

## RMA/2023/2046 – 33 Dublin Street – Urban Design Assessment

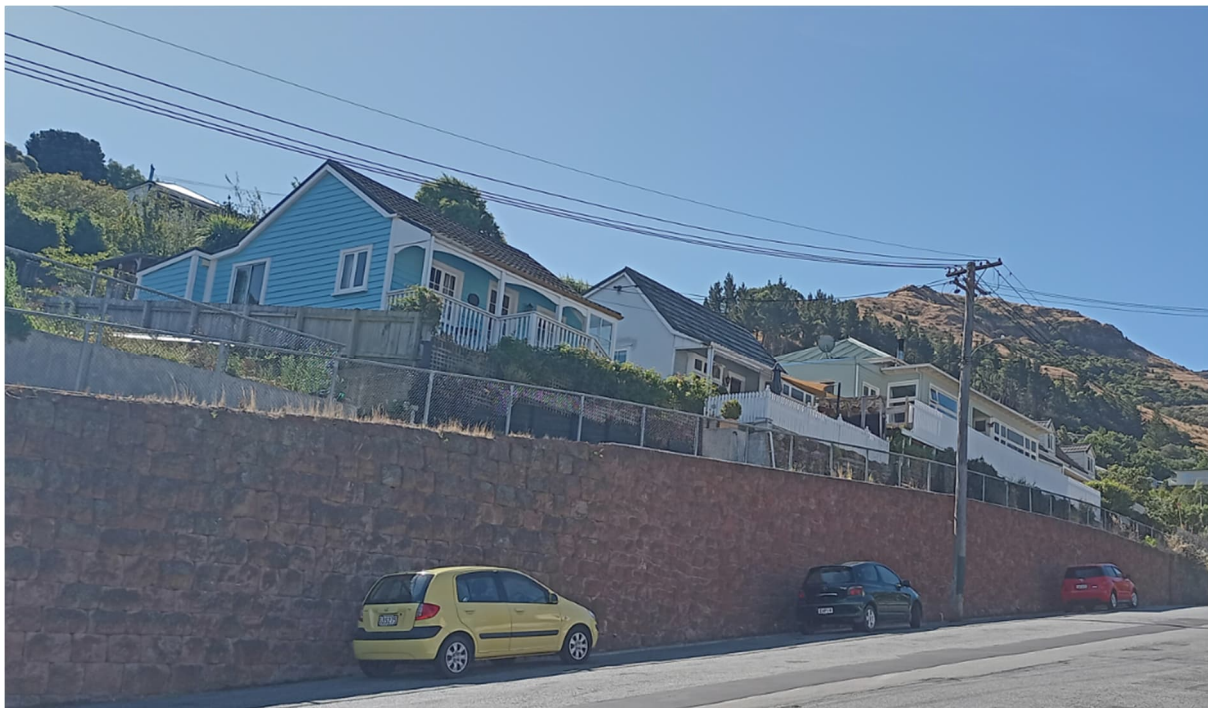
David Hattam, 23 February 2024

### Introduction

The site is located in Lyttelton, on Dublin Street, within the character area. The site is elevated and sits above the street, atop a red volcanic stone wall. The site is then set back from the wall, behind a footpath and its own retaining wall. The existing house sits above this wall and the site slopes up steeply at the rear of the site. Consent has been granted for a new house on no.28A Jacksons Road, at the rear, which is in the same ownership.

The house is original and has many original features. From a character perspective, the key is that there is a high level of visual richness and detailing which is typical of the area, including the simple form, pitched roof, verandah, prominent front doors, and large timber framed windows with prominent framing and mullions.

The house sits within a cluster that is visible above the wall, in particular from down slope on Dublin Street and across the street. This group of elevated houses have a reasonably consistent pattern and form a coherent group, which is visible from various points in the townscape, notably to the south and east.



**Above: View of application site from the south east**

Recently, a house was demolished at no.29 Dublin Street, within the abovementioned group, and the site remains vacant. The impact of this has been to diminish the overall character of the area, but in my opinion this action has not in itself undermined the cohesion of the area. The immediate vicinity (upslope on Dublin Street and Coleridge Terrace) otherwise has a very consistent pattern of character buildings.

