

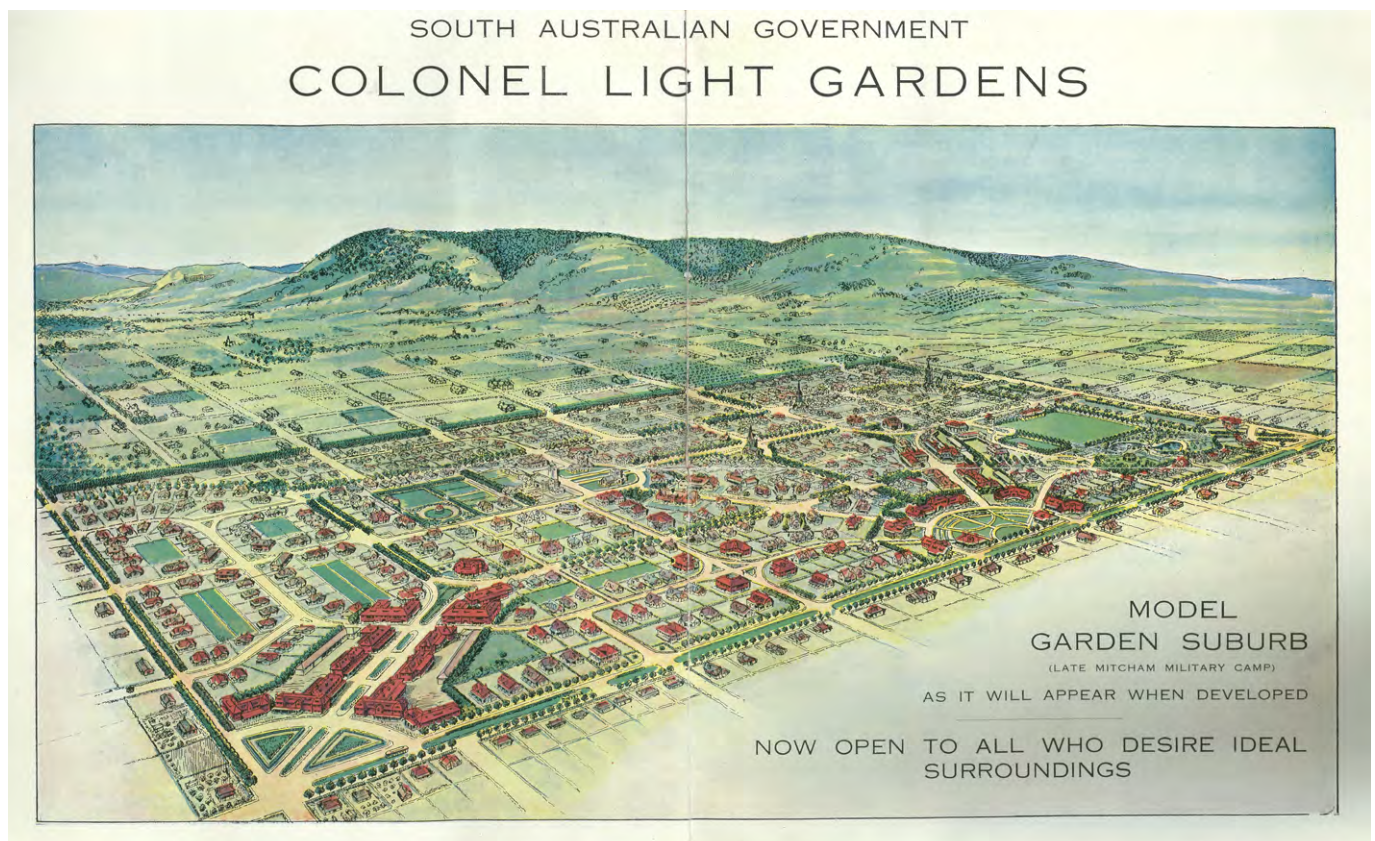
# 2. Heritage Value

## 2.1. Statement of Significance (Colonel Light Gardens State Heritage Area)

'The suburb of Colonel Light Gardens is of heritage value for the following reasons:

