

BETTER



PLACED

An integrated design policy for the
built environment of New South Wales

GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECT
NEW SOUTH WALES



Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.



Better fit
contextual, local
and of its place



Better performance
sustainable, adaptable
and durable



Better for community
inclusive, connected
and diverse



Better for people
safe, comfortable
and liveable



Better working
functional, efficient
and fit for purpose



Better value
creating and
adding value



Better look and feel
engaging, inviting
and attractive

GA NSW

Minister's Statement



The Government Architect NSW (GA NSW) celebrated its bicentenary in 2016. Now as we reflect on the contribution it has made in shaping some of the most valued buildings and spaces in our state, it's also time to start the conversation about how we see the NSW Government championing good design in the process of shaping our next 200 years.

NSW has a strong tradition of architecture and design, but we are facing growing challenges as more people want to call our state home, resulting in growing urbanisation of our cities and towns. To help address these challenges the NSW Government is encouraging a strategic approach to good design to deliver the places and spaces that will meet the needs of future generations.

Better Placed has been developed by the Government Architect to deliver the strategic approach needed to ensure that as our cities and towns grow bigger they get even better. It responds to the concerns of communities and those involved in the development of our built environments about the impact of poor design but also defines how we can make the most of the opportunities that will arise as we develop new spaces and places.

The NSW Government recognises the importance of good design in making our cities and towns even more appealing, liveable and successful for the communities that live there. We understand that well-designed places have the potential to link new and old, are more efficient, healthier, and support social cohesion. Most importantly well-designed places add value, attracting and retaining residents, jobs, global talent, tourists and further investment.

Better Placed provides clarity on what the NSW Government means by good design, not just how a place looks, but how it works and feels for people, and outlines processes for achieving this. It has been created to assist everyone involved in design projects or the development assessment process and advocates that we all have a role in ensuring our cities and towns are better places.

It is essential that as the NSW Government, the community and the private sector look to the future, that we are ambitious, that we put good design front and centre, leaving a legacy that we can look back on and be proud of 200 years from now. A legacy of great places and spaces. A legacy that has NSW **Better Placed**.

Anthony Roberts
Minister for Planning

Government Architect's Foreword



Better Placed seeks to capture our collective aspiration and expectations for the places where we work, live and play. It creates a clear approach to ensure we get the good design that will deliver the architecture, public places and environments we want to inhabit now and those we make for the future. It articulates the means and methods to value and improve our built environment and public domain, so that we can be proud of our cities, towns and public places.

Design plays a critical role in achieving the aspiration we have for our future, because good design is about deep understanding and a creative synthesis of ideas, issues and people. Design offers both a stand-alone and contributing process to planning our future by bringing together creative intelligence, lateral thinking and capturing the collective imagination. Importantly, design is an iterative and inclusive process with much to offer to decision making and planning in government.

The Government Architect NSW (GA NSW) holds a unique position in government. We are experts in design thinking and processes, but are also tasked with making the connection between government priorities, industry expertise and capability, academia and our future creative thinkers and communities.

Better Placed confirms our collective wishes for the future design of our infrastructure, architecture, and public spaces, and endorses the power of design to enable a better and resilient future for our communities.

Peter Poulet
Government Architect

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The Government Architect NSW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays their respects to Elders past, present and future. We honour Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to our society. To that end, Better Placed seeks to uphold the idea that if we care for country, it will care for us.

