
Union Rd Commercial Precinct

Location

SURREY HILLS, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO532

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

HO Union Road Commercial Precinct, Hawthorn

What is Significant

The Union Road Commercial Precinct is concentrated in Union Road, Surrey Hills, which is a north-south running road through the suburb. The precinct straddles the railway line, and incorporates development at the corner of Canterbury Road, including some (limited) development on the south side of Canterbury Road, east of Union Road. The precinct emerged in the 1880s after the extension of the railway line to Lilydale and the construction of the Surrey Hills Railway Station. Dates of construction for the graded heritage buildings range from the late 1880s through to 1940, although the majority of buildings fall within the period of the 1890s to the 1920s. The historic development, save for the former 1888 Surrey Family Hotel, is typically single and double storey, of masonry construction, with zero setbacks to the street. Many shopfronts at ground level retain their original or early form, and first floor facades are typically intact. Parapets are variously plain, stepped and curved; some have pediments, with decoration; and some with cement signage panels. Non-original or altered shopfronts, and non-original verandahs are also found, which is common in historic commercial streetscapes of Melbourne. There is also landscaping in the precinct which contributes to its character, albeit some of more recent origin. The landscaping includes pinoak plantings setback from the street; plane trees including at corners with intersecting streets; and some low trimmed box hedges to the footpaths.

How is it Significant

The Union Road Commercial Precinct is of historical, social and aesthetic/architectural significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it Significant

Union Road Commercial Precinct is of local historical significance (Criterion A). It is a long-standing local commercial/retail shopping area in Surrey Hills, which emerged in the 1880s after the extension of the railway line to Lilydale and the construction of the railway station in 1882. The diversity of local businesses was well established by the interwar era, by which time the built form of the precinct had also consolidated. The diverse commercial enterprises of the period met the typical needs of middle class suburban living, including the growing number of railway commuters, with a ladies draper, boot shops, laundry, painter, greengrocers, florist, chemist, butchers, delicatessen, cab proprietors and newsagents. The precinct is also of historical significance for its pattern of development which followed a similar pattern to that of residential development in Surrey Hills, commencing in the 1880s and, after some fitful follow up development around the turn of the nineteenth century, culminated in substantial consolidation in the 1920s. In terms of social significance (Criterion G), Union Road Commercial Precinct is locally significant as a much valued commercial/retail shopping area in Surrey Hills, which has served the community, and railway commuter traffic, for over 120 years. Although comparatively modest in size, its ongoing commercial focus emphasises its importance to the community of Surrey Hills.

Union Road Commercial Precinct is of local aesthetic/architectural significance (Criterion E). The precinct has a comparatively high level of intactness, and streetscape diversity arising from the variety of facade and parapet treatments. Earlier buildings in the precinct have typical Classical Revival detailing, at least to their first floor facades, while later buildings of the 1910s and 1920s have simpler detailing. There is also some homogeneity to the shopping strip, enhanced by pairs or multiple shop terraces that have remained unified, at least at first floor or parapet level. The precinct also derives some aesthetic value from its landscaping and street plantings. Union Road Commercial Precinct is additionally significant for demonstrating some of the principal characteristics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century shopping precincts (Criterion D). These include a mix of single and double storey historic masonry commercial buildings, with zero setbacks to the street; shopfronts at ground floor level which retain their original or early form and fabric; awnings of mostly simple form and detailing; and a preponderance of intact first floor facades, with solid walls, punched rectangular windows, and often prominent parapets.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Boroondara - Surrey Hills and Canterbury Hill Estate Heritage Study, Lovell Chen, 2011;
Hermes Number	192601
Property Number	

Physical Conditions

The Union Road Commercial Precinct is concentrated in Union Road, Surrey Hills, which is a north-south road running through the suburb. The precinct is largely linear in nature, following the alignment of Union Road, and straddles the railway line which is located at a dip in the centre of the precinct. Union Road rises to either side of the railway corridor.

The precinct incorporates some development at the corner of Canterbury Road, including some (limited) development on the south side of Canterbury Road, east of Union Road.

