



## **The Grey Square, Portrane**

### **Architectural Conservation Area**

#### **Statement of Character**



### **Note**

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### **Preface**

This assessment of the special character of The Grey Square Architectural Conservation Area in Portrane was prepared between August and November 2007 by Lotts Architecture and Urbanism with the assistance of Michael O'Neill, architectural historian.

The study was commissioned by Fingal County Council and its progress was guided by Helena Bergin, Conservation Officer and Fionnuala May, Senior Architect. The report follows the format devised by the Conservation Office of Fingal County Council for other ACAs in the county.

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November 2007

This document was approved by Balbriggan/Swords Area Committee at meeting on 25 September 2008 and noted at Fingal County Council Meeting on 13 October 2008

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## 1.0 Introduction

Many of the towns and villages of Fingal contain areas of architectural, historical, and/or cultural interest, which have a particular distinctive character considered worthy of retention and enhancement. Planning legislation allows a planning authority to include objectives in the County Development Plan to preserve the character of places, areas, group of structures or townscapes that:

- are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or
- contribute to the appreciation of protected structures.

Such areas or places are known as Architectural Conservation Areas, or for short, ACAs. Currently, there are 28 ACAs designated in Fingal.

An ACA could be a terrace of houses, a streetscape, a town centre, or a cluster of structures associated with a specific building such as an historic mill or country house. Most structures in an ACA are important in how they positively contribute to the character of the area. Historic building materials and features, heights and building lines, and the scale and arrangement of streets and open spaces all make a contribution to the character of an ACA. Therefore, it is the external appearance of structures and the appearance of the open space which are protected in an ACA. Planning permission is required for any works that would have a material effect, or impact, on the character of an ACA. Even works which in other locations would meet the criteria for Exempted Development as outlined in the Planning Regulations will require planning permission if they are within an ACA. This does not prevent alterations, extensions or new build within ACAs but the designation seeks to ensure that any new development respects or enhances the special character of the area and is carried out in consultation with the Planning Department and Conservation Officer, usually through a planning application.

This document is one in a series that set out to identify the special character of each individual ACA and give guidance to homeowners, developers and planning professionals on the type of works that would require planning permission in that specific area.

## 2.0 Location and Boundary of the Architectural Conservation Area

Portrane is a small seaside settlement located at the end of Donabate peninsula on the east coast of Fingal. The Grey Square is located to the south of Portrane village, it is almost opposite the ruins of the medieval St. Catherine's Church and is immediately east of Red Square. It is accessed off Quay Road by a cul-de-sac lane opposite the village shop.

The Grey Square comprises two identical facing terraces of six three-bay, two-storey, plainly rendered houses on each side of a central north-south access road. Map evidence shows that they were built sometime between 1908 and 1937, and stylistically they would appear to date from the 1920s. The houses are numbered 49 to 54 on the east side and 55 to 60 on the west side.

The ACA encompasses the six houses, their front and back gardens, the street, rear access lanes and the curved access road from Quay Road. The following map shows the boundary of the ACA.

