Part 1

Identifying the context

This part introduces generic apartment building types to inform appropriate site, block and building design responses at a strategic level. It outlines the importance of understanding the context, setting, local character, size and configuration of a development site. It is to be used primarily during the design stage of a development and during the strategic planning process when preparing planning controls

1A Apartment building types

Apartment development occurs in a variety of arrangements, configurations and types. Apartments can occupy different sized lots from large redevelopment areas to small infill sites, can consist of a mix of building types or uses and be situated in suburban, transitional or inner city locations.

The generic apartment building types in this section share common three dimensional and organisational characteristics and provide a high level overview of apartment development. They can be used during the strategic planning phase to:

- determine the appropriate scale of future built form
- communicate the desired character of an area
- assist when testing envelope and development controls to achieve high amenity and environmental performance of future buildings.

Building types can be adapted to fit specific urban contexts. A particular site configuration may be suited to accommodate a mix of types or uses. In larger developments multiple building types may apply and provide more housing choice and design variety.

The apartment building types in this section include:

- narrow infill apartments
- row apartments
- shop top apartments
- courtyard apartments
- perimeter block apartments
- tower apartments
- hybrid developments.

A series of examples representing these building types in more detail is provided in Appendix 4 of this guide.

Narrow infill apartments

Narrow infill apartment types are suited to narrow, deep lots. The design needs to consider privacy impacts on neighbours

Narrow infill apartments are typically two to three storey walk-up apartments (stairs only) or buildings with three to five levels and a lift. They are a response to the dimension of traditional residential lot sizes in suburban areas in NSW which are narrow and deep, and are often surrounded by a combination of detached houses and flat buildings from previous eras.

Privacy impacts along side and rear boundaries to neighbouring properties need to be carefully managed as achieving minimum building separation can be a challenge. This building type is best used when:

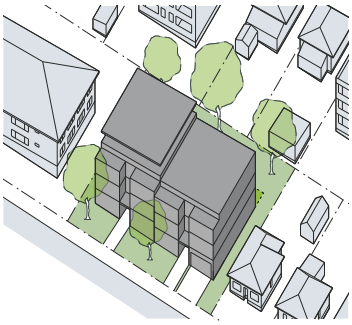
- a narrow lot width or frontage results in a building envelope oriented perpendicular to the street frontage
- amalgamation opportunities of properties in the area are constrained.

Row apartments

Row apartments are a modular building type, highly adaptable and able to respond well to sloping sites

Row apartments are generally well suited to both urban and suburban contexts. They are characterised by a limited number of units arranged around an access core and can be single buildings or a series of building modules. This building type is best used when:

- smaller building footprints are desirable
- live and work apartments or commercial/retail uses are encouraged at the ground floor level
- continuation of the street edge is desirable
- a vertical rhythm reinforcing existing subdivision or building patterns is desirable
- rear landscape areas are desired including keeping existing significant trees
- built form needs to step down the street to respond to a slope.

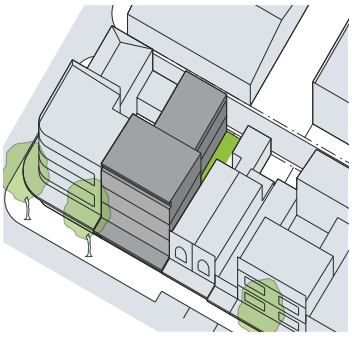


Shop top apartments

Shop top apartments are best suited to main streets and centres that require active retail or commercial frontages

Shop top apartments are mixed use residential buildings often located in established centres, along main streets or close to public transport hubs. They can be small infill or larger developments where the ground floor is occupied by retail or commercial uses. Shop top apartments typically range between two and six storeys and are best used when:

- increased residential uses are desired in established retail and commercial areas
- the context is a traditional main street
- zero setbacks to side boundary walls are possible or desired
- active frontages such as retail tenancies are desired at street level
- pedestrian activity on the street is desired
- rear lane access is available.



