

Alphington North Heritage Precinct

Review of Proposed Heritage Overlay Area



DRAFT - December 2011

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1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the City of Darebin. It has been prepared in light of Amendment C108 to the Darebin Planning Scheme, which seeks to introduce a number of new heritage overlay controls for individual places and precincts in Darebin.

The purpose of this report is to independently review the existing assessment of the Alphington North Heritage precinct, and to comment on the appropriateness of the proposed heritage overlay control.

2.0 Background

In February 2007 Council commissioned Context Pty Ltd to undertake the *Darebin Heritage Study*, a comprehensive study of the Municipality's heritage. The study identified 18 precincts (including the Alphington North precinct) and 109 individual places as having heritage significance and recommended these for inclusion in the heritage overlay. Council sought to implement these recommendations through Amendment C108 to the Darebin Planning Scheme.

Amendment C108 went on exhibition, and attracted a large number of submissions from affected property owners, the majority in relation to Alphington North precinct. Council subsequently undertook a review of the Alphington North precinct in consultation with their Heritage consultant, Heritage Victoria, and the DPCD.

The review concluded that some parts of the proposed precinct were still worthy of heritage protection, but excluded some other streets because recent demolition and redevelopment works had diminished their significance. The review also sought to correct some errors and anomalies in classification of contributory and non-contributory buildings, taking into account recent demolitions in the area. In addition, it was agreed that solar panel rainwater tanks and other environmentally sustainable installations should be less restricted.

3.0 Sources of Information

The analysis below draws upon a street-by-street inspection of the Alphington North precinct and a review of the *Darebin Heritage Study* (Context Pty Ltd, 2008), *Darebin Heritage Review* (Andrew Ward, 2000) and the *City of Northcote Urban Conservation Study* (Graeme Butler, 1982). In addition, reference has been made to

a Council officer's report that provides a background to the precinct (Report 9.3, Council Meeting Minutes, 18 July 2011).

This assessment has also been informed by historical research using primary sources such as MMBW Detail Plans and Sands and McDougall directories.

4.0 Listings and Controls

City of Darebin

The Alphington North Precinct is currently subject to an interim heritage overlay control (HO296). As already noted above, the precinct was initially identified in the *Darebin Heritage Study* (Context Pty Ltd, 2008). No part of the precinct was identified or recommended for statutory planning controls in any of the earlier heritage studies pertaining to this part of the municipality, i.e. the *Darebin Heritage Review* (2000) and the *City of Northcote Urban Conservation Study* (1982).