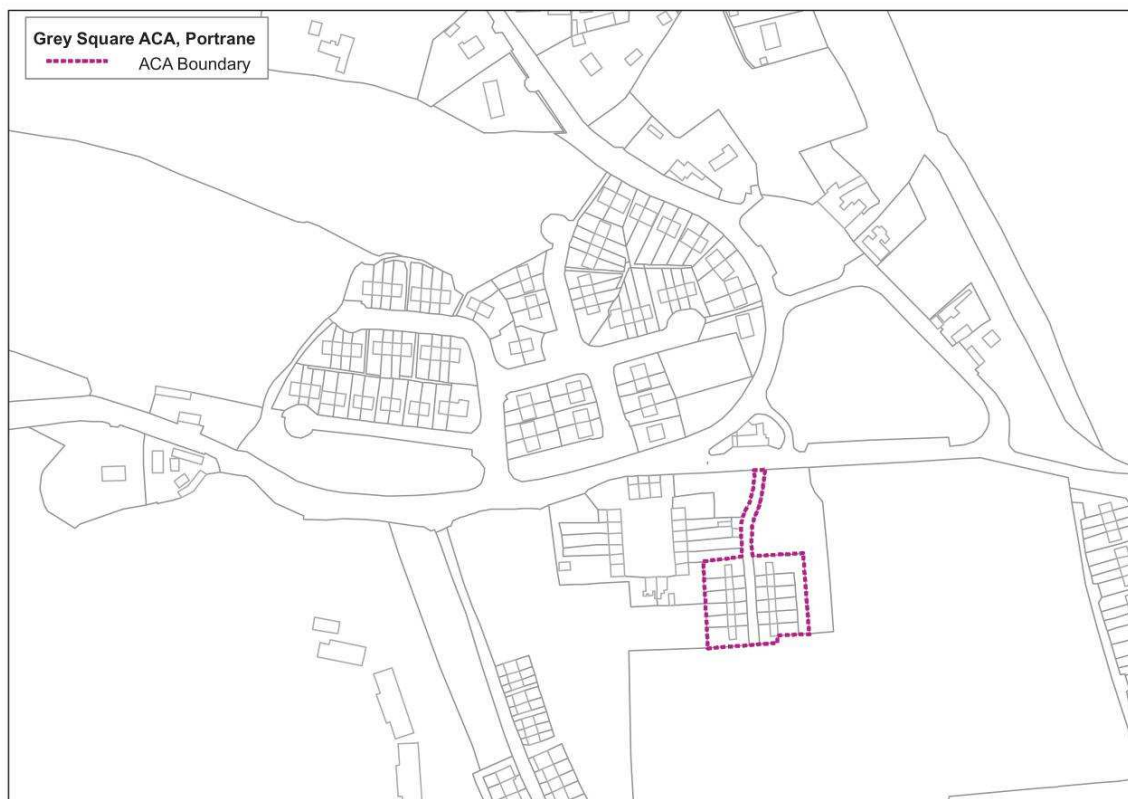


Fig. 1: Boundary map of The Grey Square ACA (not to scale)

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### 3.0 Schedule of Protected Structures

None of the buildings within the boundary of The Grey Square ACA are themselves Protected Structures. However, there are a number of protected structures in the vicinity of the Square.

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| RPS No. 294 | St. Catherine's Church (in ruins), Portrane Village |
| RPS No. 295 | No. 35 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 296 | No. 36 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 297 | No. 37 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 298 | No. 38 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 299 | No. 39 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 300 | No. 40 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 301 | No. 41 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 302 | No. 42 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 303 | No. 43 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 304 | No. 44 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 305 | No. 45 Red Square, Portrane                         |
| RPS No. 306 | St. Ita's Hospital Complex, Portrane Demesne        |

Portrane Demesne (St. Ita's Hospital Complex) is also an Architectural Conservation Area.

### 4.0 Development Plan Zoning & Objectives

In the Fingal Development Plan 2005-2011 the land within the ACA is zoned RS – *to provide for residential development and to protect and improve residential amenity*. The lands surrounding The Grey Square on all sides is zoned in the same way.

The land adjoining Quay Road at the eastern side of the access road is zoned NC – *to protect, provide for and/or improve neighbourhood centre facilities*. The land adjoining Quay Road at the western side of the access road is zoned OS – *to preserve and provide for open space and recreational facilities*.

The development strategy for Portrane is *to protect and retain the distinctive village character of the village and to protect and enhance existing natural amenities and built heritage, to strengthen the urban form in the centre of the village and to improve local service facilities*.

## 5.0 Historical Development of the Area

Portrane is a small coastal settlement, which is dominated by the late 19th century St. Ita's Hospital complex (formerly known as the Portrane Lunatic Asylum) built on the site of Portrane House & Demesne.

The name Portrane is an anglicised version of its original Irish name of Port-Reachrann [Portrahern], the port or landing place of Reachra, Reachra being the ancient Irish name for Lambay Island. Portrane appears to have formed part of the territory conquered by the Danish (Viking) King of Dublin as in 1040 Sitric, King of Dublin endowed it to Donatus, Bishop of Dublin, for the establishment of Christ Church. The ruins of the 14th century medieval church of St. Catherine's are located in the centre of the village, as are the ruins of Portrane Castle, a 13th century structure.

In the late 1880's the governing board of lunatic asylums in Ireland purchased the Evans estate at Portrane, Co. Dublin to be the site of a new asylum. Portrane House was a spacious early 18th century brick building in the centre of a demesne of about 460 acres. In August 1894 an architectural competition was held to choose a design for the New Lunatic Asylum. The winning entry was by George Ashlin and work commenced in 1896. Portrane House was used for a period of time as the residence of the Medical Superintendent, but was demolished in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

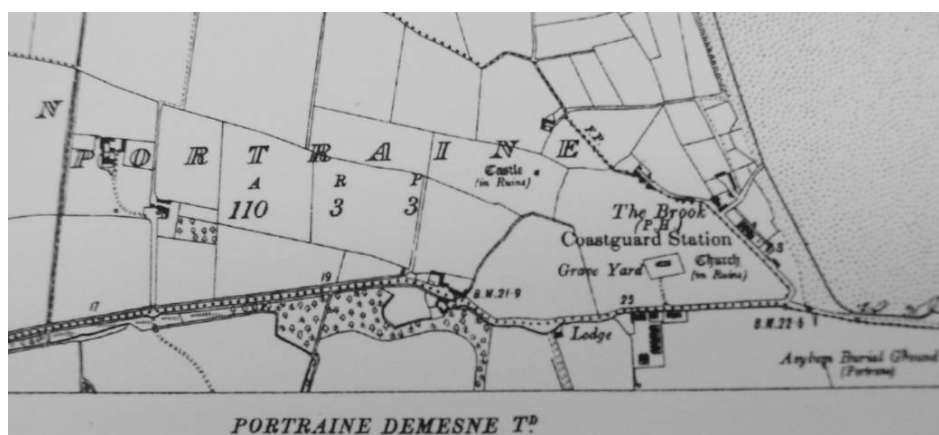


Fig. 2: Extract from Ordnance Survey map of 1909, showing that The Grey Square was not yet built

Grey Square was built as accommodation for the staff of St. Ita's Hospital. There were several schemes of housing built in the grounds for the staff, dating mostly to the early part of 20th century, other examples being the adjoining Red Square and the houses along the main avenue. The Grey Square development does not appear on the 1908 edition of the Ordnance Survey map. This was revised in 1937 by which time the square had been built (1940 edition). A site plan dating





## 6.0 Description of Existing Built Environment

### 6.1 Street Pattern and Materials

The Grey Square lies at the southern end of a small cul-de-sac roadway off Quay Road. The northern end forms a curved access road bounded by hedges and by walls at the ends of the back gardens of the neighbouring Red Square. The road is surfaced with tarmac with granite kerbstones forming the edge of footpaths in front of each of the terraces. Despite the quality of the kerb the road and footpaths are in poor condition and detract from the character of the ACA.