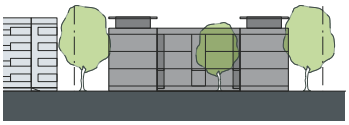
1A Apartment building types

Courtyard apartments

Courtyard apartments are able to fit and respond to a wide range of lot sizes, slopes, orientations and contexts

Courtyard apartments provide a centralised open space area, generally range between three and six storeys in height and are suitable in both urban and suburban settings. Their configuration depends on the context and site orientation. Courtyard apartments are a highly adaptable building type and are best used when:

- located on corner sites or sites with two or more public frontages
- located on sloping sites
- a landscaped street character is desired (by orienting the courtyard to the street)
- an urban character to the street is desired (by creating a street wall edge and orienting the courtyard to the rear)
- there is a predominant aspect or outlook.



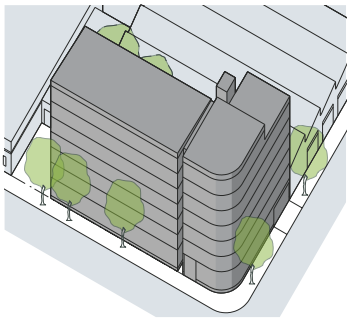
Perimeter block apartments

Perimeter block apartments define the street edge and achieve comparably high urban densities

Perimeter block apartments are suited to urban areas and are often integrated into street blocks. This building type is a key component of most European cities and its compact form achieves comparably high urban densities.

Typically, perimeter block apartments have elongated plans and apartments are generally arranged along a corridor, with a single or multiple cores depending on the building length. They range from four to nine storeys and are best used when:

- an increase in residential density is desired
- a clear definition and continuous street wall edge is desired
- active frontages with commercial and/or retail uses are encouraged at lower levels (see shop top apartment building type)
- towers and tall buildings are not desired.

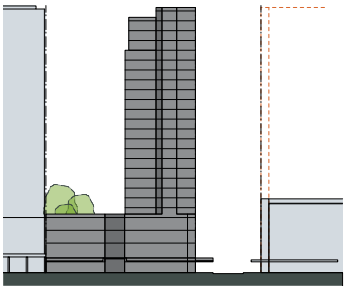


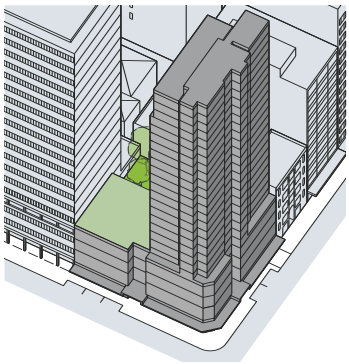
Tower apartments

In commercial centres, tower apartment types are often combined with a podium of four to eight storeys

Towers are suited to central business districts, major centres and urban renewal areas. This building type can be freestanding or combined with block developments (podiums). The location and siting needs to reflect environmental considerations such as wind, overshadowing and visual impacts on surrounding properties and the public domain. Tower apartments are typically more than nine storeys and best used when:

- located in dense urban areas
- other towers exist in the surrounding context
- an area requires greater density than can be delivered by perimeter block buildings
- a strong vertical form or landmark is desired.





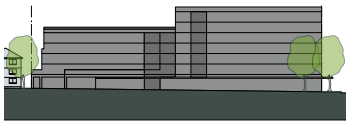
Hybrid developments

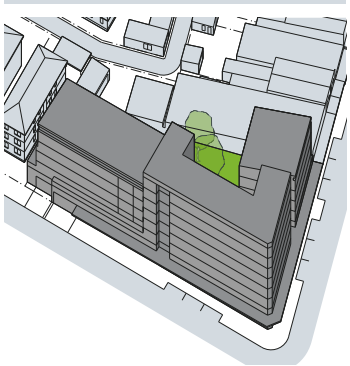
Hybrid development types can respond to varying site conditions and achieve interface and future character outcomes

Hybrid developments combine different uses or building types in one development. They can incorporate community facilities and larger commercial or retail components, such as offices or a supermarket.