- It exemplifies the theories of town planning of the early 20th century based on the Garden City concept, and is considered the most complete and representative example of a Garden Suburb in Australia, combining both town planning, aesthetic and social elements into coherent plan. The public and private spaces of the suburb meld to create a distinctive three-dimensional suburban design.
- It represents the best work of Charles C. Reade, who was the first appointed Town Planner in Australia and South Australian Government Planner from 1916–20. Reade was the leading exponent of the Garden City Movement to practise in Australia.
- It is the repository of the majority of houses built under the mass housing programme of the Labor Government of the 1920s known as the Thousand Homes Scheme and became the area identified with the scheme. International visitors were taken to view the housing developments at Colonel Light Gardens during the 1920s. It contains a homogeneous style of residential architecture representing the particular workingman's house idiom of the mid-1920s, developed from the Californian Bungalow design.
- It is the embodiment of other, more ephemeral social concepts of the 1920s such as 'post-war reconstruction,' 'homes for returned soldiers' and 'community spirit and self-help' which led to the creation and development of a community.'

*(as entered on the South Australian Heritage Register, 4 May 2000)*



*Colonel Light Gardens 'as it will appear when developed'. Coloured birds eye perspective of the model garden suburb in Colonel Light Gardens: Comfort, Convenience, Beauty [1921]. Courtesy of Architecture Museum, University of South Australia.*

## 2.2. What is of heritage significance?

Colonel Light Gardens is closely associated with the phenomenon of suburban development in Australia and with the popular aspiration for living and owning a home in the suburbs. It was established in the 1920s as a model garden suburb by the South Australian Government and demonstrates the distinctive influence of both the modern town planning movement and the garden city idea on planned 20th century residential environments.

Charles Compton Reade (1880–1933) designed Colonel Light Gardens in 1917. He was ‘the single most important figure in Australian garden city history’<sup>15</sup> and a major contributor to the garden city story internationally. Built mostly between 1921 and 1927, Colonel Light Gardens is distinguished from other Australian garden suburbs because of its comprehensive expression of garden city planning principles ‘strongly influenced by [the international exemplar] of Hampstead Garden Suburb’ but adapted to suit Australian conditions and cultural preferences.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, it is the site of Australia’s first mass housing project, the Thousand Homes Scheme, which commenced in 1924.

The significance of Colonel Light Gardens as a planned environment was recognised at state level in South Australia in 2000 when the entire suburb was designated a State Heritage Area under the *Heritage Places Act 1993*. The suburb has been identified as one of 23 ‘indicative’ ‘major sites of planning heritage’ in Australia and singled out for its ‘iconic garden suburb status’.<sup>17</sup> In a nutshell, it captures ‘the essence of a planned landscape [which] lies not so much in individual elements as in their combination. It is less about the design of discrete buildings ... or their construction ... or green surrounds ... but more about their spatial interrelationships in making something special that is larger than the sum of the parts. The spaces between built structures are just as important as the structures themselves’.<sup>18</sup>

### The Garden City Idea, Garden City planning principles and the Garden Suburb

The Garden City idea originated in England at the turn of the 20th century. Its focus was on:

- improving human environments and particularly urban living and working conditions
- planning for people’s social, cultural, physical, emotional, and aesthetic needs
- facilitating opportunities for social interaction to enhance wellbeing and to foster community building
- creating healthy, visually harmonious, comfortable and convenient environments.

The garden city idea generated an internationally accepted approach to modern town planning known as ‘planning on garden city lines’. Applied initially at the city scale, the approach proved most successful at the suburban or residential level; hence the rise of what became known as the garden suburb.

A set of planning and design principles emerged to inform and direct the design and development of places planned on garden city lines. The principles were applied to sites around the world and adapted as necessary to suit local conditions and preferences. Wherever the location, the underpinning intent was to achieve a self-contained, physically and socially distinct place and a visually pleasing and harmonious environment characterised by ‘no jarring note’.<sup>19</sup> The distinctive physical characteristics were intended to contribute to a sense of place and to residents’ wellbeing and contentment with their environs, to social interaction and to community building.

15 Robert Freestone, *Model Communities: the Garden City Movement in Australia*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1989, p.76.

16 Robert Freestone, *Urban Nation: Australia’s Planning Heritage*, CSIRO and DEWHA and Australian Heritage Council, Collingwood, 2010, p.179; Christine Garnaut, *Colonel Light Gardens: model garden suburb*, Crossing Press, Sydney, 2006 (repr. 1<sup>st</sup> published 1997), especially chapter 5.

17 Freestone, *Urban Nation: Australia’s planning heritage*, 2010, pp.274-75, p.276; Christine Garnaut and Robert Freestone, ‘Colonel Light Gardens, History, Heritage and the Enduring Garden Suburb in Adelaide, South Australia, in Mary Corbin Sies, Isabelle Gournay and Robert Freestone (eds), *Iconic Planned Communities and the Challenge of Change*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2019, p.133).

