



# Planning circular

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## PLANNING SYSTEM

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Local character; Precincts

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<b>Circular</b>	PS 21-026
<b>Issued</b>	2 December 2021
<b>Related</b>	Replaces PS 18-001

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## Planning and designing for better places: respecting and enhancing local character

This circular provides guidance for local councils and other relevant planning authorities, state agencies and communities about the tools available to them to incorporate consideration of local character into strategic planning and detailed planning for places.

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### Introduction

Growth in NSW will continue and it is the role of the planning system to guide how growth will be managed, including by setting strategic targets for new housing to meet the needs of future communities.

Character is a critical element of local areas and neighbourhoods and needs to be carefully considered in future planning.

This circular provides advice on how the NSW planning system will deliver development that both meets the growing needs of NSW and is contextual, local and of its place - to make better places for everyone.

### What is local character?

Character is what makes one neighbourhood distinctive from another. It is the way a place 'looks and feels'. It is created by the way built and natural elements in both the public realm and private domain interrelate with one another, including the interplay between buildings, architectural style, subdivision patterns, activity, topography and vegetation.

It is important to ensure that consideration of character is understood to be distinct from considerations of heritage and conservation.

Compatibility is different from sameness, as it allows for many different features to coexist together harmoniously.

All places have character and what is important in one area might be very different in another. Good planning should ensure all places have a future desired character and once this has been established the planning framework can be used to guide the degree of change needed to achieve that vision.

Where major growth is planned, such as in growth areas or precincts, there are opportunities to enhance

the future character of these areas through the planning system to ensure the places we create become the much loved suburbs of the future.

In other areas where the existing character is valued by the community, there are opportunities to plan for the enhancement of that character for the enjoyment of existing and future residents.

Respecting character does not mean that new development cannot occur. Instead, it means that a design-led approach needs to be implemented which builds on the valued characteristics of individual neighbourhoods and places. Built form, bulk, scale and height as well as landscaping and good design all play a part in ensuring the character of an area is maintained while still allowing for new development to occur.

Good design in the built environment is informed by and derived from its location, context and social setting. It is place-based, relevant to and resonant with local character and community aspirations. It contributes to evolving and future character and setting.

### The role of character in the NSW planning system

NSW is rapidly growing and respecting and enhancing local character are important considerations in planning for the growth of our cities, towns and regions.

A growing population can bring the benefits of greater housing diversity and choice, job opportunities closer to home and investment in infrastructure, facilities and services. However, communities are also concerned that new development can impact the local character and amenity of their neighbourhood.

Places which develop in response to an identified local character and agreed desired future character are

likely to be more sustainable, contribute to good quality of life and attract investment.

Local character should be considered at every stage of the planning and development process in NSW. With the use of guidance and tools prepared by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (Department) and the Government Architect NSW, all stakeholders can play their part in ensuring that, as our communities grow, they become better places.

### **How can character be considered in the NSW planning system?**

Local character needs to be considered as part of strategic planning and when detailed plans for places are prepared. Local communities play an important role in defining what character is in their local area.

Consultation is essential throughout the plan-making process to ensure that character is planned for and consistent with the community's view of the desired future character of their area.

## **Strategic Planning**

### **Regional and district plans**

Regional and district plans set the strategic vision for communities across NSW. These plans are developed to manage our future needs for housing, jobs, infrastructure, and the environment, by recognising our shared economic, social, and environmental values and heritage.

Regional plans are prepared for the whole of NSW and district plans are prepared for metropolitan Sydney. These plans recognise and support local character by:

- Acknowledging that areas with a strong sense of local character are desirable places to live and work and support strong communities, and that this should be an objective in planning for all communities;
- Identifying that areas that build on existing local character contribute to the vitality and viability of centres;
- Emphasising that new development should respond to and reflect the existing character of an area; and
- Demonstrating how investing in local character can drive economic development and opportunity, particularly in regional areas.

