

Media release



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Local character key to new developments in growth areas

The local character of a neighbourhood will be front and centre for new development as part of guidelines to ensure communities have a voice in the future “look and feel” of their suburbs.

A new planning circular – *Respecting and enhancing local character in the planning system* – from the Department of Planning and Environment demonstrates the importance of maintaining local character, and encouraging community participation early on.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment’s Deputy Secretary for Policy, Strategy & Governance, Alison Frame, said while planning for Sydney’s inevitable growth was important, the look and feel of neighbourhoods had to be a priority.

“Character is a critical element of neighbourhoods – people are emotionally invested in their local area. They want to be able to shape how it will look in the future and this circular helps with that,” Ms Frame said.

“New developments need to do two things – respect local character and provide green, open space and parks.”

The new guidelines were informed by the work of The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community, a pioneer in the UK of working with communities to develop characterful places that respect local identity

Experts and planners from The Prince’s Foundation in London, ran a series of workshops for government, industry and the community last year.

“Since then, the Department has done a lot of work to progress new guidelines that put the local character of a neighbourhood front and centre as a consideration for new developments,” Ms Frame said.

“A centrepiece of good place -making is a community consultation and engagement process that considers local character from the outset in planning for new developments.”

Local community participation is central to the new circular and key to the recent sweeping reforms to planning legislation as part of the EP&A Act.

In the new legislation, every council and the Department will need to prepare a community participation plan, which spells out how and when they will engage with their communities.

To improve accountability, decision-makers will have to give reasons for their decisions.

“The message is loud and clear – communities need and want to be part of the plans from the outset. Their involvement is integral to the success of delivering better places for present and future generations,” Ms Frame said.

The planning circular:

- Will assist with the future urban renewal plans for planned growth precincts with local character statements that are developed with the community from the outset;
- Can be used as Local Environment Plans (LEP) are prepared and a council determines a local area through zoning, height and floor space ratios and add expectations for design excellence;
- Can be used to help implement district and regional strategic plans to create places with a strong sense of local character that are desirable places to live;
- Will assist with councils’ Local Housing Strategies that will strike a balance between respecting and enhancing local character and accommodating the community’s future housing, infrastructure and social needs.

Ms Frame added that respecting character doesn’t mean new development can’t occur.

“This is about having a design-led approach which builds on the existing characteristics of individual neighbourhoods and places.

“Our Better Placed policy fits hand in glove with the new circular and I encourage anyone passionate about their neighbourhood to read these documents developed by the Department.”

To download a copy of Better Placed, please visit

<http://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/thinking/integrated-design-policy>

For more information on the Prince’s Foundation, please visit: <http://princes-foundation.org/more/about-the-princes-foundation>

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