Fig. 5: Street surface and boundary to front gardens

### 6.2 Form and Arrangement of Open Space

Grey Square is not a square in the usual sense, as it is built only on two sides. The square is in fact a linear street composed of two uniform terraces of houses with front gardens facing each other across a secluded cul-de-sac.

Some front gardens retain their original form with a central path leading from a garden gate to the front door and lawns on either side. Other gardens have been paved over or, in a few cases, used for off-street parking. The front boundary was originally composed of two horizontal rails of steel with intermediary steel uprights, set between slender concrete piers with chamfered caps on a low plinth wall, each property having a central pedestrian gate. The steel railing survives in places, though generally corroded and hidden in box hedging. In other cases the railings have been replaced with other infill, in the main retaining the concrete piers. An original gate survives at house number 55. The rear boundaries to the gardens and rear access lanes are in-situ cast concrete walls with local aggregate.



Fig. 5: Original gate at house number 55



Fig. 6: Original railing at house number 54

### 6.3 Socio-Economic Functions

All houses are in residential use. The HSE has sold the houses to private owners in recent years with the last two remaining houses in HSE ownership (Nos. 49 and 60) for sale in mid 2008.

### 6.4 Built Fabric

Due to the former collective ownership by the HSE and appropriate repairs or reinstatement of features by some private owners the houses have retained a uniformity which is seldom seen in terraced houses in individual ownership.

Each terrace consists of six unpainted rendered houses of uniform two-storey design one room deep and unified by a continuous pitched roof with overhanging eaves, hipped at either end. Each terrace retains the original natural slate roof covering over its full length and this does much to strengthen the coherence and uniformity which are the central aspect of the character of the ACA. The roofs have clay ridge tiles, cast-iron rainwater goods and rendered stacks in the hip-ends and on the party walls.



Fig. 7: Eastern terrace

Each house is three unequal bays wide with a shallow-projecting entrance positioned slightly off-centre. Original doors had six glazed panes in the upper third with a deep lock rail with letterbox above plain vertical panels. Three original doors survive at Nos. 51, 56 and 58, with close variants at Nos. 53, 55 and 57. Painted multi-pane timber windows are a major defining element of the character of the terrace. Three of the four windows to the front of each house are striking tripartite sash windows, also known as Wyatt windows, one of the ground floor windows being a smaller six-over-six paned sash window. Windows have been replaced in three houses in uPVC and this detracts significantly from the character of the square. Ground floor window and door openings are articulated with chamfered lintels of terracotta-tinted concrete with curved chamfer-stops. Lintels and sills of the same material have been painted over in all houses except for Nos. 49 and 58.



**Fig. 8: House no. 56 with original front door and windows**

Rainwater pipes and gutters have been replaced on each side of the terrace in a piecemeal manner. Sufficient material remains of the original cast-iron goods to determine that they are plain round and half-round with segmental hopper heads and plain brackets. The houses originally had two-storey single-bay flat roofed returns to the rear, paired for every two houses (see Fig. X, Site Plan of 1953). Rear access is provided via a path bounded by the original boundary wall to the west terrace and by an extended vehicular access bounded by a concrete block wall to the rear of the east terrace.

## **6.5 Views**

The Grey Square stands adjoining an expansive open site which forms part of the demesne of St Ita's Hospital. This situation allows impressive views from and through the square towards the mature trees which surround the hospital on high ground to the south. The higher structures



within the hospital complex form the focus of these views, which contribute to the special character of the ACA.



**Fig. 9: View to St. Ita's Hospital with tower to left of view**



**Fig. 10: The Grey Square from south with view to tower of St Catherine's Church**

A second significant view is that of the ruins of St Catherine's Church in the village of Portrane to the northwest, its side walls to nearly full height and a western tower topped with crow-stepped battlements. The view out of the square to St Catherine's Church is marred by the local shop on Quay Road, a two-storey building which occupies a central position in the view out of the square to the north.



**Fig. 11: View to north of The Grey Square with shop on Quay Road**

Looking into the ACA from Quay Road and St. Catherine's Church the uniformity of the terraces is very apparent.



