

Sydney Avenue, Blackrock

Architectural Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Recommendations



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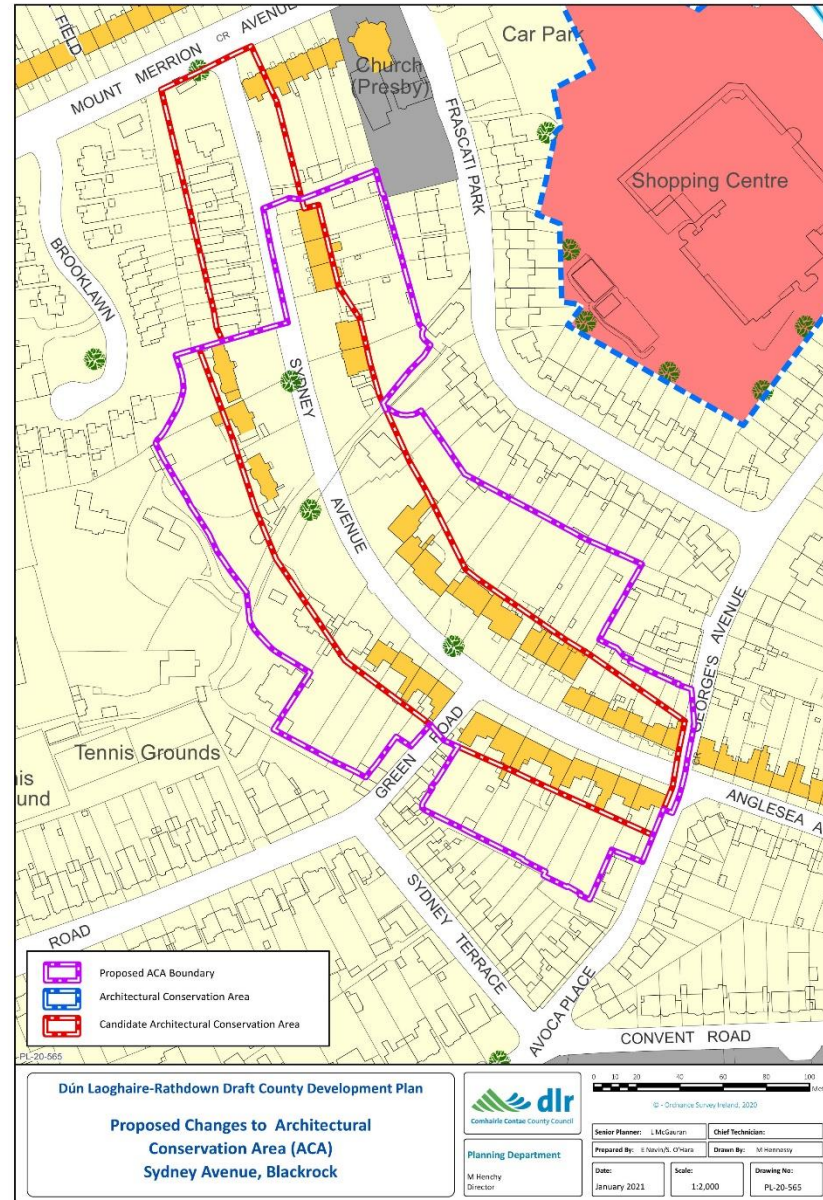
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1. Location and description of boundary of ACA

Sydney Avenue runs southwards from Mount Merrion Avenue through a gentle curve to reach George’s Avenue on a bearing of east-south-east. Frascati Park lies to the north-east, while Brooklawn Park, and Sydney Terrace lie to the south-west.

George’s Avenue runs northwards to Blackrock at the eastern end of Sydney Avenue. Avoca Place forms the eastern boundary of Sydney Avenue. Green Road runs off to the south-west part way along the road, while a laneway also leads to the south-west from a point further along the road. The ACA would include thirty-eight Protected Structures, located on Sydney Avenue, and one on Mount Merrion Avenue.

This includes all of the nineteenth-century houses in Sydney Avenue, except for two – (Nos. 26 and 28), which are large detached nineteenth-century houses, located on the western side of the road.



The first of these, in 1848, (Nos. 13 and 15), were built as a pair of brick-fronted houses with a narrower frontage that ensured that they had less of a horizontal emphasis. About ten years later Nos. 9 and 11 were added to the end of the terrace.