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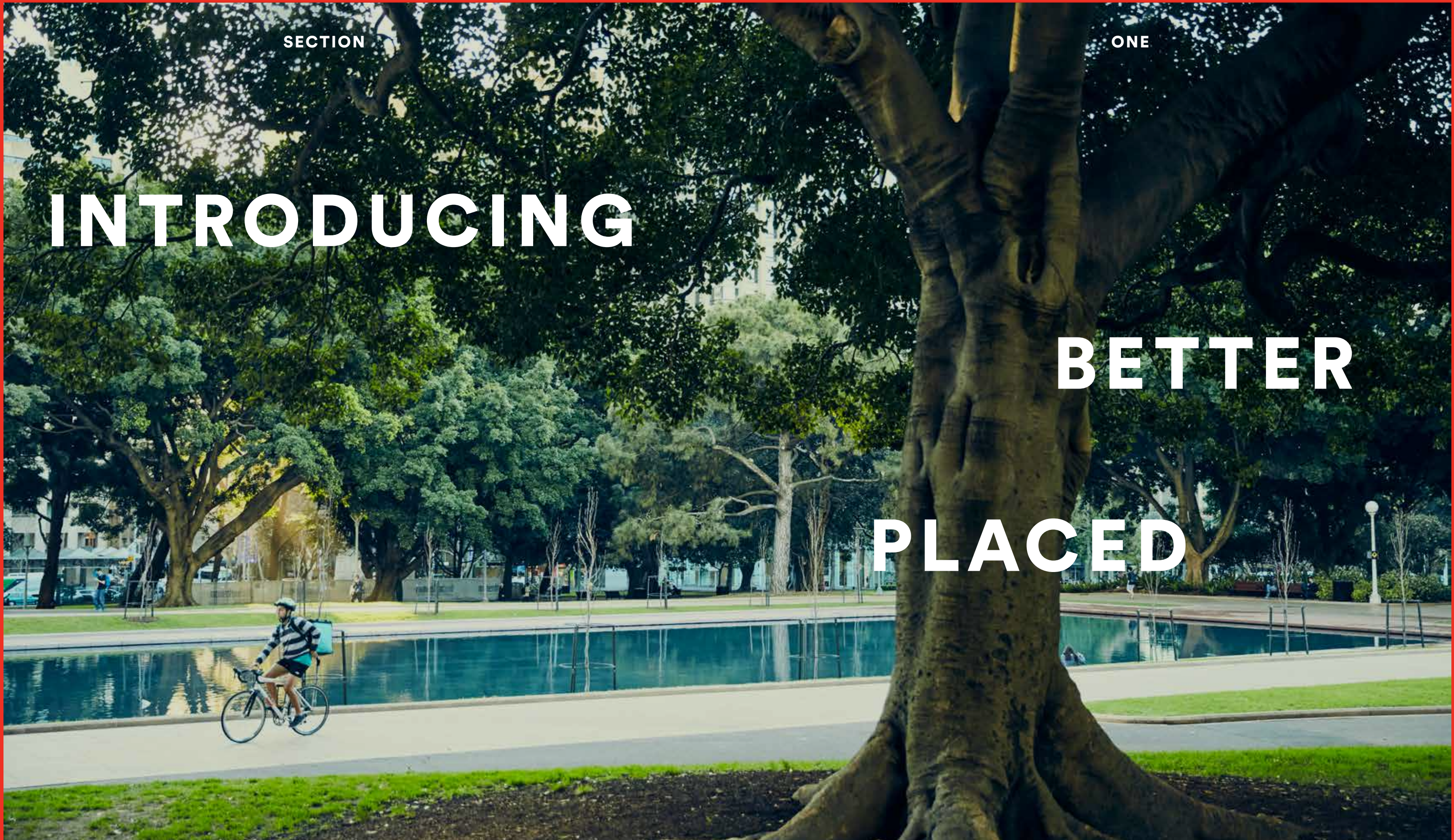
SECTION

ONE

INTRODUCING

BETTER

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Good design makes better places

New development has the potential to transform quality of life for people, stimulate the economy and enhance the environment. The design of the built environment shapes the places where we live, work and meet. The quality of design affects how spaces and places function, how they integrate, what they contribute to the broader environment, and the users, inhabitants and audiences they support or attract.

Better Placed is a policy for our collective aspirations, needs and expectations in designing NSW. It is about enhancing all aspects of our urban environments, to create better places, spaces and buildings, and thereby better cities, towns and suburbs. To achieve this, good design needs to be at the centre of all development processes from the project definition to concept design and through to construction and maintenance.

