Appendix 3: Aro Valley

Contents

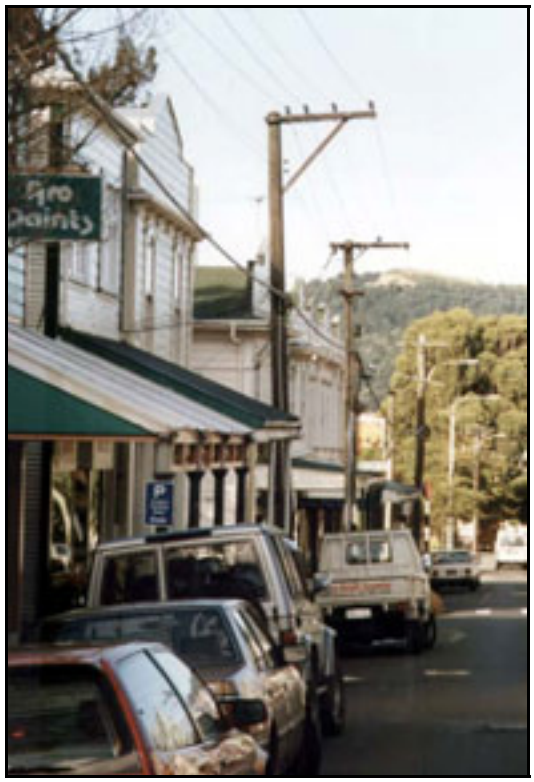
3.1 Significance of the Aro Valley to the City

The Aro Valley is a largely untouched remnant of old Wellington, with the majority of its dwellings dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century, and a significant number from the nineteenth. While records indicate only one multi-unit development over the period 1985-1995, the area is facing increasing pressure for development.

Strongly defined by its topography, the Aro Valley is also a distinctive community with several features of recognized value:

- **Heritage Significance**
  This derives from the Aro Valley being a reasonably complete concentration of buildings from the early years of the city's establishment. The majority of buildings are Victorian and Edwardian in style and these have remained relatively unchanged. With the exception of some apartment development in the lower valley area, particularly around Abel Smith Street, there is little redevelopment and infill. While few buildings are of heritage significance in their own right, the Aro Valley stands as a notable example of the urban fabric of early twentieth century Wellington.

- **Historical continuity**
  Development began during the nineteenth century. Construction was most intense between 1900 and 1920 when dwellings began to spread up into the hills above Aro Street. Around half of the buildings in the Aro Valley date from this period, and while these are spread throughout, concentrations can be found in Devon Street, on the city side of Epuni Street and in lower Aro Street. Pre-1900 buildings are found primarily along upper Aro Street and in Maarama Crescent



The Aro Valley is a relatively unaltered collection of old buildings

- **Distinctive Character**
  The Aro Valley projects a strong sense of place due to its geographical separation from other parts of the city, the enclosure of the valley walls and the relative consistency of development within.

  Buildings are of generally consistent type and similar domestic scale. This gives a fine and relatively even grain of development to the area as a whole. Further aesthetic coherence arises from the limited range of typical buildings and a limited palette of forms and materials.

  At the same time, there is visual intricacy and richness. These qualities derive from variations (within closely defined limits) in siting, roofscape, the size of primary building forms, and the way planting reflects the contours of the valley walls. The skyline as viewed from the street also shows a distinctive fine-grained richness.

  Elevated buildings, such as those on Landcross St can be seen in distant views from the valley floor and across Aro Valley. These views are often characterised by a visual rhythm created by the alignment of similar vertical forms set above a band of vegetation.

  Along central and lower Aro Street and immediate environs, the intensely developed and defined street edge adds further distinctiveness.

Fine grain, consistency, richness and intricacy

3.2 Character Overview

Within the part of the Aro Valley to which this guide applies, most buildings can be classified into a limited number of building types with a consistent and defined range of forms and materials. Because a significant proportion of the existing buildings in the area were constructed at the same time (around the turn of the twentieth century), there is a notable consistency in building style.

The character of the Aro Valley is determined by the following common patterns:

Building type

Limited range of building types
Most residential buildings are either villas or cottages, with around equal proportions of both. Close to half the villas are single storey. This relatively narrow range of consistently sized building blocks establishes the character of the Aro Valley.

Buildings are characterised by simple rectangular primary forms. Richness is often achieved by the addition of secondary elements

such as bay windows, porches, verandas and lean-tos.

Row house or apartment development is not common. Row housing, particularly at a right angle to the street, as well as stepped/cascading form of development would contrast and be uncharacteristic. However, the concentration and orthogonal alignment of individual dwellings on separate small lots located very closely to each other on the flatter parts of the area suggests a form of cluster development.

Cluster development roofscape suggested

Building size

Common building dimensions
This area as a whole is characterised by an even grain of relatively similar sized dwellings.

Around two-thirds of all buildings are single storey, the remainder two. There are some significant groupings of buildings of similar height. However, variation of height between neighbours is also common, due to both the frequent proximity of one and two storey dwellings and the trend for buildings of similar height to be elevated above one another by the rising topography. Nevertheless, height variation is generally not greater than one storey.