While these two houses followed the general scale of their three neighbours as single-storey over basement, three-bay houses with similar parapet heights, these houses were embellished to a greater degree, with rendered architraves to the windows having nail-head mouldings on either side and acanthus scroll brackets supporting an entablature over, while the houses also displayed lions *couchant* on the parapet over the front doors, as seen at No. 37 below.



2. Character Appraisal

2.1 Building typology and materials

The houses that were built in the Blackrock area from the opening years of the nineteenth century, were usually faced in render, and examples may be seen in Carysfort Avenue, which was one of the earliest streets to be opened up in Blackrock in that century. By the 1830s, this was well established as the norm in Blackrock, Monkstown, and Dún Laoghaire, though with the occasional exception. Towards the end of the century brick became more popular, particularly as mass-produced machine-made brick became widely available, as this was not only cost-effective, but the better quality bricks were more resistant to damp penetration than their more porous equivalents of the earlier period.

2.2 Mid-nineteenth century houses

Facades:

All of the houses built in the 1830s were rendered, for the most part with a simple, unadorned format, though there were exceptions, most notably at Nos. 23 and 37.

The windows were almost invariably six-over-six timber sliding sashes, though in some cases, these were later replaced with one-over-one sashes or, in one case, two-over-two. The front boundaries of the terraced houses in this phase were low masonry walls, rendered and with granite copings, over which was an iron railing. In the middle section of the road the detached houses were mainly bounded by rendered masonry walls.

The small group of post 1830s houses differed slightly than their predecessors.

This break with the simplicity of the earlier houses marked the clear move into the Victorian era. However, the next two houses reverted to the earlier style, when Nos. 17 and 19 were built in 1871 as replicas of the two houses at No. 13 and 15, dating from fourteen years earlier.

There was a simplicity to the facades of the houses built in Sydney Avenue up to around 1840. This is not devoid of embellishment, having the windows set back in recessed panels, a traditional-style fanlight and a cornice and blocking course at parapet level.

However, the composition is clean and simple, in contrast to the added features of the slightly later period, exemplified by No. 11 Sydney Avenue, which is more embellished.

Of the thirty-two houses that are visible from the street, and which are rendered, nine are roughcast rendered, while the majority are smooth rendered – mostly rendered, ruled and lined, as was traditional. In about two thirds of these cases the facades are painted, representing fifteen of the twenty-three smooth rendered houses, while the other eight are unpainted.

It is noted that these comments apply to the front elevations, as the other elevations are not always the same – No. 2 Sydney Avenue has a painted facade, while the substantial side elevation to Avoca Place is unpainted. Similarly, No. 18 is roughcast rendered to the front, while the side elevation to Green Road is smooth rendered, ruled and lined, as evident from the photographs below.



No. 5 Sydney Avenue



No. 11 Sydney Avenue



Roughcast rendered



Rendered, ruled, lined and painted



Rendered, ruled, and lined

In Sydney Avenue, parapets predominate, though not overwhelmingly, some twenty- two of the mid-nineteenth century houses having parapetted facades, as compared with thirteen with eaves rather than parapets. These figures include four houses at Nos. 2, 4, 6 and 8 Sydney Avenue as having eaves, though their form is transitional, having a cornice at the eave that is part-way to being a parapet.



Detail of cornice

This feature, seen in the photograph above, includes a small fascia, with the window heads breaking into the bottom of the fascia, and with a cornice above. Unlike a traditional parapet, this cornice does not conceal the eaves, let alone the rest of the roof, and hence has not been considered here as being a parapet.



Nos. 2, 4, 6 and 8 Sydney Avenue

In more than half of the instances where the houses are parapeted, the parapets follow the simple form, with coping stones capping the parapet wall. In a significant minority of cases the parapets are more elaborate, with a cornice and blocking course. These range from the simple examples seen at Nos. 1, 3 and 5 Sydney Avenue, to the stronger design, and larger cornice seen at houses such as 'Glenmore', at number 26 Sydney Avenue, and 'Victoria Lodge', at No. 27.