Great places and cities don't happen by chance: they are designed, and continue to be designed as we manage the transformation of our cities.

NSW is rapidly growing and changing, and our built environments must remain liveable, productive, healthy and sustainable. The rate of demographic, economic, environmental and social change is creating challenges for our built environment. **Better Placed** can assist in the creation of better places for the future heritage of NSW.

Design has a central role to play in resolving the complexity of the change we face. The decisions we make about our built environment today will define the heritage of our future – our legacy. The complexity of contemporary social, economic and environmental challenges calls for new modes of thinking, analysis and problem solving. Design thinking is key to this.

Better Placed is about enhancing the design quality of our built environment, raising expectations and raising standards, about working better and creating better environments.

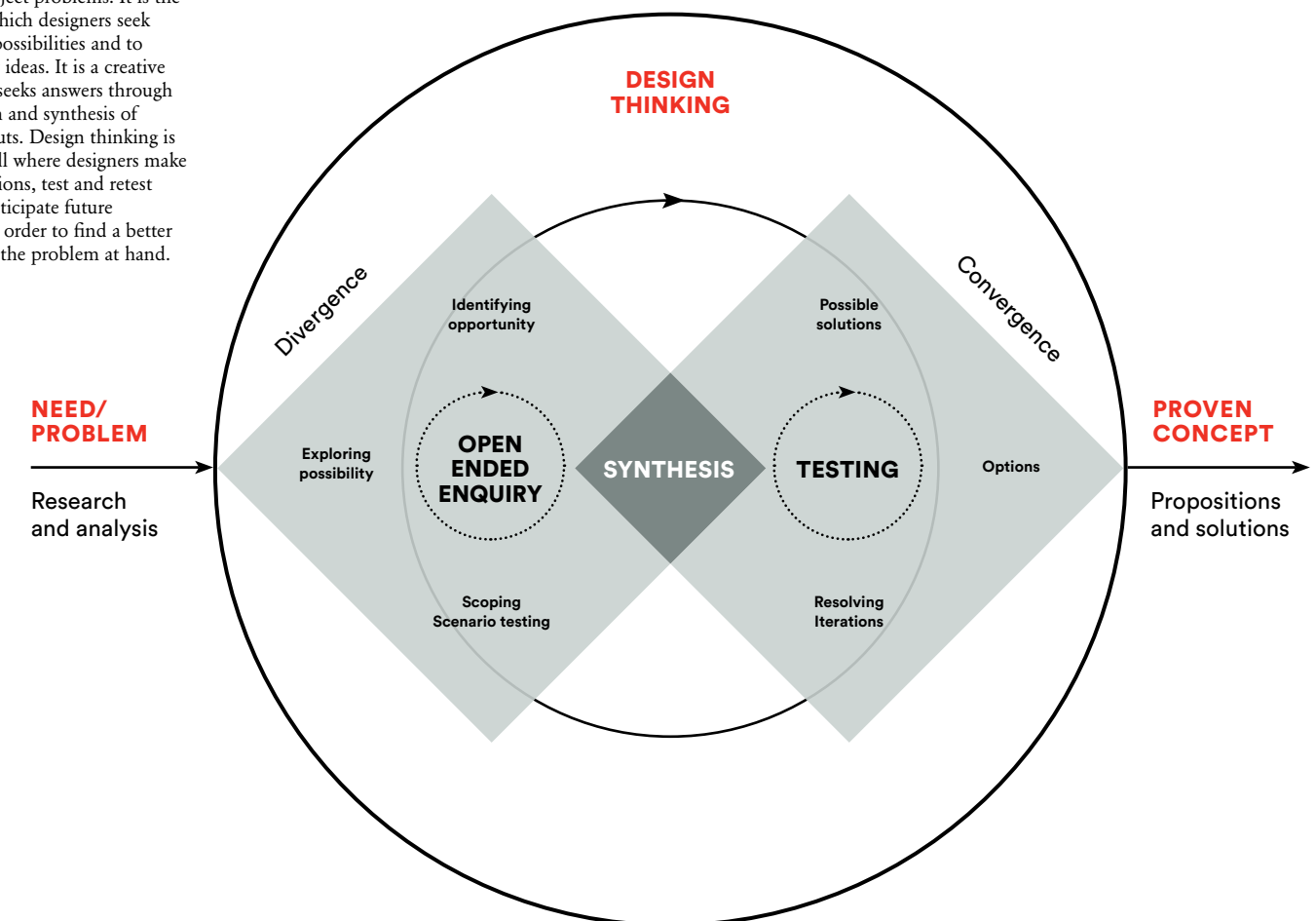
To create great places for NSW, we need to elevate the role, importance and value of design, towards finding solutions to today's pressing challenges that will benefit all our communities. In short, good design makes better places.