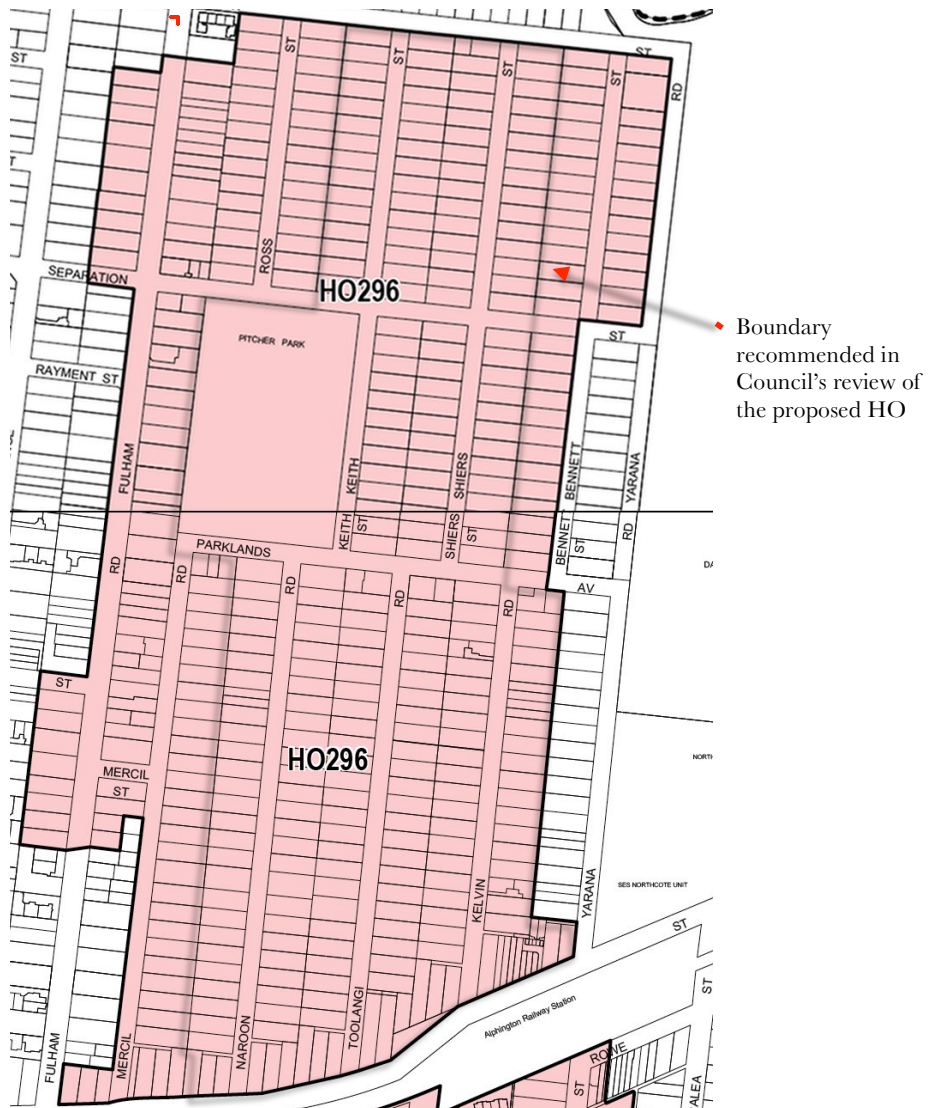


Figure 1 Heritage overlay map showing the exhibited Alphington North Precinct (HO296).

Heritage Victoria

The precinct is not included on the Victorian Heritage Register, nor are any individual buildings or places within the precinct on the register.

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

No part of the precinct has not been classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

Australian Heritage Council

No part of the precinct is included on the Register of the National Estate, the Commonwealth Heritage List or National Heritage List.

5.0 Statement of Significance

The *Darebin Heritage Study* provides the following statement of significance for the Alphington North Heritage Precinct:

What is significant?

The Alphington (North) Precinct is a residential subdivision comprising housing and a small amount of commercial development dating from c.1915 to c.1945. The following elements contribute to the significance of the precinct:

- The contributory Edwardian and inter-war Bungalows and other inter-war houses of similar single-storey scale, form and siting that create cohesive streetscapes enriched by architectural features that are characteristic of this period such as the Arts and Crafts detailing, and sometimes complemented by original or early picket or woven wire front fences.
- The 'garden suburb' character created by the consistent siting of houses behind garden setbacks with low front fences, mature street trees that create a canopy of vegetation in many streets, and views to Pitcher Park at the centre of the precinct.
- The intactness of many streets to the original phases of development and the extent to which development in key phases from c.1915 to c.1945 is apparent.
- The groups of Inter-war shops in Wingrove Street.

Later alterations and additions to contributory houses and houses and buildings constructed after c.1950 are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Alphington Precinct is of local historic, architectural and aesthetic significance to Darebin City.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the Alphington Precinct is significant as evidence of important phases in the suburban development of Alphington particularly the rapid growth during the inter-war development boom that followed the electrification of railway to Heidelberg in 1921. Features such as the modest detached housing, a small shopping strip opposite the station, subdivision layout and public realm elements such as the mature street trees are characteristic of estates of the inter-war era. The former shops in Wingrove

Street provide evidence of the practice where local shopping centres were established around railway stations. (AHC criteria A.4 & D.2)

The Alphington Precinct is architecturally and aesthetically significant as a fine example of an inter-war residential subdivision, which is notable for the consistent quality and scale of the built form, and the 'garden suburb' character which is enhanced by mature street trees and the central parkland. (AHC criteria D.2 & E.1)

6.0 History & Description

Historical information below is drawn from the precinct citation unless otherwise noted.