Hybrid developments are particularly relevant for larger sites that need to respond to a change in building form and scale within the adjacent context. This approach is best used when:

- located on large and/or irregular shaped sites
- a combination of uses is desired to support active urban areas or centres
- greater diversity of apartment types is desired
- a development needs to address two or more streets with different scales and/or characters.





1B Local character and context

Figure 1B.1 Photographs help to communicate the desired future character or future 'look and feel' of an area or development

Good design responds and contributes to its context. Context is everything that has a bearing on an area and comprises its key natural and built features. Context also includes social, economic and environmental factors.

Understanding the context means understanding how the inter-relationships between all these factors, including between the local area and the region, will impact on the area over time.

The process of defining the context's setting and scale has direct implications for design quality of apartments. It establishes the parameters for individual development and how new buildings should respond to and enhance the quality and identity of an area.

Desired future character

The desired future character can vary from preserving the existing look and feel of an area to establishing a completely new character based on different uses, street patterns, subdivisions, densities and typologies.

Establishing the desired future character is determined through the strategic planning process in consultation with the community, industry and other key stakeholders. Understanding the context during this process is crucial to support change and determine appropriate building types and planning controls.

Common settings

The planning process establishes the appropriate location for residential apartment development by determining land use and density in proximity to transport, employment, services, land form and environmental features. Within this framework, the specific characteristics of a place or its setting will inform design decisions. Common settings for residential flat buildings include:

- strategic centres
- local centres
- urban neighbourhoods
- suburban neighbourhoods.

Strategic centres

Strategic centres are characterised by an established commercial core with a full range of services, taller buildings and a network of retail and commercial streets with active frontages.

Considerations for residential apartment development in strategic centres include complex relationships with adjacent buildings, impact of taller building types, privacy between commercial and residential uses, parking demand, high site coverage, limited deep soil, reliance on quality public streets and places and overshadowing.

Local centres

Local centres are typically characterised by an established main street. In larger local centres, retail and commercial uses are distributed around the main street or across a small network of streets defining the core. In smaller local centres, the main street or shopping strip is surrounded by residential uses.

Considerations for residential apartment development in local centres include shop top housing, high site coverage, narrow site frontages, heritage, relationship with adjacent low density residential uses and multiple small lot land ownership requiring amalgamation to support changing use and density.

Urban neighbourhoods

Urban neighbourhoods are often located within walking distance of centres. Established urban neighbourhoods may be characterised by existing residential flat buildings ranging from three storey walk-ups to eight storey perimeter blocks or towers. Other urban neighbourhoods may be transitioning from low density residential and/or a mix of larger format commercial and light industrial use.

Considerations for residential apartment development in these settings include overshadowing, amenity and privacy impacts between existing and future buildings, open space patterns, existing vegetation, demand for new public domain elements, variety of lot sizes and shapes and changing streetscape and scale.

Figure 1B.2 The location of residential flat buildings is determined by factors such as neighbourhood character, accessibility to transport, jobs and services and environmental considerations

Suburban neighbourhoods

Suburban neighbourhoods are typically characterised by detached housing in a landscaped setting.

Considerations for residential apartment development in suburban neighbourhood settings include relationships and interface with existing houses, appropriateness of apartment buildings compared to other forms of medium density housing (such as terraces or townhouses), landscape setting, existing significant trees and the pattern of front and rear gardens.