“Design thinking has much to offer... It provides not just a useful and rigorous process of coming up with creative ideas but also a synthesising, holistic way of looking at the world around us, making connections and seeing relationships among things we often treat as separate and distinct.”

— Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World*

Design thinking

Design thinking offers a holistic way of finding opportunities and resolving project problems. It is the method in which designers seek to integrate possibilities and to generate new ideas. It is a creative process that seeks answers through collaboration and synthesis of multiple inputs. Design thinking is a creative skill where designers make new connections, test and retest ideas, and anticipate future challenges in order to find a better outcome for the problem at hand.



“Built and natural environments are collectively and ultimately tangible records of history. Both are cultural assets that represent a long-term investment for generations to come. The quality of our environment — everything from products to the planet — profoundly affects the quality of our everyday lives. Our regard for nature and the design of the built environment is an expression of our aesthetic, cultural and social values, and a statement of the challenges and expectations we seek to address in shaping a sustainable world for the future.”

— Laura Lee, Professor of Architecture, Carnegie Mellon University



1.1 Introducing design

It is important to understand design as a verb and a noun; and both a problem defining and problem solving activity that brings together many different people and pieces of information in order to identify and develop new opportunities.

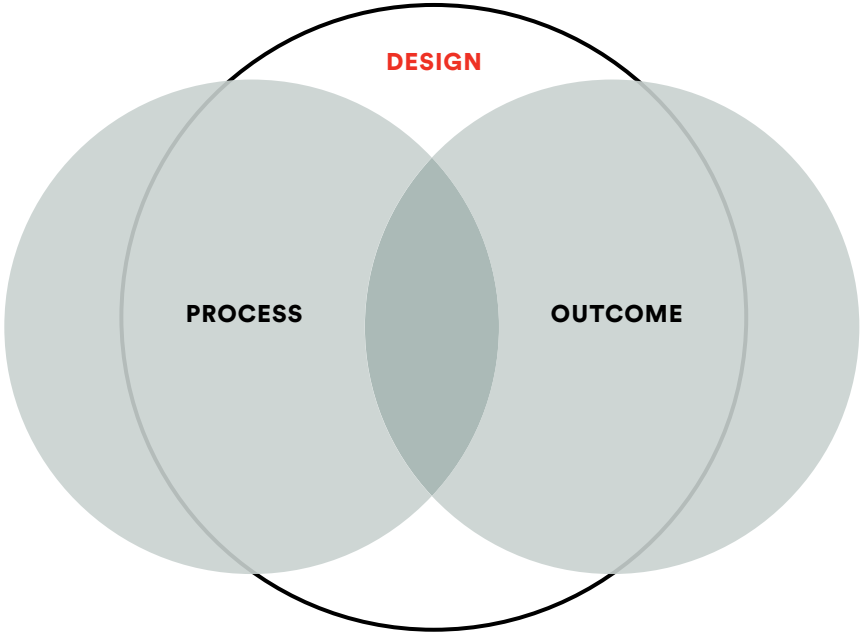
Design should be understood as both a process put in place to do something, and an outcome by creating something.