The Alphington North precinct is a large interwar residential area, bound by Wingrove Street and the Melbourne to Hurstbridge Railway line to the south and Smith Street to the north. The western boundary is formed in part by Fulham and Mercil roads. The east boundary includes the rear of properties in Kelvin Road, Bennett Street and the parts of Yarana Road. Within the precinct are Ross, Keith, and Shiers streets, Naroon, Toolangi and Kelvin roads, Parklands Avenue, and Pitcher Park.

The southern part of the precinct was initially created as the 'Station Estate' subdivision in 1913.¹ Residential allotments were offered for sale on Yarana, Kelvin, Toolangi and Naroon roads. Allotments on Railway Avenue (now Wingrove Street) were advertised as 'business blocks'. There were some houses built on Fulham and Mercil roads prior to 1920 but the pace of development in the area appears to have remained fairly slow until the railway line was electrified in 1921. Thereafter new houses rapidly filled the empty lots, and by the end of the 1920s Naroon and Toolangi Roads were almost fully developed.² Some of these new houses were built for the Commissioners of the State Savings Bank of Victoria, who in 1923 advertised for tenders for the 'erection and completion of timber framed dwelling houses' in Naroon, Toolangi and Kelvin Roads.³

A 1930 MMBW plan shows the northern half of the precinct remaining sparsely developed.⁴ The plan also shows Ross Street continuing south of Separation Street across present day Pitcher Park. This land either side of Ross Street was subdivided into residential allotments but had only one house by 1930. Sands and McDougall directories first list 'parklands' on the west side of Keith Street in 1931, and by the following year it had acquired the name 'Pitchers Park'.⁵

¹ *Argus*, 6 December, 1913, p.4.

² Sands and McDougall directories, 1930.

³ *Argus*, 24 March, 1923, p.5.

⁴ MMBW Detail Plan No.2469, State Library of Victoria.

⁵ Sands and McDougall directories, 1930 & 1931.

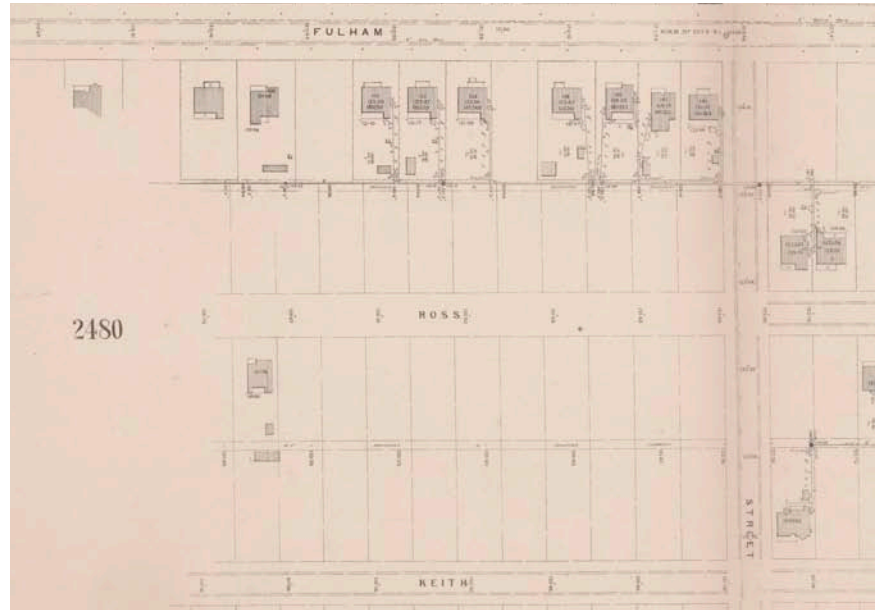


Figure 2 Part of a 1930 MMBW detail plan showing the southern half of Ross Street prior to the creation of Pitcher Park.