**Fig 12: The Grey Square from St Catherine's graveyard**

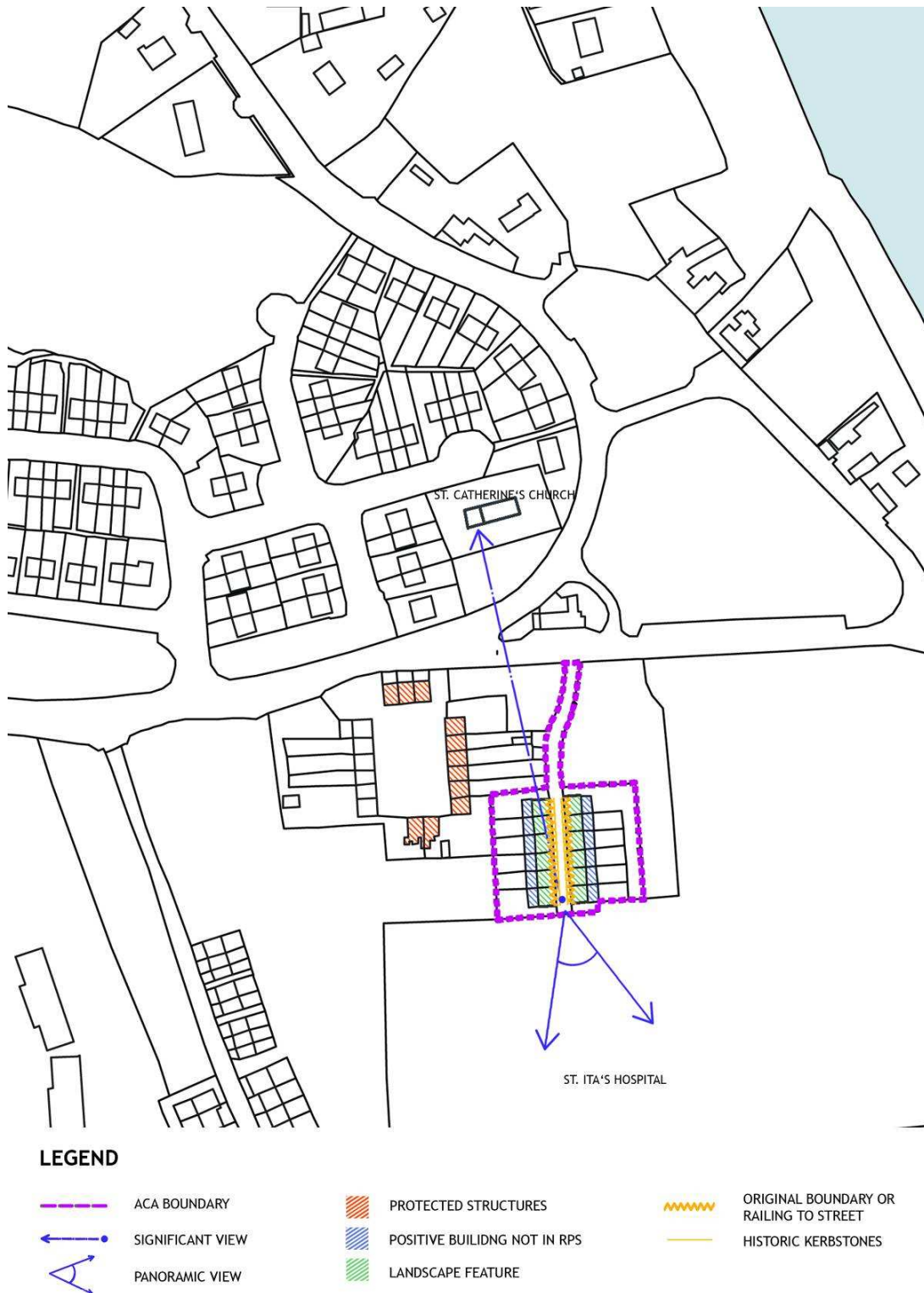


Fig 13: Annotated map of The Grey Square ACA showing significant features

## Summary of Special Character

The significance of the two terraces which form The Grey Square ACA lies in the uniformity and quality of their design, materials and layout, and in their physical and cultural relationship to St. Ita's Hospital, Portrane.

The square is a set-piece of two facing terraces comprising six houses each. The houses are of formal design and are good examples of the domestic architecture of the 1920s. The scheme survives as a strongly coherent design entity, although some alterations have occurred to the exteriors and to site features. The design and materials are of a high quality and of formal architectural character. The defining features are the unpainted rendered walls, the tripartite Wyatt windows, the Edwardian-style front doors with glazed upper panels, the uniform roofs hipped at the ends of each terrace and modest front gardens with boundary treatment of a functional simplicity which are typical for the period.

The layout and proportion of the terraces forming the ACA has a comfortable and intimate scale. Views out of the square to St. Catherine's Church and to the towers of the St. Ita's complex enrich the quality of the space. The cul-de-sac makes for a degree of privacy for the residents and the curve in the access laneway is a positive feature which contributes to this secluded character. Views of the square from the surrounding landscape and from the main road enhance the historic character of Portrane village.

The Grey Square is closely associated with the development of St. Ita's Hospital, and lies within the grounds of the historic demesne. St. Ita's has played a vital role in the development of Portrane village, providing employment and housing to the local community. The square was built with a progressive social purpose and, as an example of a housing scheme built for employees of a psychiatric hospital, it provides insight into the history of the development of the hospital and the health service in general, and is therefore of social and historical significance.

