the most distinctive architectural heritage of the Peninsula. They are important for their links to innovative designers and the established figures for whom they were typically built. Elements of their design have been copied at beachside resorts around Victoria.

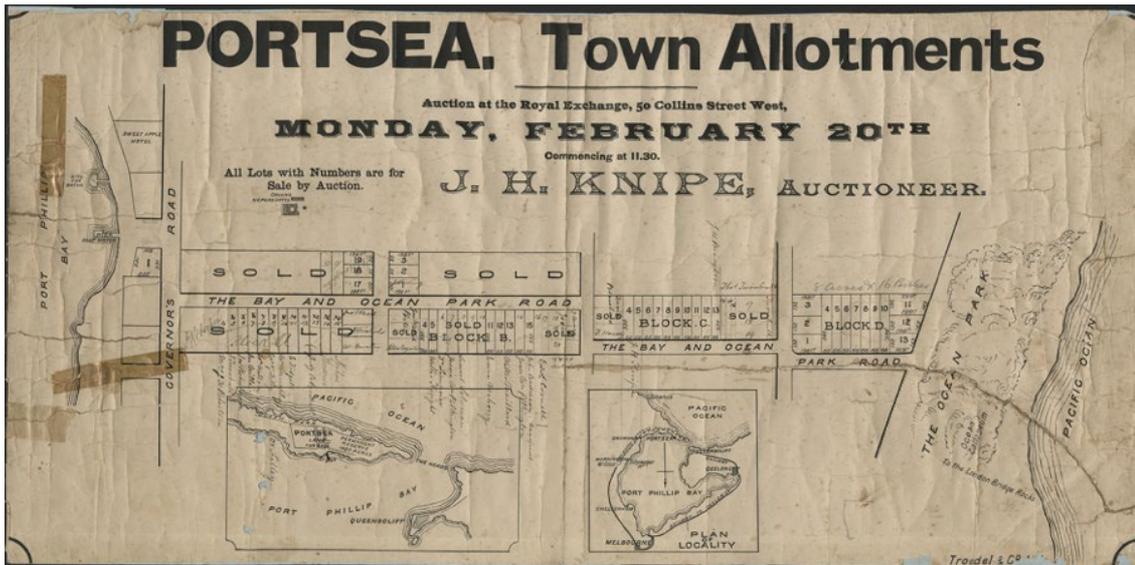
The Inter-War Peninsula holiday house became the symbol of basic Victorian seaside houses until well past this construction era. It was a single storey bungalow on a small beach allotment, often with a detached garage and built with cheap materials such as timber, concrete block or fibro-cement sheet. Portsea appears to have far fewer of these buildings, possibly due to later alterations, renovations and subdivision. [Butler & Context, 2012:111]

History of the Place:

The Back Beach Road precinct includes housing on both sides of Back Beach Road, within Crown Allotment 29 originally alienated by James Sandle Ford (1811-1890). The Ford family settled at Portsea in 1840 and are credited with the naming of Portsea. Parts of the Ford farm are still extant at the corner of Farnsworth Avenue and Back Beach Road to the south of the precinct.

Small scale subdivision of the Ford farm had occurred by the 1870s, even as Ford resisted offers from big land speculators like CG Duffy, JJ Casey and J Service, to sell his land. [Hollinshed, 1982:121] In circa 1887, Ford subdivided his land again, although

some previous subdivision must have occurred to allow the building of at least three buildings along the western side of the road prior to this date.



Subdivision Plan from Nepean Historical Society collection, VNEP A280 Ford Land Sales with names c.1887

The significant buildings in the precinct demonstrate a number of themes for Portsea. In particular, it shows very clearly the mix of local families and holiday makers who have built and lived on Back Beach Road from the 1880s until now.

Local families lived in the small, limestone Oleander Cottage at 52 Back Beach Rd which was built in 1876 and was occupied by the Knight family from 1885 until 1930. Killalde at 66 Blair Court, which is part limestone, was built 1882 by labourer James O'Keefe. He owned the property until Charles Knight bought it in 1913 and owned it until 1951. Glasnevern at 34 Back Beach Road has a limestone kitchen and was built in circa 1901 for Patrick Foran a local boatman. Craig Bryn at 20 Back Beach Road was built in circa 1905 for Mrs Charles Harding a local shopkeeper. Lochee at 57 Blair Road was built circa 1892 by John Stirling a labourer and fisherman and whose family owned it until 1989. 3789 Point Nepean Road, was built in 1889 for local fisherman, Alex Watson.

The places built as holiday houses include The Grange built in 1889 by John Henry Broughton a leather merchant of Melbourne. Pitstone at 3795 was constructed in 1902 and was owned as a holiday house until the 1960s. Limestone Karacoum at 12 Back Beach Rd was built 1878, possibly with limestone from Ford's quarry, by Dr Robert Robertson. Some local families owned a number of properties like the Knights and the Hardings and rented them to holiday makers. In the Post-War period some Melbourne families commissioned modernist architects such as Rae Featherston to build holiday houses on Back Beach Road.

An 1890 Plan (C437) of the Parish of Nepean indicates that the only houses along Back Beach Road at the time were Killalde, Oleander Cottage, Karacoum and the Grange. That the subdivision of 1887 had not resulted in a profusion of houses along Back Beach Road was probably due to Portsea's relative isolation from Sorrento and Rye and lack of services. The peninsula at this time is described as open country with tea-tree and cleared areas for small farms and just four or five buildings near the jetty making the township. Many of the lots are shown vacant and unfenced.