Figure 3 (left) 1945 aerial of Pitcher Park.



Figure 4 (right) Current view of Pitcher Park.

Most of the housing stock surviving from the area's rapid phase of development in the 1920s consists of archetypal timber framed Californian bungalows. There are also examples of timber and masonry villas of the 1930s with Moderne inspired detailing.

The precinct's interwar houses are generally modest in character and are of similar scale (single storey), siting (detached with regular front and side setbacks) and form). Fences are predominantly low throughout the precinct. Mature street trees in a number of streets contribute to an attractive, verdant character.



Figure 5 (left) 1920s bungalows on the west side of Naroon Road.



Figure 6 (right) Toolangi Road showing the canopy created by mature street trees.



Figure 7 (left) A 1920s timber bungalow at 29 Naroon Road.



Figure 8 (right) Interwar Moderne style villa at Shiers Street.

In addition to the interwar dwellings, there are examples of post war infill development. Those built not long after the war, such as the 1948 villa at 1 Naroon Street, are stylistically very similar to some of the interwar dwellings. Other dwellings, such as the c1960 cream brick villa at 40 Shiers Street and the late 1950s timber villa at 55 Shiers Street, are more overtly post war in character.



Figure 9 (left) A 1948 Moderne style villa at 1 Naroon Road.



Figure 10 (right) Late 1950s villa at 55 Shiers Street.

In recent years, the precinct has experienced a marked increase in instances of demolition of interwar houses and redevelopment of these sites with atypically large double-storey dwellings and townhouses. Some of these developments adopt an appreciably modern architectural expression while others draw on an eclectic range of historical sources with almost total disregard the prevailing bungalow of early housing stock. Aside from insensitive new development, the integrity of the

precinct has been further diminished by unsympathetic alterations and additions to interwar housing stock, including examples of overly prominent upper storey additions in most streets.

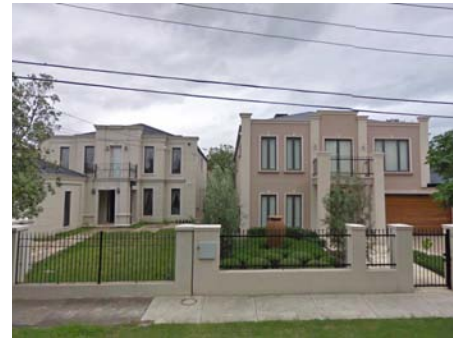


Figure 11 (left) Recent development at 104 and 102 Fulham Road, replacing interwar houses.

Figure 12 (right) A pair of recent houses on Mercil Road.



Figure 13 (left) Interwar house on Kelvin Road with prominent upper storey addition.

Figure 14 (right) Recent French provincial style house at 2 Toolangi Road.

7.0 Analysis

Whilst the precinct has for the most part a pleasant, tree-lined character, its heritage character has been diluted by the disproportionately large number of modern developments and period dwellings with unsympathetic additions and alterations. Naroon and Toolangi road present the strongest case for heritage overlay protection. The east side of Naroon Road in particular stands out as the most cohesive and homogenous streetscape in the precinct, being almost entirely made up of interwar timber bungalows. The northern end of Sheirs Street (north of Separation Street) also retains its early character to a reasonable extent.

The remainder of the Alphington North precinct does not achieve the level of integrity and intactness normally expected of a heritage overlay area. Moreover, there is limited benefit in subjecting these streets to a heritage overlay control when they have already been irrevocably impacted upon by the types of changes that heritage overlays normally seek to prevent – e.g. insensitive infill development, highly visible upper floor additions and vehicle accommodation in front setbacks.