18 Freestone, *Urban Nation*, p.4.

19 Quoted in Freestone, *Model Communities*, p.94; ‘By-Laws under the Garden Suburb Act 1919’, *South Australian Government Gazette* 29/9/1921, pp.719-720.

The key planning principles that underpinned the design of a garden suburb were:

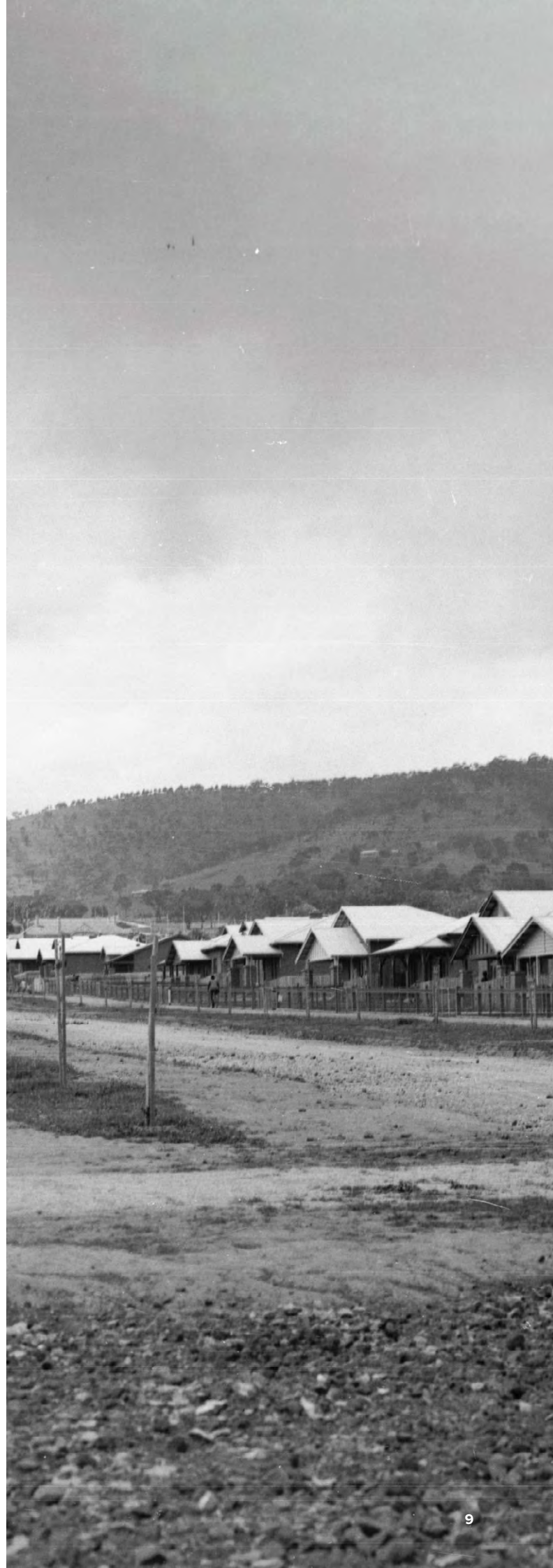
- A bounded site within which residents' everyday needs were accommodated.
- Areas set aside for specific uses – residential, commercial, educational, religious, recreational (local community and individual, and active and passive uses).
- Public open space of a variety of types and scales for a range of local community uses. Internal reserves for shared community use were a distinctive open space type in garden suburbs.
- A hierarchical road system. Roads were classified according to use. Typically, the widest took the largest volume of traffic. The narrowest were intended for access to residential streets.
- Variation in street width, line and length. Typically, 'curved, short arc and straight' also referred to as 'curvilinear symmetrical'<sup>20</sup>.
- A park-like environment created through preserving existing natural features, planting street trees, reserving open space, plantings in private gardens and in street garden reserves and melding of the public and private realm.
- Low density development.
- Detached single-storey dwellings sited with generous setbacks and ample front and back yard space. (Single story-detached dwellings was the Australian preference.)
- 'Architectural unity but not uniformity' achieved primarily through consistency of style, form, scale, colours and materials.<sup>21</sup>

Colonel Light Gardens' distinctive character is due to the Garden Suburb plan on which it was initially based, and the cohesive and consistent architectural style of its housing and buildings. Both of these aspects contribute to the heritage value of the suburb in the history and development of South Australia.