Good design
This policy establishes a baseline of what is expected to achieve good design, across all projects in NSW. Good design is a phrase that encapsulates the aspirations of **Better Placed** including its vision for NSW, its definition of good process, and its outline of objectives for the built environment.

Good design creates useable, user-friendly, enjoyable and attractive places and spaces, which continue to provide value and benefits to people, the place and the natural environment over extended periods. Good design brings benefits socially, environmentally and economically, and builds on these benefits over time – continually adding value.

Design

Design is both process and outcome – its methods of open ended enquiry, synthesis and testing are pathways to determine the most appropriate outcome.



1.2 What Better Placed will do



Better Placed is structured to work in a number of ways, with the purpose of achieving better places for the people of NSW by:

Advocating the importance of design for better places, spaces and outcomes.

Supporting industry and government to deliver good design for people.

Enabling effective design processes to be established and supported in the planning system.

The policy will:

Raise awareness of what the NSW Government means by good design in the built environment.

Provide clear, consistent, rigorous objectives to achieve good design throughout the development process.

Outline the value of design thinking and what is involved in supporting effective design processes.

Provide a framework for examining places and reviewing proposals from a good design perspective.

Establish key concepts of design and shared terminology for the built environment.

Encourage a stronger design culture and active engagement in design.

1.3 Where Better Placed fits

Better Placed is positioned among a range of national, state, city, and local government policies that reference design.

At a national level, policy directions include Our Cities Our Future (2011) which provides a clear overarching framework for cities. Alongside this, the Urban Design Protocol (2011) provides a concise guide to effective urban design processes and outcomes. These documents currently have limited impact in the NSW planning system.

At a state level, while a range of State environmental planning policies (SEPPs), local environmental plans (LEPs), development control plans (DCPs), and typology-specific design guides provide policy and advice on good design, there is currently no overarching policy outlining the NSW Government's position on design.

Better Placed establishes the value of good design, and identifies key concepts, good process, and objectives for good design outcomes. The policy responds to stakeholder requests for clarity in relation to what is meant by good design and the process to achieve it.

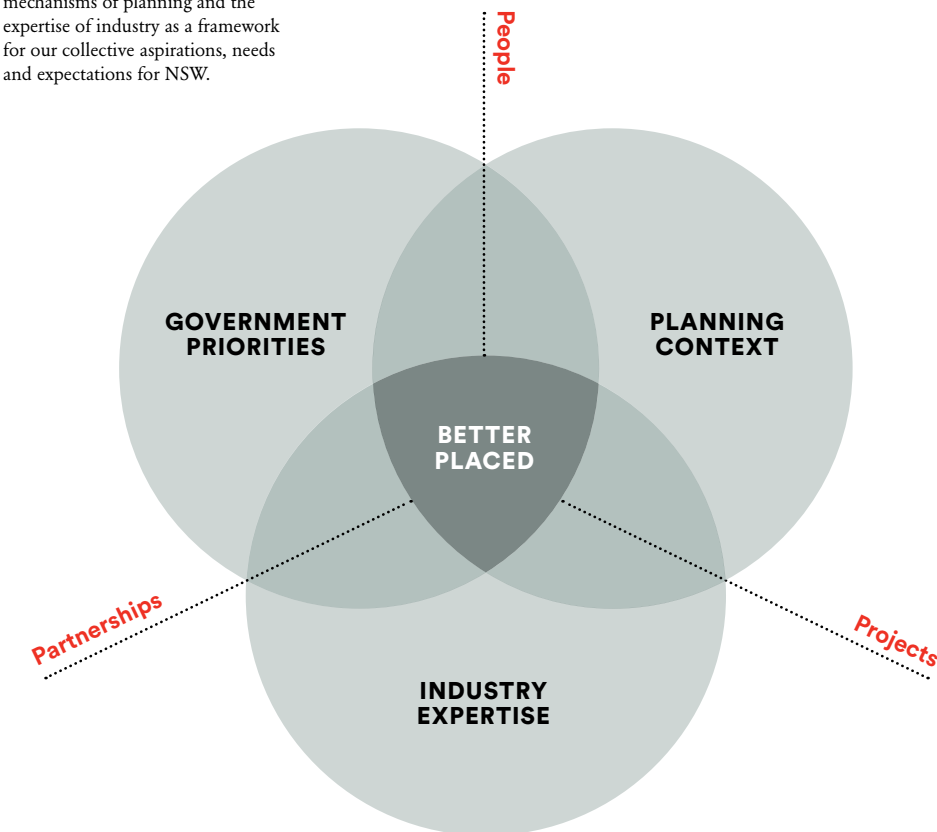
Better Placed sits alongside other Government Architect NSW policies and is supported by design guides, manuals and case studies which describe the objectives in more detail according to scale, type or conditions.