The impact of recent redevelopment is especially pronounced in Fulham, Kelvin and Mercil roads and the northern end of Keith Street. Whilst these streets retain examples of early houses in isolation or in small groups, there is no overriding sense of cohesion or consistency of built form. In other more ostensibly intact streetscapes, many of the buildings appear to be of the postwar period. Given that Council's citation notes that buildings constructed after c.1950 are of no contributory value, this would further suggest that these streets are only of moderate to low integrity.

The diminished integrity of the area is also a function of the fact that since 2009, and subsequent to the preparation of the *Darebin Heritage Study* citation, a not insignificant number of houses have been demolished. Some 27 Section 29A Building Demolition Consents have been issued for houses in the precinct in this period.

In addition to having lost contributory buildings to demolition, the precinct also includes early housing stock that has been renovated in a way that is extremely detrimental to its original character. Prominent upper storey additions are a feature of most streets in the precinct. These additions are typically built very much closer to the front façade than is normally allowed in a heritage overlay precinct.

The map of the precinct as originally proposed shows a significant proportion of 'contributory' building stock, but it does not, in our opinion, give a true impression of the extent to which the area has been adversely impacted upon by modern infill development, prominent upper-storey additions, and other unsympathetic changes to early housing stock.

Reviewing the precinct citation in further detail, it is apparent that many of the elements that are said to contribute to the significance of the place are characteristic of interwar subdivisions in Melbourne's middle ring suburbs, rather than being special or unique to this particular area. For instance, proximity to a railway station was one of the key factors dictating patterns of subdivision and suburban growth across the Metropolitan area in this period. The development of small retail strips around railway stations is also typical of the era. The modest (and heavily altered) row of shops on Wingrove Street are not particularly good examples of this type of interwar retail development and they are not integral to the proposed HO precinct.

The *Darebin Heritage Study* citation seems to have been correct in assuming that some of the bungalows in the precinct are standard State Savings Bank of Victoria designs, but the presence of such houses is itself not a highly remarkable or unusual occurrence, given that over 7,000 are thought to have been built across Metropolitan Melbourne.

With respect to the area's garden character, the provision of reasonably generous front setbacks is another common interwar trait. The leafy, verdant character for which the area is prized is much more a result of its mature street trees than elements in the private domain.

The extent to which Pitcher Park contributes to a sense of an interwar garden suburb is limited, and there is no strong case for its inclusion in the Heritage Overlay. It is a sparsely planted aside from some relatively recent native trees and shrubs and a very small number of mature deciduous trees. The two cream-brick pavilions in the park are of limited architectural interest, and little apparent historical interest. The larger of the two pavilions possibly incorporates an interwar structure (visible in the 1945 aerial photograph above), but it has been heavily altered and extended so that its prevailing character is post war. Further research has also made apparent the fact that Pitcher Park was not originally set aside as public open space in the manner of a 'garden suburb', but was instead created between 1930 and 1931 using under-developed residential land. This is to some extent apparent in the way that houses on Fulham Road back directly onto to the park.

Looking at other existing heritage precincts in Darebin, the Alphington North Precinct is most directly comparable to the Alphington Precinct (HO167). Located close by on the south of the railway line, the Alphington Precinct demonstrates similar patterns of interwar residential development, but also includes some Edwardian housing. Within HO167, Harker and Miller streets display a broadly comparable level of integrity to the some of more intact sections of the Alphington North precinct. The remainder of HO167 encompasses a relatively small area in comparison to Alphington North but presents as a more intact and more clearly defined heritage environment.