1B Local character and context

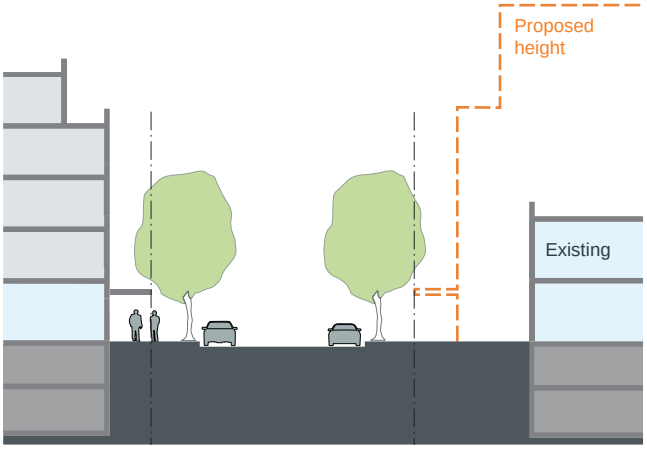


Figure 1B.3 Section showing the building envelope and scale of the proposed development in relation to the street

The range of scales

Apartment development needs to consider a range of scales during the planning and design phase.

Wider scale: The wider scale includes the urban structure, landscape setting and broader land use patterns of the wider context and identifies the development site's proximity to centres, transport and major public open spaces. It should also illustrate the future density and proposed change of the area (if known or applicable) and highlight important infrastructure such as major hospitals, schools and education facilities. Addressing this scale is important for larger precincts and redevelopment sites in particular. As a guide, a radius of 1 to 5 kilometres around the development site should be considered.

Neighbourhood scale: The neighbourhood scale outlines the urban structure including streets and open spaces. It should also include topography contours, drainage and vegetation patterns, services and future infrastructure requirements (if known), land use zones, cadastre boundaries and identification of heritage items and other local landmarks. It is appropriate to address this scale when planning for individual or small groups of apartment building sites. A radius of 400 metres to 1 kilometre should be considered.

Streetscape scale: The streetscape scale deals with the character of the street(s) that the proposed development addresses, and shows its spatial enclosure by buildings or landscape elements. It should outline surrounding building uses and heights, front setbacks, pedestrian access, awnings, vehicle driveways and public domain elements including street trees, verges and footpaths. It is appropriate that all proposals for apartment buildings address this scale.

Site scale: The site scale involves detailed consideration of the individual development site relative to neighbouring properties, buildings across the street and the public domain. It addresses surrounding and proposed deep soil zones and open spaces, existing vegetation and trees, fences, retaining walls, overshadowing impacts and privacy considerations. This scale should also highlight any other site specific factors such as orientation, slope, geology, infrastructure or access easements and stormwater management.

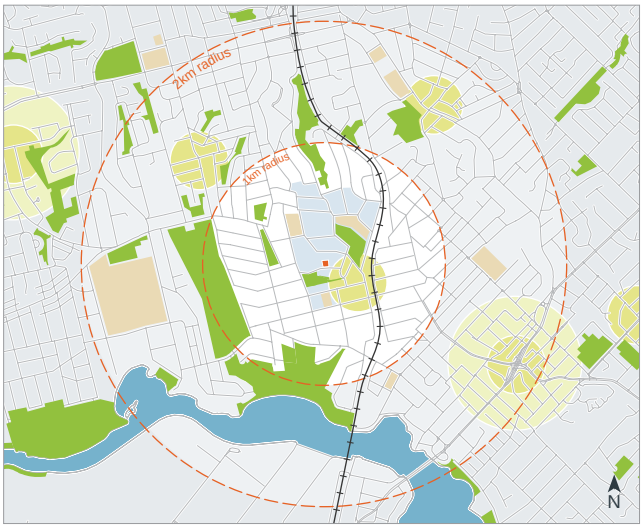


Figure 1B.4 The wider scale should analyse the urban structure and broader landscape setting and identify the site's proximity to centres, transport and major public open spaces. Proposals for larger precincts and redevelopment sites should address this scale