The precinct comprises historic commercial/retail buildings, with some more recent infill development. The buildings are predominantly of 'contributory' heritage value (see Schedule of Properties), defined in Boroondara's

Clause 22.05 'Heritage Policy' as follows:

'Contributory' heritage places are places that contribute to the cultural heritage significance of a precinct. They are not considered to be individually important places of State, municipal or local cultural heritage significance, however when combined with other 'significant' and/or 'contributory' heritage places, they play an integral role in demonstrating the cultural heritage significance of a precinct.

Several properties are of 'significant' heritage value, which is defined as:

'Significant' heritage places are individually important places of State, municipal or local cultural heritage significance. They can be listed individually in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay. They can also be places that, when combined within a precinct, form an important part of the cultural heritage significance of the precinct. They may be both individually significant and significant in the context of the heritage precinct.

More recent infill development in the precinct, including post-WWII development of little or no heritage character, and in some instances earlier buildings which have been significantly modified, are identified as 'non-contributory'. These buildings are described in the Schedule of Properties. 'Non-contributory' buildings are defined Clause 22.05 as:

'Non-contributory' places are places within a heritage precinct that have no identifiable cultural heritage significance. They are included within a Heritage Overlay because any development of the place may impact on the cultural heritage significance of the precinct or adjacent 'significant' or 'contributory' heritage places.

The 'significant' buildings within the precinct are generally individually important in the precinct context, because they exhibit particular architectural merit or other distinguishing characteristics, with a corresponding level of intactness. For instance, 96-98 Union Road, a 1911 building, is significant for its particularly inventive facade treatment and rich original detailing, including tiling to the upper level facade. No 108 Union Road, of c.1890, is also significant, standing out for its 'sheaf of wheat' motif to its pediment, which denotes its original bakery use.²²

The precinct is intended to capture, or include, historic commercial/retail buildings which are concentrated in the core of the Union Road shopping centre. While the precinct includes within its boundary some non-contributory buildings, this is generally due to their being adjacent to, or between, graded heritage buildings in Union Road.

The dates of construction for the graded heritage buildings range from the late 1880s through to 1940. The majority of buildings fall within the period of the 1890s to the 1920s.

In terms of built form, the historic commercial buildings are single and double storey, with zero setbacks to the street, of masonry construction, with face brick (sometimes overpainted) and rendered exteriors. Many shopfronts at ground floor level retain their original or early form, with stallboards, recessed entries, marble or tiled thresholds and 'in-gos', shop window glazing bars, highlight windows, and tiling to walls. Non-original or altered shopfronts are also found, which is common in historic commercial streetscapes of Melbourne. The fact that few original verandahs survive is also common. These aspects of the precinct do not necessarily diminish its significance.

Also typical is the preponderance of intact first floor facades, with solid walls, punched rectangular windows, and often prominent parapets. The latter, including to the single-storey buildings, are variously plain, stepped and curved; some have pediments, with decoration; and cement signage panels. The first floors were often used for residential accommodation, in contrast to the retail or commercial activity at ground floor level. Several commercial buildings in the precinct have separate residences attached to the side or the rear. Awnings and verandahs are also found; the former typically of simple form, with fascias and some original soffits; the verandahs as noted above are typically not original.

Signage varies in impact and prominence: signs are attached to the fascias of awnings; to parapets, first floor facades and the roofs of verandahs and awnings; and in painted form to shop windows.

Many of the properties also have rear service yards, with annexes, skillions and outbuildings being common.

There is also landscaping in the precinct which contributes to its character, albeit some of more recent origin. The landscaping includes pinoak plantings setback from the street; plane trees including at corners with intersecting streets; and some low trimmed box hedges to the footpaths.

The Surrey Hills Railway Station complex and railway line alignment, due to their reconfiguration in c.1970, are excluded from the precinct.

Reference:

22 This building was constructed for George Garner, baker and pastry cook, see Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre Heritage Collection, 'History Walkabout' notes.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>