Elsewhere in the Municipality, the Sumner Estate (HO165) is a far superior example of an interwar residential enclave. The Sumner Estate was developed rapidly during the 1920s, and retains remarkably consistent streetscapes from this period, made up almost entirely of single-storey timber framed Californian bungalows. Prominent modern additions are nowhere near as prevalent as in the Alphington North precinct. Modern infill development is also rare and generally sensitive to its heritage context. The Alphington North Precinct citation also mentioned the Preston Tramways Estate (HO168) as a comparable interwar residential area. The housing stock in HO168 is of a more modest scale and front garden setbacks are less generous. HO168 is also less verdant than the more heavily treed streetscapes in Alphington North, but is overall far more intact and homogenous in appearance. Whilst there are instances of unsympathetic alterations, the area is not marred by prominent additions and modern infill.

Beyond these two areas, the interwar housing types in the Alphington North Precinct are well represented in a number of other existing heritage overlays in Darebin, including the Preston State School precinct (HO169), the Regent G E Robinson Park precinct (HO171), and the Preston Oakhill Avenue precinct (HO172). This is not to say that parts of the Alphington North Precinct are not worthy of a heritage overlay control because of their similarity to some existing heritage overlays, but it does serve to demonstrate the relatively unremarkable qualities of the area in a local context. That the Alphington North precinct was overlooked in Council's previous heritage studies is further evidence of its generally low heritage interest.

8.0 Recommendations

Taking all of the above into consideration, it is recommended that the extent of the proposed Alphington North Heritage Precinct be further reduced to only encompass Naroon and Toolangi roads, and some adjoining properties on Wingrove Street (refer precinct map, attachment 1). The northern end of Shiers Street (i.e. north of Separation Street) could also be included in the HO as a satellite to the main precinct. It is nonetheless our opinion that Shiers Street is somewhat more marginal in terms of its heritage interest, and could be excluded from the HO without diminishing the significance of the core heritage area consisting of Naroon and Toolangi roads.

In relation to the assessment of individual buildings within the precinct, it is noted that in the Darebin Heritage Study the houses at 2, 6, 8, and 10 Naroon Road have been classified as 'non-contributory', even though they present as relatively intact interwar dwellings. The dwelling at 47 Shiers Street was identified as contributory but would appear to us to have been rebuilt in an interwar style, or, at the very least, altered to such an extent that it would be better identified as non-contributory. Council's building records should be checked to confirm if this building has been altered or rebuilt.

It is also noted that several post war houses in the precinct were initially classified as contributory but were downgraded to a non-contributory status subsequent to Council's review of the area. Some of the houses constructed in the immediate post war period (e.g. 1 Naroon Road and 98 Wingrove Street) are stylistically very similar to the late interwar houses, and contribute to the heritage character of the area. These types of houses would generally be the equivalent of a C graded place in the City of Stonnington, or a D graded place in the City of Melbourne. Houses of the late 1950s and 1960s (e.g. 40 and 55 Shiers Street) are more clearly reflective of post war trends in suburban housing and contribute far less to the early character of the area. Recommended changes to building classifications are listed in the schedule of buildings in attachment 2 to this report. .

In light of the changes that have already taken place in the area, and taking into account that this is not a pristine heritage environment, we would agree that some degree of latitude could be applied to the heritage overlay with respect to environmentally sustainable installations such as rainwater tanks and solar panels.

Lastly, it is noted that many of the submissions made to Council in support of the Alphington North Precinct were concerned with the impact of large and unsympathetic development on the valued character of the area. If parts of the Alphington North precinct are excluded from the HO, these concerns might be better handled by design and built form controls other than the heritage overlay, e.g. a DDO or NCO.