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Parapet at Nos. 1, 3 and 5 Sydney Avenue



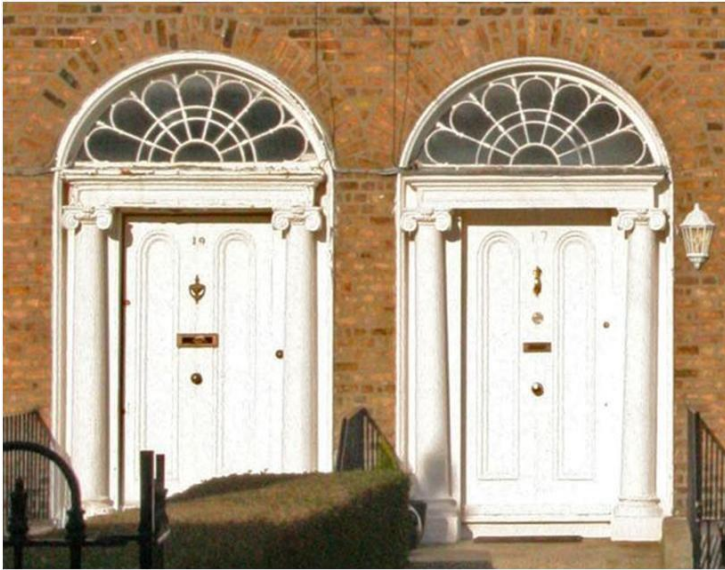
Parapet at Victoria Lodge



Parapet at Glenmore

Doorcases

In Sydney Avenue there is a variety of types of Georgian doorcase. The fanlights are typical of the period, which had seen a general turn away from the large, semi-circular fanlights found in Dublin's Georgian houses. This was due to a large degree to the reduction in scale of the houses, with lower ceiling heights, and hence less headroom for the height required for those substantial lights. There are three common ways to reduce the height of the fanlights, and all three are found in Sydney Avenue, with three semi-circular fanlights of smaller radius to those of the earlier period, ten elliptical or three-centred, and eighteen segmental. The latter two styles achieve a lower height while retaining a reasonable width. In the case of Nos. 13, 15, 17 and 19 Sydney Avenue the fanlights are segmental, but are almost semi-circular, thereby reflecting the earlier style, but on a smaller scale. Similar fanlights are found at Nos. 10, 12, 14 and 16 Sydney Avenue.



Nos. 16 and 17 Sydney Avenue

The great majority of the nineteenth-century houses in Sydney Avenue have panelled front doors. Of the nineteenth-century houses, the largest number have four-panelled doors, with six-panels in eight instances and others with two, five or nine panels.



Segmental fanlight at No. 8



Fanlight at No. 39

At No. 39 Sydney Avenue the segmental head of the fanlight caps an otherwise rectangular light, in a style that emerged in Dún Laoghaire in the 1820s.

The doorcases vary in style, with sixteen having classical columns flanking the doorway, half of which are Tuscan, the others being either Ionic or Doric. In eight instances the doorways are flanked by broad, flat panels; this is a feature that is found elsewhere in Blackrock, such as Carysfort Avenue, Anglesea Avenue, and Waltham Terrace. A few of the doorways are flanked by pilasters.

In essence, the nineteenth-century houses in Sydney Avenue were built with classically derived doorcases, and virtually all have managed to retain the features associated with those doorways. In all cases, seen during the survey the original fanlights have survived, while very few of the front doors have been replaced.



Six-Panelled Door and pilasters



Four-Panelled Door with Plain Panels



Two-Panelled Door and Ionic Columns

Porches

For the most part the nineteenth century houses in Sydney Avenue were built without porches, and few have added them since. The exceptions are Nos. 31 and 33, which were built with projecting hoods over the front doors, and No. 30, which has a broad canopy over a six-panelled door flanked by pilasters, and with key-hole side lights.

Nos. 24 and 32, are among the few that have had later porches added to the front, and in both cases, the additions would date from the later nineteenth or early twentieth century.



Hood Over No. 3



Porch at No. 24



Doorway at No. 30

Roofs

All of the houses in Sydney Avenue were built with natural slate roofs, probably using Welsh slates in all cases. Where the roof covering may be seen the majority still have natural slate roofs, some of which have been re-slatted, in more recent years. In a small number of cases, the roof covering has been replaced with fibre-cement tiles.

No. 23 Sydney Avenue, which has gothic elements in the fanlight and the front windows, has two courses of scalloped slates mid-way up the slope of the roof.



Conical pots and red brick capping



Detail of slates on roof of No. 23 Sydney Avenue



Three Dublin-style pots and one replacement

Chimneys

All of the chimneystacks are rendered. In the majority of cases the stacks are not painted, though the stacks above on three of the houses have been painted to match the painting of the render on the main façade. In three cases, the chimneystacks have three courses of red brick as a capping. All three of those houses – Nos. 25, 31 and 33, the chimney pots are of red clay and are in the shape of truncated cones, these being the only examples in the street of this type of pot. The majority of the houses have buff-coloured clay pots in the traditional Dublin style, while a few have simple cylindrical pots in either red or buff colour.