Figure 1B.5 The neighbourhood scale outlines the urban grid and block structure including streets and open spaces, significant topography, heritage and civic and community uses. Proposals for individual or small groups of apartment building sites should address this scale

Figure 1B.6 The streetscape scale helps understand the impact of proposed development on streetscape quality and should show heights, setbacks, driveways and existing street trees. All proposals should address this scale

Figure 1B.7 The site scale is a detailed analysis of the development's immediate context and should include the site itself, the street it addresses and surrounding properties. All proposals should address this scale

1C Precincts and individual sites

Figure 1C.1 Individual site: this development comprises two apartment buildings with a shared communal open space and mediates between low density housing and a local centre to the north

Residential apartment developments are generally developed on individual sites or within precincts.

Individual sites

An individual site is a single lot or an amalgamation of several lots that can support individual or groups of residential flat buildings.

The size, shape and orientation of individual sites directly inform the possible building types and development capacity. The generic building types in section 1A and the primary controls in Part 2 of this guide can assist in testing individual sites to determine the planning controls and supporting guidelines, such as deep soil zones, communal open spaces, privacy, solar access and natural ventilation.

Where an area is planned to change, new development needs to address the desired future character at both the neighbourhood and street scales. In established areas new development should carefully respond to neighbouring development.

Incremental change typically occurs lot by lot in established areas and can be constrained by existing development adjacent to the site. Planning and design considerations for managing this change include:

- site amalgamation requirements may be appropriate and expressed as minimum site frontages or site specific amalgamation patterns included in development control plans*
- corner sites and sites with multiple frontages can be more efficient for development yield than mid-block sites with a single frontage
- the development potential of the adjacent site is retained where zoning permits this
- avoiding left over and isolated sites that are unable to realise the planned development form and potential.

* *It is important to note that parking rates can be a significant driver for amalgamation. On sites with good public transport accessibility and limited opportunities for amalgamation, a reduction in parking rates should be considered*

Precincts

Precincts are characterised by large land parcels or a group of larger sites undergoing extensive change. These sites often need to be restructured to support a change of land use mix, building height and density.

Precinct plans typically incorporate new streets and infrastructure, through-site links and public open spaces that relate in scale, location and character to the local context. The subdivision of large land parcels into smaller ones assists in creating a finer urban grain and achieving greater diversity in building design. It can also assist with the staging of redevelopment.

Precinct plans provide a number of opportunities including:

- reconnecting parts of the city or town that have previously been isolated
- improving the public domain network and providing more public open space
- incorporating a mix of uses to support more vibrant renewal areas
- integrating heritage and important views within the site or surrounding context
- providing greater housing diversity
- providing space for new community facilities such as recreational centres, libraries and childcare centres
- leveraging efficiencies of scale to deliver more effective environmental measures such as on site energy production, integrated stormwater management and waste water recycling
- supporting greater flexibility in site layout to provide greater amenity to individual apartments and open spaces.

Precinct plans establish building envelopes and inform the controls within a local environmental plan and development control plan, against which future development applications are assessed. Indicative plans at both ground and upper levels can assist to describe the expectations of future development types within the envelope providing more certainty for local government, applicants and the community.

Figure 1C.2 Precinct: this precinct plan for the redevelopment provides a clear structure of new streets, public parklands, adaptive re-use of former tram sheds and mid block shared communal open spaces

When determining the floor space of a precinct plan, the net floor space is based on the whole site area including streets and open spaces. This will be significantly lower than the net floor space of individual parcels within the precinct plan (see also section 2D Floor space ratio).

Through the precinct plan design process and the testing of proposed building envelopes against the site constraints, alternative solutions to some of the design criteria in this guide may be appropriate.

Some design criteria may be best applied to the entire precinct area or to stages within the site, for example deep soil and communal open space may be consolidated and accessed by a number of buildings.

Other design criteria associated with the amenity of individual apartments, such as visual privacy, sunlight access and ventilation, are typically applied to each building within the precinct plan.