Relatively narrow frontages
Patterns of relatively narrow frontages in a consistent range of widths can be found. Along the central valley and valley floor areas, buildings share a limited range of frontage widths. Maarama Crescent has notably large dwellings, typically 10-12m wide. While dwelling widths though the remainder of the area are variable, concentrations of dwellings 5-6 and 8-9 metres wide are common. These buildings are typically found fronting Epuni, Aro and lower Devon Streets.

Greatest variability on rear sites
Greatest variability in building size is found in parts of the area characterised by rear sites (eg Boston Terrace and other rear sites off and to the south of Aro Street, Levina Avenue) and steeply sloping topography (eg Upper Abel Smith Street and upper Devon Street).

Limited variability of building frontage widths

Consistency and variation of building height co-exist

Landform and character

Building alignment to lot boundaries
While there is a diversity of building types throughout the area., in almost all cases and irrespective of site contours, the primary form of the building is aligned to the lot boundaries and the street grid.

Buildings are typically orthogonally aligned irrespective of contours

Intensity of development

Perception of density
Flat sites at the centre of Aro Street have relatively high site coverage. This reinforces the effect of concentration and intensity along the street edge and is complemented by relatively low site coverage on the steeply sloping valley sides. At the sides of the valley, rear yards are often heavily planted, giving the effect of a garden setting for the area as a whole.

High intensity development along the street edge and at the centre of the valley

Frontage setbacks and building relationship to the street

Strong street edge definition
Strong street edge definition and spatial enclosure is a feature along the central and lower parts of Aro Street, Epuni, lower Devon and Essex Streets. Definition, created by buildings being close to the street edge, is strengthened by the continuity of front facades. This quality of definition visually emphasises changes in the alignment of streets as they follow the valley floors, and contributes to a distinctive sense of place in these areas. Greater variability of setback occurs in other areas.

Variable setbacks linked to topography
Frontage setbacks typically follow one of two patterns. They are generally shallow, often in the range of 0-2m on flat sites or when the site slopes steeply down from the street. When a site slopes up from the street, setbacks increase dramatically, commonly to around 5m, and up to 10m.

Neighbouring buildings, close to frontages and aligned with each other give strong definition to the street edge.

Side and rear yards

Minimal side yards
Side yards are typically minimal.

Private rear yard pattern
The pattern of shallow and relatively consistent frontage setbacks along the valley floors is accompanied by a consistent pattern of small courtyard or cottage garden scale yards at the rear of

dwellings. Private open space on the valley walls, particularly steeply sloping sites, is characterised by significant concentrations of vegetation, enhancing the garden setting of the valley. The visual effect of vegetation on the valley walls is a defining characteristic.

Vehicle access and parking

Limited on-site car parking. The typical shallow frontage setbacks do not readily accommodate vehicles and parking for most dwellings is on the street. In the few instances where parking at frontages is possible, it is usually limited in extent, and secondary to the visual effect of a front garden.

Garages at the street frontage are not common, and multiple garages are rare. Exceptions occur in a few specific locations where garages belong to a continuous wall along the street edge and below and in front of the dwelling. This pattern occurs most notably in Epuni Street and Maarama Crescent but is rare along Aro Street.

Garage integrated into a front garden

Building Form

Consistency, richness and intricacy of building form
This arises from the combination of features such as individual roofs on relatively small primary building forms, a relatively limited range of roof types and pitch, and limited material types.

Limited range of roof types
Roofs are typically hipped or gabled, with the former most common. Flat roofs are uncommon.

Distinctive combinations of type and pitch are evident. Hips are typically moderately pitched, and gables steep and typically narrow span. Moderately pitched gabled roofs are uncharacteristic and the steep hipped roof is virtually absent.

Typically intricate roofscape, demonstrating consistencies of roof type and pitch

Façade treatment

Clearly defined front elevations
Front elevations, always including main windows and usually entrances as well, are consistently oriented towards the street. Characteristic of their era of construction, these front elevations have strongly articulated surfaces with three-dimensional construction detail. Decorative elements are often used, particularly on villas and larger buildings. Bay windows, porches and verandas are common at frontages.

Entrances and main windows addressing the street

Materials

Limited palette of forms and materials
Painted weatherboards are typical for exterior walls and corrugated iron is the overwhelmingly predominant roofing material. Most walls are light in colour. Naturally weathered timber and brick walls, and tiled roofs are rare.

Modular cladding materials - such as the rusticated weatherboard used on frontages and horizontal corrugated iron on the sides of buildings - give visual texture and richness.

Combination of characteristic materials

Frontage landscaping and fencing

Small front gardens with low fences
The shallow front yards with small front gardens that are strong frontage elements particularly along Aro Street and in its immediate environs are typically combined with low picket fences. High, close boarded or masonry fences and walls are atypical. Front gardens of elevated sites are of variable depth, and are typically unfenced and heavily planted.