Windows

The majority of the houses in Sydney Avenue were built during the period when windows were generally small-paned, prior to the removal of the tax on glass in 1845. The two houses that were built in 1848 and 1871, also have small-paned windows, the latter being replicas of the 1848 houses. The majority are six-over-six timber sliding sashes on their front elevations, while some has eight-over-eight sashes. Nine of the 1830s houses have had their windows replaced with one-over-one sashes, while the two houses built in the period 1855-1863 also have one-over-one sashes. One of the earlier houses, has replacement sashes with a two-over-two configurations.



Wyatt window at No. 20



*Gothic-influenced window at No. 23
Sydney Avenue*



Window at No.9

The last of the nineteenth-century houses to be built in the street, No. 19a, has casement windows. This house is of a different style to the others and is likely to have had casement windows from the time it was built. With the exception of No. 6, most still have timber sliding sashes, notwithstanding the replacement of some with sashes of a later period, in a different style. No. 6 has uPVC casements. The sashes in No. 18 have been replaced with replica sash windows, with double glazing. Some windows have external mouldings. There are single-storey canted bays to the front of No. 26, while there is a tripartite, or Wyatt, sash window at ground floor level in No. 20. No. 23 has traditional timber sashes, but with gothic-arched glazing bars at the tops.

Boundaries and Entrances

In most cases the front boundary is marked by a stone wall and this is usually rendered – either with original harling or with more recent cement-based pebbledash or smooth render. About three-quarters of the houses have iron railings mounted on the low walls that bound the front gardens, usually with granite copings on top of the plinth walls. Most of these are the traditional round-section vertical iron railings with flat bar horizontals in wrought iron and bosses and finials in cast iron. No.30 has decorative low cast iron railings, on top of a high front boundary wall. The traditional railings are concentrated in the southern part of the street, while the larger houses at the northern end tend to have higher walls without the railings.



Low cast iron railings on high wall at No. 30



Iron railings on plinth wall, with pedestrian gate

The side boundaries that abut public roads such as George's Avenue and Avoca Place are also of masonry, some with and some without render. In some instances, these side walls have been rebuilt in stone following development.

The entrances to the properties tend to reflect the length of site frontage, with the larger grounds having vehicular entrances flanked by piers of rendered masonry. Where space has allowed, many of these houses have been provided with vehicular entrances in more recent years; in some instances these entrances are provided with traditional-style gates, while in other cases there are gates of steel or no gates at all.



Traditional-style piers and gates at No. 30



Traditional pedestrian gate at No. 4



Original splay at No.23



Replacement gates

In some instances, the modifications have been for the purpose of better visibility at the entrance, as in the photograph above, which shows reconstructed gate piers set back from the road, with the flanking walls providing a vision splay. The gates are modern reproductions in steel, reflecting the traditional style.

No. 23 Sydney Avenue is unusual, in that the original boundary was set back from the footway on a curve, to provide a vision splay and a design flourish, consistent with the gothic delicacy of the house itself. In this instance the wing walls are medium-height and surmounted by traditional railings, the gates are also traditional-style wrought iron with cast iron finials, and bosses.

Rainwater goods

The majority of houses still have cast iron rainwater goods where these are visible at the front of the house. About half of the nineteenth-century houses have parapets on the front elevation, and many of these are drained via cast iron hoppers, and downpipes on the front elevation, frequently shared between two or more houses. The downpipe on No. 2 is to the side of the house, and has been replaced in black PVC. The guttering on No. 8 has been replaced in replica cast iron with a similar profile to the original, and with cast iron downpipe. This has been painted black.



Replacement cast iron gutter



Hopper and downpipe draining from parapet



Profiled gutter on No. 2

2.3 Twentieth Century Houses

The development of Sydney Avenue was substantially complete by the middle of the nineteenth century, and the last two houses were built in 1871. One further house was added towards the end of the century when No. 19a was built in the side garden of No. 21. A new owner of 'Brooklawn', built five pairs of semi-detached houses, and one detached house. In this section the individual elements of these houses are examined to identify the common threads, the differences, and the changes over time. The semi-detached houses were built to a common design and would originally have been more or less identical. Some changes have taken place over the years, that have brought about differences in the external appearance.



Nos. 48 and 50 Sydney Avenue

Facades

The semi-detached houses were built with red-brick facades. They are two-storey with attic accommodation and are two-bay. At ground floor level a slated canopy runs across each pair of houses, and beneath it each house has a rectangular bay window, and an open-fronted porch.