## 7.0 Implications for Planning and Development

The objective of Architectural Conservation Area designation is to protect the special character of an area through the careful control and positive management of change of the built environment. The Planning & Development Act 2000 requires that planning permission be obtained for all development works except for those deemed to be exempted development, which Section 4(1)(h) of the Act defines as follows:

*Development consisting of the carrying out of works for the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of any structure, being works which affect only the interior of the structure or which do not materially affect the external appearance of the structure so as to render the appearance inconsistent with the character of the structure or of the neighbouring structures.*

With regard to Architectural Conservation Areas, it is important to note that works, which would not under normal circumstances be inconsistent with the character of an area, may affect the particular character of an ACA and would therefore not be exempt. Section 82(1) and (2) of the Act defines exempted development in the context of an ACA:

*(1) Notwithstanding section 4 (1)(h), the carrying out of works to the exterior of a structure located in an architectural conservation area shall be exempted development only if those works would not materially affect the character of the area.*

*(2) In considering an application for permission for development in relation to land situated in an architectural conservation area, a planning authority, or the Board on appeal, shall take into account the material effect (if any) that the proposed development would be likely to have on the character of the architectural conservation area.*

Assigning ACA status to a streetscape, group of buildings or to a town or village core therefore results in considerable restrictions on works to the exteriors of structures within the boundary of the ACA. Planning permission is required for any new build works to visible sides of buildings or for changes to original materials, such as windows, wall finishes, boundary walls, roof coverings etc. New infill development and alterations to existing structures are subject to planning permission and only proposals which respect or enhance the special character of the area can be granted permission.

More detailed direction is given in the following section on the type of works that will or will not require planning permission.



Protected structures: Planning permission is required for all works, internal or external, that would materially affect the character of a protected structure, or any element of the structure including its curtilage, which contributes to its special character. Works to a protected structure that constitute essential repairs or maintenance require a declaration from Fingal County Council under Section 57 of the Planning & Development Act 2000. A declaration issued under this section sets out the type of works the Planning Authority considers would or would not affect the character of a structure, or any elements which contribute to its special interest.

Non-protected structures: Owners and occupiers of non-protected structures located within The Grey Square ACA should be aware that works, which in the opinion of the Planning Authority would materially affect the character of the ACA will require specific grant of planning permission under Section 82(1) of the Planning & Development Act 2000.

Public Domain: Agencies and service-providers carrying out works to the public realm e.g. footpaths, planting, street furniture, parking schemes, public lighting, etc., are required to consider the special character of the area as identified in this document, and should consult with the Planning Department and Conservation Officer of Fingal County Council.

## 8.1 Works Requiring Planning Permission

### 8.1.1 External Walls

Repairs to Render: The elevations of the 12 terrace houses in The Grey Square are rendered and this is ruled to look like stone blocks. The render finish is a key contributor to the distinctive architectural character of the ACA. The removal of render would damage the authentic character of the square and would be deemed unacceptable. Repairs should be done in a manner suited to the articulation of the render as 'blocks' and not run across the block pattern. The character of the render is in large part due to its aged patina and the ruled-and-lined block pattern.

Painting: The render finish to the structures within the ACA was always intended to remain unpainted. Unpainted renders add to the aged patina of the conservation area and should not be painted over. Careful removal of the paint from the tinted concrete lintels and sills of the window and door openings would be encouraged by Fingal County Council as this would allow the uniformity of the elevations, a key aspect of the special character of the ACA, to be better appreciated. Abrasive or destructive methods should not be used (see next paragraph on cleaning). Some of the render at window reveals has been painted over and this should not be removed in a manner that would damage the render or give it a 'new' or un-weathered appearance. No further reveals should be painted.

Cleaning: Abrasive cleaning methods, such as coarse grit-blasting or chemical cleaning agents damage the external surface of natural building materials and are therefore not acceptable in historic buildings. Non-abrasive cleaning methods may be appropriate, but these must preserve the aged appearance of the historic building. Particularly in a consciously designed terrace such as The Grey Square cleaning of individual houses can mar the unity of the overall group. Cleaning measures will always require planning permission.

Ventilation outlets: A number of different grill outlets have been installed in the elevations. These detract from the uniformity of the facades and the character of the ACA. Careful consideration needs to be given as to the design of any new vents and where these can be discreetly placed on the exterior. Potentially any new requirement for ventilation should be met through the rear elevation or the roof. Removal of existing vents should be considered and the render made good in an inconspicuous manner.

External Cladding: Covering external walls with different finishes is not acceptable in The Grey Square ACA. Original exterior finishes must always be retained and planning permission will not be granted for changes which affect the special character and uniformity of the ACA.

### 8.1.2 Roofs

Roofing Materials: The removal of the original roofing material, ridge tiles, chimneys, eaves details, cast iron gutters and downpipes, and their replacement with modern materials can seriously damage the character of the ACA. Original coverings and elements can generally be repaired and reused and should always be retained. Where roof repairs require that coverings are taken up and re-laid, some loss of original material may be unavoidable. In this case lost material must be replaced with materials which are historically correct, matching the original in colour, size and material. Where roof coverings of individual houses need to be re-laid, the continuous coursing of the slates across the length of the terrace should not be altered. Differing slate sizes or row widths, visible flashings, cut slates, or other vertical divisions would seriously alter the character of the roofs and will not be permitted. Materials used in small repairs should also be historically correct to prevent incremental erosion of the character of the ACA.