3.3 Sub-areas within the Aro Valley

Sub-areas

Boundaries of indicated sub-areas

1. *The valley floor*
2. *Adjoining streets and elevated areas*
3. *Peripheral Areas*

1 The valley floor: Aro Street and immediate environs

This comprises central and lower Aro, lower Devon and Essex Streets. Recognition of established patterns is most important here as this is the central and character-defining part of the Aro Valley.

The following patterns are evident*:*

- Shallow frontage setbacks, reasonably close alignment of neighbouring dwellings, and highly intensive development with typically narrow side yards give continuous street edge definition and strong street enclosure.
- Car parking or garages at frontages are uncommon.
- The predominant building types of villa and cottage appear along the length of the street
- Visual richness arises from variation within close limits, diversity in front garden planting and the intricacy of the skyline. However, the street gains coherence from the alignment of a large number of dwellings of relatively similar size and proportion.
- Concentrations of relatively narrow buildings, 5-6 m wide and others 9-10m.
- Greater variability of size, type and siting of dwellings on the rear sites accessed from these streets, although the basic building blocks are of similar shape and scale to those elsewhere in this area.

Alignment of frontages to give strong street edge definition

Variability in rear sites off Aro Street

Implications for design specific to the valley floor, that is Aro Street and immediate environs:

- Place the highest intensity of development at the street edge.
- Pay particular attention to street edge definition with continuity and alignment of frontages.
- Create shallow frontage setbacks, and treat these as front gardens.
- Avoid garages and blank walls at the street edge.

Shallow front gardens and strong street edge definition

2 Adjoining streets and elevated areas

These contrast with central and lower Aro Street and its immediate environs due to their greater diversity and complexity, and in places, greater variability in setbacks from boundaries. Nevertheless, the type and scale of primary building forms, roof forms, materials and textures remain generally consistent.

Upper Aro Street

- Angled frontages and variable contours at the street edge leading to variability in siting.
- Variation in building type and landscape treatment also define this part of the street.
- This variation is moderated by a consistency in scale, and materials.

Variation and complexity in Upper Aro Street

Maarama Crescent

- Reasonably strong street edge definition when buildings are viewed in plan, but a diversity of street edge treatments, garages, planting and other landscape elements leads to a visually complex street edge.
- Concentration of relatively large and often multi-storey villas. The building frontages are typically 11-12m wide.

Setbacks and diversity of street edge treatment in Maarama Crescent, including ancillary buildings

Epuni Street

This has a similar character to central Aro Street but is

differentiated by the following features:

- Relatively large and variable frontage setbacks, as dwellings are built up valley walls that slope steeply up from the street.
- Pattern of intermittent but large scale mature planting on deep front yards particularly along the east side of the street.
- Concentrations of garages at the street edge.

Epuni Street edge

Upper Devon and Abel Smith Streets

- Characterised by very steep topography in combination with highly variable and generally large frontage setbacks.
- Planting on steep sites is an important character element.

Dominance of planting on steep sites

Implication for design specific to adjoining streets and elevated areas:

- There is greater opportunity for diversity in the siting and mix of building forms here than on the central parts of Aro Street.

3 Peripheral areas

The peripheral areas are located along the east and west edges of Aro Valley. Upper Durham Street/Mortimer Terrace and Adams Terrace have a close relationship with the Town Belt and their overall character is similar to that of the streets and elevated areas adjoining Aro Street. Palmer Street/Abel Smith Street/St Johns Street and Ohiro Road/Brooklyn Road are more diverse and have a strong association with the central city.

Upper Durham Street/Mortimer Terrace

- Variation in building type, orientation and frontage setback, accentuated by the changing topography
- General consistency in scale and materials
- Wide and steep berms with established vegetation and planting on steep sites is a characteristic element

Adams Tce

- Variation of frontage setback and building character reflecting the changing topography, with some distinctive groupings/clusters of buildings of similar scale, type and style.

- The two sides of the street have generally consistent but different characteristics – buildings on the north/west side are smaller and are strongly related to the green backdrop behind, buildings on the opposite side are larger/taller, some with deeper frontage setbacks.

Palmer/Abel Smith and St Johns Street

- These areas, located at the interface with the central city, are in close proximity to the Inner City Bypass. They are characterised by variation in building type and scale and a general consistency of siting.

Ohiro Road/Brooklyn Road

- Comprised of three distinctive parts, the area has a transitional character and as a whole is quite diverse.
    - The part west of Ohiro Rd is a mixture of old and new buildings
    - The part eats of Ohiro Rd is distinctly different including multi-storey blocks of flats
    - The west side of Brooklyn Rd has a more consistent character with a row of old houses of similar age.

Holloway Rd

- Although generally buildings are sited towards the front of the site there is a variety of frontage setbacks, and building form.
- Buildings are generally of a modest scale with a degree of age consistency. Many buildings retain a strong connection with the surrounding vegetated valley walls.
- The area is visually contained and surrounded by sloping topography and significant areas of greenery.

Implication for design specific to adjoining streets and elevated areas and peripheral areas:

- There is greater opportunity for diversity in the siting and mix of building forms here than on the central parts of Aro Street