In the wider area, there are a number of new houses. The impact of these is variable, but many have been carefully designed and are consistent with the character and visual interest of the area, with a

good example being 44 Exeter Street, opposite, a modern house that is built with compatible materials, a comparable form and a good level of visual richness and detail.

The subject site was assessed in 2022 by Jane Rennie of Boffa Miskell, in her report assessing whether the character area should be retained under Plan Change 14<sup>1</sup>. She considered it to be a primary building and noted that dwellings from the original era make the strongest contribution to the streetscape and character area. I agree with this assessment and consider that this house does make a positive contribution to the area.

The boundary is fenced with a low picket fence, which is also typical of the area.

The proposal is to demolish the existing house on the site and the application is restricted discretionary because it triggers rule 14.8.3.1.3. I have considered it against the assessment matters in 14.15.23, as well as the relevant policy (14.2.4.7).

Future plans for the site are not part of the application. I have assumed that the site is to be left vacant for now at least, and note that any future building would also be a restricted discretionary activity.

## Urban Design Assessment

I have assessed the application against the assessment matters in 14.15.23, and also against the policy framework. I note that the assessment matters are primarily concerned with new development as opposed to demolition and so the policy discussion may be of most significance.

### 14.15.23 Character Area Overlay

#### a Area context

Whether development recognises the distinctive landforms, landscape setting and development patterns of the character area in respect to:

- A. retaining and enhancing the areas' natural features;
- B. integrating with the existing pattern and grain of subdivision and building;
- C. the extent and scale of vegetation retained and/or provided;
- D. the relationship with adjoining sites and buildings, including any recorded historic heritage values;
- E. the visual coherence of the area.

The existing house contributes to the pattern and grain of buildings in the character area (the regular arrangement of buildings at the top of the wall). It has a strong relationship with neighbouring sites in visual terms (the consistency of the buildings scale and features with others around it), as described above. This means that it does contribute to the visual coherence of the area.

The removal of the house would diminish the coherence of the area because it would interrupt the rhythm and pattern of houses on top of the wall. The row of houses is prominent from some locations. It is visible at close distances (such as across the street) and also more widely in the townscape (due to the topography it is intermittently visible from medium distances such as Canterbury Street). From these intermediate distances, the loss of the house will be quite noticeable and the coherence of the built form will be reduced.

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<sup>1</sup> [Investigation of Qualifying Matters \(ccc.govt.nz\)](https://ccc.govt.nz/)

Overall I consider that the loss of the building would have a moderate adverse impact on the character area, due to the loss of an item that makes a prominent positive contribution.

**b Site character and street interface**

Whether the development complements the residential character and enhances the amenity of the character area by:

- A. providing a balance of open space to buildings across the site consistent with the surrounding sites within the block, and to a lesser extent, the wider area;
- B. providing a front yard building setback which is consistent with the overall depth and pattern of the character area, and in particular with other sites within the street;
- C. retaining the front yard for outdoor living, open space, tree and garden planting
- D. avoiding the location of vehicle access, parking areas and garaging within the front yard, or where it visually dominates the streetscene;
- E. having low height or no fencing on the street frontage; and
- F. orientating the building on the site to face the street.

The existing building exemplifies these matters. It complies with B-F in its form and its presence is consistent with A because of its size and location on the site.

The main impact of its absence would be that the balance of buildings and open space would be disrupted. As for item a, I consider that it would have a moderate adverse impact on the character area, due to the loss of an item that makes a prominent positive contribution.

**c Built character**

Whether the development supports the residential built character values of the character area in regard to:

- A. the scale and form of the building, including the roof form;
- B. architectural detailing including features such as verandas, materials, window and front entry design and placement;
- C. complementary and compatible building design;
- D. the recognition of recorded historic heritage values of adjacent buildings.

This matter is mainly concerned with the way a building is designed to respect the character of the area. I consider it is not really relevant to a demolition, the effects of which are discussed above under a and b.