### **Local housing strategies**

Local housing strategies enable councils to align the vision for their local area with the housing objectives and targets established in the relevant Regional Plan for regional areas, and for Sydney with the NSW Government's Greater Sydney Region Plan and District Plans. Councils implement local housing strategies through updates to their Local Environmental Plans (LEPs).

Local housing strategies are detailed strategic and implementation plans that show where and how new

homes are best to be developed in each local government area. These strategies will support the delivery of new homes in the right locations to meet the needs of a growing and changing population.

### **Planning for local communities - precincts**

A [new approach to precinct planning](#) has been developed to provide certainty and a way forward for precincts. It follows the Department's review in partnership with the Greater Sydney Commission and Government Architect. This review found the Department could better target its role in the delivery of precincts, giving councils and communities a greater say while allowing the Department a more focused set of priorities for better outcomes.

Local councils will be empowered to plan for their local areas because they know their people and communities best. The Department will continue to support and collaborate with each council to deliver great places while remaining focused on strategic issues and getting a coordinated approach from State agencies.

There are four pathways outlined in the new approach and a summary of each is provided below:

#### ***State-led strategic planning***

These projects will involve early investigations and high-level strategic planning work led by the Department, to inform future rezoning processes.

#### ***Collaborative planning between the State and councils***

In these precincts under the collaborative planning pathway, the Department plays a coordination role facilitating collaborative partnerships between other State agencies and councils to resolve complex issues.

Rezoning will generally be implemented by the council, although in certain cases they could become State-led.

#### ***State-led rezoning***

State-led rezonings focus on where there is a strategic imperative for the Department to lead. This includes places with current or future city-shaping infrastructure and investment and where the State has the opportunity to create great public spaces.

#### ***Council-led rezoning***

This new approach provides an opportunity for the councils to progress and lead rezoning in some of the existing precincts. These areas are those where the councils are best placed to deliver the detailed planning within their communities.

### **Local environmental plans (LEPs)**

LEPs represent local strategic planning in a statutory form. They are informed by regional and district plans, state and local policies and Community Strategic Plans.

The aims of an LEP can reflect character (clause 1.2 of the Standard Instrument LEP), where a council can describe the characteristics of the LGA, through zone objectives, principal development standards (such as height and FSR controls), additional local provisions and requirements for design excellence.

### **Local character in the Standard Instrument LEP**

The future of the implementation of local character in the Standard Instrument LEP is currently under consideration.

### **Development Control Plans (DCPs)**

DCPs are a key document for inclusion of more detailed guidance about implementation of LEP standards relating to design of development and consideration of local character.

Councils can include local character considerations in DCP provisions that relate to particular types of development or certain zones. DCPs can contain locality specific provisions, where local character considerations could be introduced through desired future character statements that build on the strategic vision contained in the council's Community Strategic Plan.

### **Better Placed and other design guidance**

*Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW* is a policy prepared by the Government Architect NSW to deliver a strategic approach to the design of the places in which we live, work and play. The policy seeks to ensure that as our cities and towns grow bigger, they get even better.

The policy provides useful guidance for communities, local councils and Government agencies about designing and building better places that are a '*Better Fit: Contextual, local and of its place*'.

The *State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 - Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development* and the associated *Apartment Design Guide* also contain useful guidance for all stakeholders in the planning system on the importance of design excellence in the built environment, and identifying local character and context in a range of local settings.

### **Further information**

*Better Placed* can be accessed at the Department's website at <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/About-Us/Office-of-the-Government-Architect>

The *Apartment Design Guide* can be accessed at: <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Housing/Apartment-Design-Guide>

Further information regarding the Local Character Provision EIE can be accessed on the Department's website.

For further information please contact Service NSW on 13 77 88.

Department of Planning, Industry and Environment circulars are available at:

[planning.nsw.gov.au/circulars](http://planning.nsw.gov.au/circulars)

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