Attachment 1: Recommended HO Map



Attachment 2: Individual Building Classifications

Naroon Road

Address	Exhibited Classification	Recommended Classification
1	Contributory	Contributory
3	Contributory	Contributory
5	Contributory	Contributory
7	Contributory	Contributory
9	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
11	Contributory	Contributory
13	Contributory	Contributory
15	Contributory	Contributory
17	Contributory	Contributory
19	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
21	Contributory	Contributory
23	Contributory	Contributory
25	Contributory	Contributory
27	Contributory	Contributory
29	Contributory	Contributory
31	Contributory	Contributory
33	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
35	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
37	Contributory	Contributory
39/39A	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
41	Contributory	Contributory
43	Contributory	Contributory
45	Contributory	Contributory
47	Contributory	Contributory
49	Contributory	Contributory
51	Contributory	Contributory
53	Contributory	Contributory
2	Non-contributory	Contributory
4	Non-contributory	Non- contributory
6	Non-contributory	Contributory
8	Non-contributory	Contributory
10	Non-contributory	Contributory
12	Contributory	Contributory
14	Contributory	Contributory
16	Contributory	Contributory
18	Contributory	Contributory
20	Contributory	Contributory
22	Contributory	Contributory
24	Contributory	Contributory
26	Contributory	Contributory
28	Contributory	Contributory
30	Contributory	Contributory
32	Contributory	Contributory
34	Contributory	Contributory
36	Contributory	Contributory
40	Contributory	Contributory
42	Contributory	Contributory
44	Contributory	Contributory
46	Contributory	Contributory
48	Contributory	Contributory
50	Contributory	Contributory
52	Contributory	Non-contributory

Toolangi Road

Address	Exhibited Classification	Recommended Classification
1	Contributory	Contributory
3	Contributory	Contributory
5	Contributory	Contributory
7	Contributory	Contributory
9	Contributory	Contributory
11	Contributory	Contributory
13	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
15	Contributory	Contributory
17	Contributory	Contributory
19	Contributory	Contributory
21	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
23	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
25	Non-contributory	Contributory
27	Contributory	Contributory
29	Contributory	Contributory
31	Contributory	Contributory
33	Contributory	Contributory
35	Contributory	Contributory
37	Contributory	Contributory
39	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
41	Contributory	Contributory
43	Contributory	Contributory
45	Contributory	Contributory
47	Contributory	Contributory
49	Non-contributory	Contributory
2	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
4	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
6	Contributory	Contributory
8	Contributory	Contributory
10	Contributory	Contributory
12	Contributory	Contributory
14	Contributory	Contributory
16	Contributory	Contributory
18	Contributory	Contributory
20	Contributory	Non-contributory
22	Contributory	Contributory
24	Contributory	Contributory
26	Contributory	Contributory
28	Contributory	Contributory
30	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
32	Contributory	Contributory
34	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
36	Contributory	Contributory
38	Contributory	Contributory
40	Contributory	Non-contributory
42	Contributory	Contributory
44	Contributory	Contributory
46	Non-contributory	Non-contributory

Wingrove Street

76	Contributory	Contributory
84	Contributory	Contributory
86	Contributory	Contributory
90	Contributory	Contributory
92	Contributory	Contributory
94	Contributory	Contributory
96	Contributory	Contributory
98	Contributory	Contributory
100	Contributory	Contributory

Parklands Avenue

Address	Exhibited Classification	Recommended Classification
15	Non-contributory	Non-contributory

Shiers Street

Address	Exhibited Classification	Recommended Classification
27	Contributory	Contributory
29	Contributory	Contributory
31	Contributory	Contributory
33	Contributory	Non-contributory
35	Contributory	Contributory
37	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
39	Contributory	Contributory
41	Contributory	Contributory
43	Contributory	Contributory
45	Contributory	Contributory
47	Contributory	Non-contributory
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55	Non-contributory	Non-contributory
28	Contributory	Contributory
30	Contributory	Contributory
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36	Contributory	Contributory
38	Contributory	Contributory
40	Contributory	Non-contributory
42	Contributory	Contributory
44	Contributory	Contributory
46	Contributory	Contributory
48	Contributory	Contributory
50	Contributory	Contributory
52	Contributory	Non-contributory
54	Contributory	Contributory
56	Contributory	Contributory