**D Akaroa and Lyttelton**

In addition to the matters listed above, in respect to Akaroa and Lyttelton character areas, whether the development:

- A. retains important views from public places;
- B. reduces the potential for visual dominance of the development when viewed from elsewhere within the viewing catchment;
- C. responding through the use of the landscape at the street interface to the existing informality or formality of the streetscape;
- D. retains residential buildings, including accessory buildings, that were built prior to 1945 and/or that contribute to the architectural traditions and character values;
- E. reflects the small scale and simple forms of residential building; and
- F. recognises any recorded historic heritage values adjacent and opposite to the development.
- G. Where the site is within the Akaroa Heritage Area, the matters set out in Rule 9.3.6.3.

The removal of the building would not affect A or B (views and visual dominance).

Regarding C, there may be opportunities to mitigate the loss of the building through appropriate landscaping and fencing. These would include ensuring that fencing was at least partly transparent, and does not exceed the height of the existing fencing. It would also be helpful to have certainty that there is no hardsurface or retaining intended for the site, and that the site should include some shrubs and small trees.

The proposal obviously cannot meet matter D, and I have considered the scale of impact of its removal in my comments above. I consider that the building's removal would diminish the character area. It would not fundamentally undermine it, but cumulatively the loss of the building in conjunction with that at no.29 will mean that the character area is significantly less coherent than was the case previously.

#### **Policy 14.2.4.7**

I have also considered the proposal against Policy 14.2.4.7 listed below:

- a. Maintain and enhance the identified special character values of residential areas arising from the following elements:
  - i. the continuity or coherence of the character;
  - ii. the pattern of subdivision, open space, buildings and streetscape;
  - iii. the landforms or features that contribute to the qualities of the landscape and built form;
  - iv. the scale, form and architectural values of buildings and their landscape setting;
  - v. the qualities of the streetscape; and
- b. Within the Lyttelton and Akaroa Character Areas:
  - i. maintains and enhances the relationship to historic heritage;
  - ii. retains buildings and settings of high character value;
  - iii. retains important views from public places;
  - iv. reflects the existing small scale of development and integration with the landscape.

In view of the discussion above and regarding point (a), I do not consider that the proposal would maintain or enhance the continuity and coherence of the area. It would be inconsistent with the pattern of building and open space established in the vicinity and this inconsistency would be reinforced by the impact of the recent removal of the house at no.29. A building that was consistent with the scale, form and architectural values of the area would be removed and replaced by a gap site. The site is prominent in the wider area and this change would be quite noticeable. The impact would be moderate, but would diminish the values of the character area.

Regarding point (b), the proposal would not maintain and enhance the relationship to historic heritage, something that is discussed in detail by Mr Wright. As discussed above, it would fail to retain a building that has a high character value. It would not affect important views from public places (clause iii – note that I have interpreted this policy to mean that it would not intrude on views). Regarding iv, the removal of the building would affect the grain of development (if the site was left vacant, it would appear to be part of a larger site encompassing the new house to be built to the rear), and this would have some impact on the scale of development. However, I do not think this would be a large impact, such as would be generated by a large modern-style two storey house and as such I assess that the impact on the character area would be moderate.

With regard to compliance with this policy, the first two clauses of policy (b) are phrased in a very direct manner and it is hard to see how the proposal could comply with them.

Overall, I consider that the proposal does not align with the policy, which it seems is clearly intended to retain buildings of high character such as that on the application site.

## Conclusion

I consider that the changes would mean that the site was no longer contributing to the character area. It would turn a site that makes a strong (primary) contribution into one with a neutral impact. As a result, I consider the proposal is detrimental to the character area, and I would describe the level of impact as being moderate.

I do consider there is a cumulative impact alongside the recent removal of No.29 and if this was repeated across the area, it would result in the characteristics that make up the area being undermined.

If the decision-maker is minded to approve the application, I request that a condition is imposed to require a landscape scheme be provided. The landscape scheme should show grass and shrubs being established on the site, and only open style fencing with a maximum height of 1m to be installed on the site.