Roof pitch: The roof pitch along the two terraces is very shallow and would not appear to have sufficient head heights to facilitate living accommodation. The character of The Grey Square ACA derives from its uniform architectural treatment, the roof being one of the principal unifying features. Therefore changes to the angle, ridge height, eaves level or span of roofs would not be acceptable within the ACA.

Roof Lights: The installation of roof lights on the main roof pitches to illuminate the attic would be seen from all sides and would fundamentally alter the visual character of the ACA. Therefore, it is recommended that where required attics are lit using internal lighting and that roof lights would only be acceptable on extensions.

Dormer Windows: The introduction of dormer windows would fundamentally change the special character of the terraces. Dormers are therefore not acceptable to either front, hip or back of the roofs.

Satellite antenna, TV aerials and other communications devices: The proliferation of TV aerials on both terraces detracts from the character of the ACA. The addition of further such installations to the front elevations or roofs of structures within the ACA would be considered to have a negative impact on the character of the area. Satellite dishes should not be visible on the front elevation of buildings. Planning permission is required for the installation of satellite dishes to front of any structure, whether located in an ACA or not. Less visible methods of TV reception, such as cable TV, should be used and where the existing aerials have become redundant they should be removed.

### 8.1.3 Windows & Doors

Alteration of Openings: Any alteration of window or door openings to the front of the houses would alter the symmetry and proportions of the terraces. Such changes would therefore be detrimental to the special character of the ACA and would not be acceptable.

New Openings: New window openings in the front or end elevations of the terraces would alter the character of the ACA and would therefore not be acceptable.

Replacement of Windows or External Doors: Original timber windows and doors are key features which enrich the character of the ACA. Authentic historic fenestration and in particular the three surviving original external doors (Nos. 51, 56 and 58) are crucial to the preservation of the character of the ACA. Decayed timber sections can in most cases be repaired and cannot be accepted as a reason for replacement. Replacement of windows and doors with modern artificial materials such as uPVC or aluminium has a particularly negative impact and will always be deemed unacceptable. Unfortunately, some of the original windows and doors have already been replaced. Surviving windows and original doors should be used as reference for repairs or for replacement of historically incorrect insertions. Where windows and doors have been altered or replaced prior to ACA designation, reinstatement in correct historic design will be encouraged, and where planning applications are made for the buildings concerned, such reinstatement may be made a condition of permission. Any alteration to windows or doors within The Grey Square ACA requires planning permission. A few properties (i.e. Nos. 53, 55, 57 and to an extent No. 60) have replacement front doors that are close variations of the original design.

### 8.1.4 Extensions

Extensions to Front or Side: No additions including external lobbies or porches will be allowed to the front or end elevations of structures within this ACA, as they would fundamentally alter the character of the terraces.

Rear Extensions in General: The terraces are highly visible to their rear sides and any proposed rear extension could materially affect the external appearance of the houses. For extensions to the rear of the terraces to be deemed exempted development (apart from the normal planning considerations in relation to the size of the extension and private open space requirements, etc.), such extensions should be designed to be subsidiary to the main building and of an appropriate scale, not rising above the level of the eaves. New window openings at first floor level should be similar in size, proportion and glazing pattern to original windows at this level. All extensions

should be sensitive in terms of materials and articulation. Roofs surfaces and pitches should match the historic roofs and rainwater goods should be of cast iron. Windows and doors should be of natural wood. uPVC is not acceptable for any external items, whether windows, fascias, soffits of rainwater goods. A level of consistency appears to have been established as to the rear building line for extensions and any new extension should consider adhering to this.



Fig 13: View of the rear of the western terrace



Fig 14: View of the rear of the eastern terrace

Rear Extensions to End Houses: The four end houses (Nos. 49, 54, 55 and 60) have not yet been added to and extensions to the rear of these houses are particularly sensitive as they terminate the terraces. Therefore, planning permission would be required where it is proposed to construct a two-storey rear extension, due to the fact that these are the most prominent sites on the terrace. The narrow end walls and the hipped roof continuing around to the rear of the houses are an important feature, which lend the terraces a slender quality when viewed from a distance. In many other houses the rear view has been detrimentally eroded by the addition of second floor extensions with roofs that obscure the eaves. Any extension to the end houses should be articulated in such a way as would not to diminish the legibility of the depth of the main building volume, or further interrupt the reading of the roof form and should be set back from the face of

the end wall. Original windows to the rear of the end houses add to the three-dimensional quality of the terraces and should therefore be retained where they survive.



Fig 15: View of end of terrace situation to south-west

#### 8.1.5 Demolition

Demolition of any house within the ACA will not be permitted. Where permission is sought for demolition on the grounds of structural defects or fire, a condition report produced by a suitably qualified and experienced conservation professional, supported by photographs and drawings indicating locations of defects will be required. Justification on structural grounds for any demolition within this ACA must include details of repairs or remedial works normally used in similar circumstances, demonstrating why they are not suitable in that instance. A full photographic record will be required before any demolition commences. In the exceptional circumstance where a house must be replaced, the replacement should be an exact replica of the historic original, in order to preserve the uniformity which is central to the special character of The Grey Square.