The open section of the canopy is supported on columns of turned timber, with curved braces spanning the entrance opening and with timber balustrades to the sides.

Roofs

The roofs are gabled, with overhangs at the barges. They were originally clad in natural slate, though several have been replaced with fibre-cement tiles. The roof over Nos. 36 and 38 appears to be in good condition and would seem to have been re-slatted. This uses natural slate and incorporates courses of fish-scale slates towards the top and bottom of the slope. This feature is absent from the roofs over the other eight houses, though it is present on seven out of the ten roofs over the porches. It seems possible that the original roofs had fish-scale courses on the main roofs prior to being re-slatted. The three canopy roofs without fish-scale courses have been re-slatted, some with fibre-cement tiles.



Roof of No. 36

Dormers

Each of the houses at Nos. 36 to 54 (even) Sydney Avenue has a dormer window on the main roof. These are broad and are set off-centre on the roof, though centred over the space between the two first-floor windows. The dormers are gabled, originally with moulded timber barge boards, though these have been replaced in some instances. The gables were probably rough-cast rendered originally, though in some cases this has been replaced with timber sheeting and one case the gable is hung with fibre-cement tiles. There is now an inconsistency in the appearance of the dormers, as many of the windows have been replaced, and some gables have been painted white, while others are darker. Most of the windows have four vertical divisions, some having top lights, while others have not. A significant difference in the thickness of the divisions between the windows, largely driven by the thicker frames of the opening sections.



Dormer on No. 54

Chimneys

The chimneys are of red brick and rise from the gables at each end of the pair. The shafts of the stacks are plain, except for a small string course of projecting brick, while the top of the stack is corbelled out. The corbelling consists of a lower course slightly corbelled beyond the main shaft, upon which is a course of brick set diagonally. This in turn supports a course projecting slightly further out and above this, two courses step progressively back inward. Each of the stacks carries five pots; most of these are simple cylindrical terracotta pots, though the stack on No. 50, carries three taller louvered pots.



Chimney stacks and plain pots

Windows

The first floor windows along the line of semi-detached houses are mostly original. These are timber casements, with two side-hung lights at the lower level and a top-hung light above. The sills are of granite. The bay windows are similar in style. They are of timber with vertical lower lights and with smaller top lights. There are four divisions to the front, and two divisions on either side.

Doors

The front doors of the semi-detached houses are original. These are four-panelled doors with the upper panels glazed with decorative coloured glass. The doors are set in timber screens with a side-light, also with coloured decorative glass, and with two top lights, generally with slightly coloured obscured glass in centre, surrounded by coloured margins. These format of the glazing in the doors, and screens varies along the line of houses, some having squared leaded lights with coloured glass, others with more intricate leaded designs. The doors have moulded panels and have drip mouldings beneath the glazed panels.



Typical vehicular entrance



Typical railing and pedestrian gate

Boundaries and Entrances

The original boundaries to the front comprised of medium-height masonry walls rendered with sand, and cement and carrying highly decorative wrought iron railings. Each house appears to have had a pedestrian gateway opposite the front door originally, and this was provided with a wrought iron gate, similar in style to the railings. Just four of these pedestrian gateways remain, while six of the houses have vehicular entrances only and two have both pedestrian and vehicular entrances – one of these is recent and was carried out on foot of a planning permission, granted in 2015. Five of the vehicular gateways have gates, and these tend to reflect the decorative nature of the original railings, with decorative steel used to provide a contemporary design, rather than replicating the original style of the railings. In three instances, there are no gates on the vehicular entrance.

Garages

The houses at Nos. 36 to 54 (even) Sydney Avenue are generally too close together to allow for garages to the side. There is a larger gap between Nos. 50 and 52, however, due to a small stream that runs through the site. This allowed for the construction of garages to the side of each house, probably in about the 1930s, at least in the case of No. 50. While the garage to the side of No.52 is probably slightly later. As they were built to house the cars of the time, these are effectively too small to accommodate modern cars. There is also a garage to the side of No. 36, and this appears to have been built some years ago, as a result of the acquisition of a strip of land from the adjacent property.



Garage at No. 50 Sydney Avenue

3. Streetscape Character and Appraisal

3.1 Visual Character and Public Realm

The houses in Sydney Avenue were built in two distinct phases. The first phase was largely complete by the mid-nineteenth century, with most of the houses built in a five-year period in the mid-1830s, while the second phase took place in the first years of the twentieth century. These phases resulted in houses of very different appearance, though the later houses would have been equivalent in size and status to some of the houses in the earlier phase.