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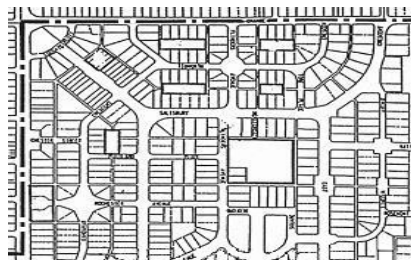
<sup>20</sup> Freestone, *Model Communities*, p.89.

<sup>21</sup> Principles are summarised from John Sulman, *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1921, p.106; Freestone, *Model Communities*, pp.87-94; *Garden Suburb Act 1919*: 'By-Laws under the Garden Suburb Act 1919', *South Australian Government Gazette* 29/9/1921; Garnaut, *Colonel Light Gardens*, especially chapters 5 and 8. Quote in last dot point from Garnaut, *Colonel Light Gardens*, 2006, p.89.



## Features within the State Heritage Area which contribute to the heritage value of the State Heritage Area include:

- a. Hierarchy of straight and curved symmetrical roadways of a variety of lengths, rounded street corners, and rear laneways, which discourage through traffic and are designed to create unfolding sequences of attractive, green and varied spaces and terminal vistas.



- b. A planned mix of wide and narrow streets with a dominant, established park-like landscaped character, with extensive reserve planting based on the original design intent (street tree species and layout, lawn, footpaths, vertical kerbing and simple pedestrian cross overs). Laneways without kerbs and paving.

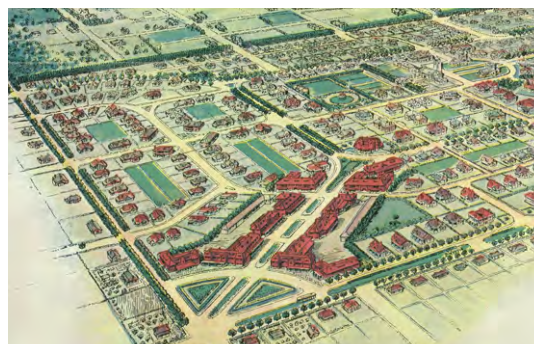


- c. Large river red gums in Freeling Crescent, Doncaster Avenue and Flinders Avenue.



- d. Suburb zones initially planned by function and location, including residential, commercial and educational, religious and recreational precincts

(part) Colonel Light Gardens 'as it will appear when developed'. Coloured birds eye perspective of the model garden suburb in Colonel Light Gardens: Comfort, Convenience, Beauty [1921]. Courtesy of Architecture Museum, University of South Australia



- e. The formality, planned purpose and abundance of open public reserves, formal street gardens and pocket parks, including shared parks to the rear of properties in the north of the suburb.



- f. Low-density residential development with dwellings sited on generous allotments with ample front, side and rear yards. Single detached dwellings of similar scale, design, and provenance, with consistent front and side setbacks – 1920s-39 in period.



*West Parkway looking south. 1930s. Source: Mitcham Heritage Research Centre*

#### **Architectural features of heritage value include:**

- face brick and/or stone construction, with brick or stone quoins – predominantly unpainted in finish



- gable or hipped/gablet roofs (22-25 degree range for bungalows, greater than 40 degrees for tudor style housing), clad with galvanised corrugated sheeting, with gable end render faces to some buildings
- Original scale of roof form, evident in ridge length, important to the understanding of the scale and type of early development within the suburb.



- simple face brick chimneys.



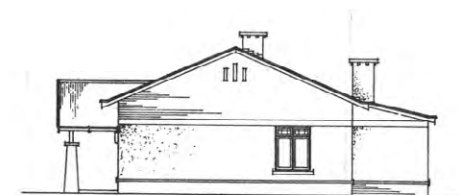
- timber framed, open verandahs with simple pitched or gable roofs, supported by masonry pillars or timber posts



- double or triple sash or casement timber windows



- traditional lean-to form additions to rear sections of dwellings



- freestanding sheds and garages of small scale in rear yards, but traditional in form – gable or single pitch, clad in corrugated steel sheeting



- front fencing – woven/ crimped wire supported by timber posts and rails. Woven/crimped wire gates with pipe framing. Hedging often featured behind fencing. Side fencing – corrugated galvanised sheet post and rail.



*B&W images - source: Mitcham Heritage Research Centre*