#### 8.1.6 Gardens and Boundary Treatments

Front Garden Boundaries: The original boundary treatment as described above is an essential feature of the architectural character of The Grey Square ACA. Removal of railings, boundary walls, dividing railings, piers, gates, etc. will always require planning permission. Loss of such features can be seriously damaging to the character of the ACA and is therefore not acceptable. No further removal of front boundaries to allow parking in front gardens will be permitted, and

Fingal County Council will encourage the reinstatement of front gardens where this has already been provided. Section 8.4.1 of this document suggests options to deal with the management of parking in The Grey Square and Fingal County Council is investigating these and will consult with residents on this matter. Surviving concrete piers, railings and gates of the front garden boundaries should always be retained. These should be repaired with like-for-like where they are corroded. Reinstatement of lost features to correct historic detail will be encouraged by the planning authority, or required by condition where appropriate when granting permission for developments within the ACA. Concrete piers and plinths should not be painted, and further picket fences will not be permitted.



**Fig. 16: Degraded boundary situation retaining historic elements**

Front Gardens: The historic garden layout with a central path to the front door flanked by lawn areas, as survives at Nos. 55 and 56, is the correct design for the front gardens. Where improvements to altered gardens are desired this design should form the model for any change. Removal of car parking from front gardens is seen as particularly desirable.

Rear Boundaries: The rear garden walls should be considered as part of the historic boundary treatment. Consideration should be given to improvement of later additions such as by rendering exposed blockwork walls and replacing precast concrete copings with render copings in a manner sympathetic to the render of the terrace elevations.

Rear Gardens to Red Square: The rear garden walls of properties in Red Square that back onto the road leading to The Grey Square require definition in terms of consistency of height and materials. At present there is a mixture of exposed walling materials with blank metal and wooden gates which detract significantly from the special character of the ACA and disrupt the simplicity of the approach into the square. These walls lie within the curtilage of protected structures on Red Square and form the boundary of The Grey Square ACA, and therefore any



changes will require planning permission. Any proposal should aim to enhance the character of the approach road and where walls are deemed necessary for functional or security reasons they should be integrated into the existing road boundary and located behind a hedge similar to the existing hedge.



**Figs. 17 & 18: View of the approach road from the north**

#### 8.1.7 External Lighting.

Proposals for the illumination at night by individual owners of buildings and other features within the ACA requires the consent of Fingal County Council. The method of lighting, i.e. type of fitting, fixing method and type of light, must be specified by the applicant in seeking permission and should be designed so that it does not affect public lighting levels, result in light pollution, or negatively impact on other structures in the ACA.



## 8.2 New Developments Adjoining the ACA

At present there is a vacant field to the south of the square that connects to the grounds of St. Ita's Hospital, situated on a low hill. From The Grey Square a body of mature trees screening the hospital can be seen with the tallest landmark structures visible on the skyline. The terraces are not on axis with any particular feature of the skyline; the water tower and round tower are off to the east of the axis and the main tower of St. Ita's is off to the west of the axis. From the site to the south of The Grey Square the terraces of houses can be seen with the sea in the background. To the west an open field stretches to the rear of houses located on the access road to St. Ita's. To the east an open field meets the main road and the open space continues more or less uninterrupted towards the sea. These views form essential elements of the special character of The Grey Square ACA.

The Grey Square is one of three examples of a similar typology of housing arrangement found on the northern periphery of St. Ita's. Directly to the west Red Square is accessed from a corner on the north and is closed by a terrace on the south. Further west the terrace of houses along the main avenue into St. Ita's is another variation, here the buildings stand either side of the road. All three arrangements are orientated towards the hospital and are clearly related to one another and to St. Ita's in their character, forming a wider context of social heritage interest. New developments should respect this relationship.

In order to preserve the character of the ACA any development on sites surrounding the ACA should adhere to the following set of principles:

1. The form and layout of any development to the south must not change the spatial intimacy of the ACA. A spatial continuity as part of a general visual relationship to St. Ita's on its elevated position may be desirable, but any development in this location should not attempt to continue the terraces of the ACA and so alter the scale and proportion of the composition.
2. The road in The Grey Square should provide access only to the residents of the square and should not be used as an access route to any development to the south of the ACA.
3. If buildings are to be located to the south of the square, they should be at a distance to and of a height relative to the terraces that would not compete with them in terms of scale, volume and expression. New buildings should not be close to the end of the terraces or be allowed to close the south opening of the square.
4. The form and layout of any development to the east and west of the ACA should not compete with The Grey Square buildings in terms of scale, volume or expression.

5. Buildings in any development to the east and west of the ACA should not face the rear side of The Grey Square terraces, this is important in order to support the definition of front (public) and back (private) of the terraces.
6. Any development to the north of the ACA should not block the view to St. Catherine's church. This is situated close to the ACA and is an important part of the character of the vista from the square. Likewise it is important to allow the northern end gables of the terraces to be seen from the main road.
7. A redevelopment of the existing shop on the main road would be desirable in order to improve the relationship of this building to the ACA. It has a scale and articulation alien to the setting of the square and unnecessarily draws attention to itself, competing visually with the church ruin.



