



## Architecture Day – Findings from the Groups

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Perhaps the biggest – and newest - single idea to arise on the day was that of APPRA publishing, or being involved in the publication of, some kind of 'Owner's Manual' for those who buy, or already possess, property in the area. This would be a kind of 'Manual for how to live in and protect the Conservation Area'. Some references are made below to advice that might be presented in such a publication.

The most commonly voiced criticisms were, first, of purely commercial landlords, who seem to feel no interest in nor responsibility for the character of the area from which they draw their income – to the worst, it is merely a cash cow. There are good landlords of course. The second group of whom criticism was voiced was the Council. "Need more push from the Council on conservation. Need more joined-up thinking from the Council." was one comment. There is certainly dissatisfaction at the Council's incomplete attitudes towards conservation, in this area particularly – casual attitudes to paving, satellite dishes and the use of the powers it already holds. Further details may be found below.

The Architecture Day saw the participants divided into six groups who toured different sections of the area, observing features of the design, landscaping and architecture. Several main headings were suggested as focuses of attention. These form the structure of the rest of this document.

First, on **Boundaries**, it was felt that these are "part of the charm of the Avenues – individual gardens/boundaries unified by the street." The group looking at Victoria Avenue "Really liked original stone balls on some walls." There was also the truism, "Front gardens should be well maintained."

The following criticisms were frequent:

- Gardens in multiple occupancy houses often have appalling concrete front gardens. Private landlords are not maintaining boundaries and gardens. Concreted front gardens are unacceptable
- Wheelie bins and meter boxes are too obtrusive (and bin stores can be as obtrusive as wheelie bins). "Wheelie-bins look foul in front gardens" and "Dustbins at front are tatty"
- Concrete garden walls are not good. As one group said, "the quality of materials of boundaries is important"
- Boundaries which are too high aren't acceptable. The current variety is good; but all boundaries should be of similar heights
- The worst aspect according to one group is overhanging branches and overgrown hedges, etc: Good maintenance is essential. The Council should use the powers it has, to enforce regs on overgrown hedges and trees.

There was much discussion of railings. It was said, *à propos* of the original layout, that "Railings aren't necessary (since they were taken away in WWII, individualism has flourished)." But

craftsman made, substantial railings – with individuality and variety - are much better than the flimsy ones frequently bought 'off the shelf' at DIY stores. It was noticed that "Railings are becoming more popular." There should be a co-ordinated approach to railings. In this connection, it may be mentioned that the railings put round flower beds at the ends of the Avenues by the Council were seen as very disappointing. Those at the Princes Avenue (west) ends of the Avenues are good; they should, said one Group, "be the 'proper' size at the Chanterlands Avenue end". It was felt that railings are much improved by having "more generous planting round them". Indeed, one group didn't like railings much – "but planting improves them."

The feeling among those present (largely owner-occupiers) was that commercial landlords were being very short-sighted in neglecting the landscaping of their properties: "Better landscaping means higher rents for landlords." There was a strong feeling that commercial owners of properties are letting down the overall look and landscaping of the area, "Landlords should be encouraged to hedge and grass their properties - the green will be pleasant, they can hide bins, and charge higher rents.

Among other recommendations to emerge were:

- Wheelie-bins should be screened. Ideas should be sought on how best to do this
- The colours of wheelie bins should be changed to be less obtrusive (though it was pointed out that this may not help the aims of recycling)
- Information, including prices, should be made available about appropriate materials e.g. railings
- The APPRA newsletter should contain an item pointing out the problem of overgrown hedges and branches

Grass to be better reinstated after Utilities have dug it up.

On **Roofs**, various themes became apparent.

First, it was emphasised that "slate is best" – and is not necessarily more expensive. Concrete tiles may often demand the (expensive) strengthening of a roof, and improved venting, making them in fact a more expensive roof than a slate one – and foreign sources of new slates, or reclaimed material, may well be much less expensive as a total solution.

Slate is "best. It's critical for long terraces." It was said that the sweep of roofing along our Avenues is important to the appearance of the area, even if, as one group said, windows are more important in determining the character and appearance of the houses.

Concrete tiles were generally reprehended, and "Pantiles are not appropriate in Avenues, even if grey." One important detail is that ridge tiles should not lose original character – including variety. A similar point was made about finials.