There are forty-nine houses along the length of Sydney Avenue, twenty-one are on the north-eastern side of the road, between George's Avenue and Mount Merrion Avenue, while the other twenty-eight are on the south-western side, between Avoca Place and Mount Merrion Avenue.

Thirty-seven of the houses dates from, 1831 and 1871, while the remainder date from the turn of the century. Over the first six years well over half of the houses in Sydney Avenue had been built. These were distributed along the full length of the road, except for the north-western end, where the grounds of Beechlawn ran along the road edge, and a block on either side of the road to the east of Green Road.

The majority of the mid-nineteenth century houses are terraced, while there is one pair of semi-detached houses from that initial period. It is noted that Nos. 13 and 15 were semi-detached when first built, but became part of a terrace of four, when the second pair was built fourteen years later.

This means that there is no consistency in the street in terms of this characteristic, and the setback from the street is also variable. All houses having at least some grounds to the front, though this is substantial in some instances and small in others. Therefore, the character of the street is that it has an eclectic mix of houses, and street frontages. Sydney Avenue is not your usual ACA where uniformity, harmony, and similar characteristics all play a part.

The majority of houses in the street are two-storeys in height, five of which also have basements. Another eleven are single-storey over basement in the Dublin villa style. One substantial house, 'Eagle Lodge', has dormers in the roof, probably as later additions to the house. The eleven Edwardian houses at the northern end of the road, built in the grounds of Brooklawn, are two-storey with dormers. No. 56, which is the large detached house, also having a gabled breakfront.



Terraced houses in Sydney Avenue

3.2 Boundaries and Street Furniture

The original granite kerb stones only survive on one stretch of Sydney Avenue between Avoca Place and Green Road at the front of Nos. 2 to 8 (even). Some survive around the corner in Avoca Place, and others in the lane leading off to the west of Sydney Avenue, between No. 28 and 30.

The front boundaries are also a significant part of the character of the street, with the almost universal presence of rendered stone walls, some of which are low and have iron railings on top. This character varies along the street, with railings, and low walls predominating at the southern/eastern end, and to a lesser extent at the northern end, while walls without railings are the norm in the central section. None of the houses in Sydney Avenue open directly onto the street, all having some form of private garden to the front.

There are no trees, though the road is enhanced by the trees, shrubs, and hedges in private gardens along the road margins.

In the end wall of No. 1 Sydney Avenue, there is a wall letter box from the period between 1911 and 1921.

4. Threats and Opportunities

4.1 Negative elements

There are few negative elements in Sydney Avenue, which has managed to retain the majority of its original features. Some repairs to the road, and footway would improve the street. There are some surviving granite kerb stones, though in some cases these need to be reset or levelled.

In a few cases the new gates or railings are in a style that is not consistent with the character of the area. There are some houses where the amount of parking in the front garden is excessive, and detracts from the character of the house, thereby dominating the garden areas to the detriment of the garden planting and the appearance of the property.

The provision of electricity and telephone lines is predominantly overhead, and this has presented a wire scape, that detracts significantly from the character of the area.

4.2 Positive elements

It has been noted above that Sydney Avenue has managed to retain a well-tended appearance and there are few serious issues that affect its overall character.

One of the most fortunate aspects of the nineteenth century houses is the extent to which the original windows, or windows in the original style, survive. The replacement of timber sash windows with casements of any kind – uPVC, aluminium or even timber – would seriously detract from the overall character.

In most cases, the new vehicular entrances, have been provided through the front boundary walls or railings, and the parking areas within have generally been carried out with care, with good quality hard landscaping mixed with suitable planting. This presents a well-tended appearance to the front garden parking area.

5. Assessment of Special Interest

5.1 Architectural interest

Sydney Avenue is considered to be of special architectural interest through the high quality of the buildings of both the mid-nineteenth century and the Edwardian period and the high degree of survival of the original character of the individual buildings.

The nineteenth century houses are representative of the substantial houses being built for the professional, and business classes during the 1830s, and the period immediately following. These houses have managed to retain a great deal of their architectural character, and it is notable how maintenance, and repairs over the years has generally been carried out using materials appropriate to the original style of the houses. Such that very few inappropriate alterations have been made. Each of these houses or groups of houses, has its own character, while conforming to a palette of features that is common through the entire assemblage.