**Fig. 19: View of The Grey Square from the south in the direction of the sea**



**Fig. 20: Modern shop on Quay Road**

### **8.3 Works Not Requiring Planning Permission**

#### **8.3.1 Maintenance & Repairs**

Planning permission is not required for regular maintenance and necessary localised repairs works, such as replacement of missing slates, rainwater goods or repairs to windows within the ACA, as long as original materials are retained, and necessary replacement is strictly limited to damaged fabric, and made on a like-for-like basis. Repairs which use incorrect materials or detailing erode the character of the ACA and are not permissible.

#### **8.3.2 Internal Alterations**

ACA designation for The Grey Square does not prevent internal changes or re-arrangements to buildings within the area that are not protected structures, as long as these changes do not impact on the exterior of the building.

#### **8.3.3 Restoration of Character**

Where original materials have been removed and replaced with modern or inappropriate alternatives, the restoration or reinstatement of these features will not require planning permission where the method, materials and details for the works have been agreed with the Conservation Officer.

#### **8.4 Works to the Public Realm**

The public domain in The Grey Square ACA is currently in the care of the Health Service Executive but this situation may change in the near future as an application has been made by the HSE to Fingal County Council to take this area in charge.

Works affecting the character of the public realm will therefore require planning permission, until such future point when it is taken in charge by Fingal County Council.

Works by major utility and service providers may be exempt from planning permission, but must be carried out in consultation with the Conservation Officer and planning department of Fingal County Council. If taken in charge by the local authority, all departments of the Council intending to carry out works within the ACA must consult the Conservation Staff before any works commence, to ensure that these works do not adversely affect, but rather enhance the character of the area.

The character of the ACA can be strengthened, enhanced or better appreciated if certain improvements are made to the public realm. Areas that could benefit from improvement are detailed below.

##### **8.4.1 Management of Parking**

At present there are significant limitations on parking within the square and the cars located there visually clutter the space and restrict views to the space and to gates, railings and hedges. Parking is currently possible to one side of the road only and cars are parked partially on the footpath making it too narrow for pedestrian use. In order to allow better appreciation of the square parking should be removed from the central space of the ACA.



**Figs. 21 & 22: Existing parking in the square**

To preserve the character of the ACA the following solutions for provision of necessary parking should be considered:

1. Parking should be restricted to the north or east of the square with no parking in the street in front of the houses. This street should be for access and drop-off only.
2. As an alternative parking could be provided in pockets to the south east and south west of the terrace beyond the present boundary wall, as part of future redevelopment of the adjoining site.
3. The winding approach road and its hedges contribute strongly to the character of the ACA. Any provision of parking near this area should not open up this passage-way in a manner that would unduly expose the terraces to the main road or be visually intrusive from the centre of The Grey Square.
4. Kerbing, line-painting and other means of delineation for parking, where necessary, should be designed in such a way that the surface quality of the open spaces in the ACA does not suffer when cars are absent. A high standard of landscape design should be employed and the Conservation Office should be consulted regarding the impact of proposed parking schemes on the special character of the area.

#### 8.4.2 Paving & Street Furniture

The road and path surfaces are in a bad state of repair. There are many potholes and the paths are used as a driving and parking surface. Although the stone kerbing is complete at present it has been pressed into the ground and barely marks any difference of height between road and path. The paths need to be clearly defined in terms of continuity and height difference to the carriageway in their full length out to the junction with the main road.

#### 8.4.3 Lighting

A lighting scheme in keeping with the character of the terrace should be developed that provides light for pedestrians in the space and along the approach road. Consideration should be given to the placement and quantity of the lights and the quality of the light itself. The aim should be to provide adequate safety without obtrusively intense lighting levels.

#### 8.4.4 Planting & Landscaping

The design of open spaces should strive for the spatial simplicity that is characteristic of the ACA. The Conservation Office should be consulted in the design of any such schemes, to ensure that the impact on the historic character of the square is acceptable.

#### 8.4.5 Traffic & Parking Signage

Designs for lighting standards, signage and other fittings should be of a scale sympathetic to the character of the ACA. Where historic evidence of street furniture does not exist, new elements should be chosen to be low-key, and conspicuous arrays of lamp standards or bollards should be avoided.

#### 8.4.6 Wires And Distribution Poles

The architectural character of The Grey Square would benefit enormously from the removal of overhead electricity supply and telephone cables and placing these underground. The cables are very conspicuous because of their disorderly appearance, number and density and they have a negative presence in the views between the buildings and out to both ends. Fingal County Council will facilitate and support any further initiatives within the ACA to place overhead services underground. This work should be undertaken as part of any paving and road finishes scheme. Utility companies should be required to remove redundant services from the facades of houses in the ACA.



**Fig. 23: Overhead cables in the square**

#### 8.4.7 Waste collection

In order to remove bins from the fronts of the buildings the establishment of a communal bin bay to the north of the development should be encouraged. Refuse vehicles should be discouraged from entering the road where turning is not possible. A policy of using large communal bins and recycling banks should be implemented to remove wheelie bins or any bag collections from the street.

#### NOTE:

The works outlined in this final section are not a comprehensive list of all works, in all circumstances, that require planning permission, but help identify the type of works that would impact on the character of the ACA. Development works would still have to adhere to the general provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2002 and Planning Regulations. The Area Planner and Conservation Officer of Fingal County Council can be consulted if there is any doubt as to whether planning permission is or is not required.