On the 1890 plan Back Beach Road is marked as a track leading straight from the Ford farm to the jetty.

Back Beach Road later became the main thoroughfare between the ocean and the Bay; and this access to the township and the ocean beach made it a popular location for holiday makers. The early subdivision of the lots along the road provided local families with opportunities to build houses close to their work at the Quarantine Station or Fort Franklin. Back Beach Road continues to be a popular location for both full time residents and holiday home owners. It is the unique mix of period housing from the first subdivision in the 1880s until the 1950s, that makes Back Beach Road so distinctive.

Up until c.1892 the concentration of buildings appears to have been isolated to the west side of Back Beach Road and the corner of Blair Road. The buildings dating from before 1892, in the Late Victorian period includes:

- Oleander Cottage, 52 Back Beach Road (1876)
- Karacoum, 12 Back Beach Road (1878)
- Killalde, 66 Blair Ct, (1882)
- 3789 Point Nepean Road (1889)
- Lochee, 57 Blair Road, (1889-1892)
- The Grange, 58 Blair Road (1889-1892)

In the Federation period, there was another surge of activity. A number of significant buildings date from this period, both limestone and weatherboard, including:

- Glasnevern, 34 Back Beach Road (1897-1905)
- Craig Bryn, 20 Back Beach Road (1897-1905)
- Marlborough House, 8-10 Back Beach Road (1902)
- 36 Delgany Avenue (1890-1910)
- Quamby 44 Blair Road (1890)
- 57 Back Beach Road (1890-1910)
- 41 Back Beach Road (1890-1910)
- Hilary, 55 Blair Road (1890-1910)
- Pitstone, 3795 Point Nepean Road (1902)

In the Post-War period a number of beach houses were constructed by notable modernist architects and some of these are individually significant including:

- 26 Back Beach Road (1954)
- 30 Back Beach Road (1953)

Thematic Context: (Graeme Butler, 2008 and Context Pty Ltd, 2012)

Theme 7: Building settlements and towns

Theme 7.8: Designing and building mansions, houses and holiday shacks

Theme 5: Establishing Communications

Theme 5.3.3: Establishing Roads

Sources:

Shire of Flinders Rate Books

Wills and Probate records

Land Title certificates

Victorian Heritage Database

Nepean Historical Society, records and files

Hollinshed, Charles, Goss, Noel and Bird, ECF, 1982, *Lime, Land, Leisure; Peninsular History in the Shire of Flinders*

Graeme Butler & Associates, Context Pty Ltd (editors), 2012 *Mornington Peninsula Shire Thematic History*

Context Pty Ltd, 1992, 1997, *Flinders Heritage Study*

Comparative precincts:

The Ranelagh Estate, Mount Eliza listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, is a large planned, residential garden suburb estate from the 1920s, designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Saxil Tuxen. It has exceptional houses and landscape elements from the 1920s-1970s. The mixed nature of housing there is similar to Back Beach Road but is more eclectic and was not a planned estate with a single urban design intent.

HO1 Sorrento Historic Precinct Residential Area at the Back Beach end of the Ocean Beach Road is the most comparable area in Sorrento. It contains buildings of similar date range and stylistic periods and was occupied by both local families and holiday makers from Melbourne. It also includes a large guest house comparable to Marlborough House.

HO317 Station Street Precinct, Somerville

This precinct has representative housing dating to circa 1890-1945. This collection of Federation and Inter-War houses in both timber and masonry is a precinct of comparatively well preserved suburban houses in Somerville. It has some comparisons to Portsea but was mainly owned and developed by locals and lacks the grander limestone villas and early Victorian cottages.

HO318 Crib Point Precinct

This precinct of houses and a single timber church is representative of the development of the town after the Flinders Naval depot was established post WW1. The housing estate was developed by a local fisherman and designed by Saxil Tuxen who also designed Ranelagh Estate. The houses were all built between 1915 and 1929 and mostly were occupied by locals.

HO92 Hansens Lane, Beach Houses Precinct, Balnarring Beach

This precinct of small, cheap beach houses developed in the Inter War period and has some comparisons to Back Beach Road in its informal layout and street character. It is characteristic of the first beachside weekender suburbs in the district. The small informal cottages are set among native vegetation close to the water.

HO333 Cook Street Flinders Precinct

This town centre precinct is most comparable to Sorrento Historic Precinct Commercial Area, rather than Portsea which did not have many public buildings or a town centre. The precinct contains a mix of church, Post Office, public hall, shopfronts and houses with infill buildings from the twentieth century. It is significant for the important evidence it provides of a pattern of development from the 1860s. Similar to Portsea it retains evidence of early allotment patterns and demonstrates continuity from the time of first subdivision, and early development of tourism and local services.

Recommendations:

Extent of curtilage:

The whole of the precinct

Significant elements or design features:

New development or works should retain a level of vegetation cover and landscape setting for each property. The streetscape setting and informal nature of the road, with meandering pavements and dense vegetation in parts should be retained.

Extent of fabric to be retained:

All of the Late Victorian, Federation, Inter-War and Post-War fabric identified.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited uses	No
Incorporated plan	-
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No

Other recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay as a new precinct with its own HO to the extent of the whole precinct as defined by the accompanying mapping.