Better Placed will inform a broad range of policies and approaches within multiple government agencies. It has a specific focus on project formation and establishment and design assurance for strategic projects. Its objectives have been created to be incorporated or referenced in new policies and guidelines to support state and local government achieving good design outcomes.

Better Placed will be useful in preparing project and consultant briefs and serve as a high-level reference for spatial and strategic frameworks, master plans, urban design, landscape architecture and architectural projects. It will form part of the terms of reference to support the delivery of state-led design excellence processes, including Design Review panels and Design Excellence competitions.

Context

Better Placed sits at a nexus of State-wide priorities, the mechanisms of planning and the expertise of industry as a framework for our collective aspirations, needs and expectations for NSW.



1.4 NSW priorities

Better Placed advocates for good design to help respond to key challenges and directions for NSW, including:

Health

“There is a growing recognition that urban environment has a significant influence on health; a clear relation has been drawn between the built environment and chronic diseases such as overweight and obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease” (NSW Health).

The connection between health and the built environment is complex, with a number of interrelated factors that can impact health. These factors include lifestyle, community, the local economy, physical activities, and the natural and the built environment. In addressing health concerns such as chronic diseases, social, environmental and economic factors need to be understood and analysed simultaneously.

Design methods and processes can help by synthesising the many factors impacting upon health, and developing solutions for the built environment that incorporate cohesive, integrated and interconnected solutions. Design methods can negotiate multiple factors and develop connective ideas and opportunities based on these inputs. Design can prototype and test ideas, as well as provide feedback into initial analysis to ensure solutions address initial concerns. The design of the built environment can incorporate health priorities to create healthier places for NSW.

Climate resilience

A focus on good design will help create resilient cities and places that mitigate and adapt to the effects of a changing climate. The challenge is to ensure that the pressure for development and investment in new and improved infrastructure creates sustainable places, benefiting communities who use them. Decisions made now will continue to affect our lifestyles for decades into the future. Design can help explain the interrelatedness of things such as climate and resources in managing risk and unintended consequences.

Good design can reduce the impacts of extreme weather conditions and climate change by lowering carbon emissions through investment in sustainable practices like use of local materials and resources, and sustainable energy sources.

Rapidly growing population

NSW’s population will grow to 9.9 million people by 2036, an increase of 2.7 million people from 2011. Sydney’s metropolitan population is projected to grow by more than 2.1 million in the next twenty years to 6.4 million people (NSW Planning).

This change will have a major impact on the built environment. How cities are designed, including how housing and transportation demands are met, and how the planning system supports this growth are key to delivering the best outcomes for NSW.

While “97 per cent of Australians believe that cities and towns are better to live in when public buildings and public spaces are well-designed,” (Galaxy Poll) poor quality of design can create fear of change. **Better Placed** promotes an increased focus on how the planning system can better recognise design, and employ design methods early in order to engage with the community to create and effectively communicate beneficial outcomes for people and places.

Changing lifestyles and demographics

Our population is not only growing, it is also getting older. By 2036, NSW’s population aged over 60 will be more than 2.6 million people – an increase of 56 per cent. Another fast-growing age sector in NSW is the young. By 2036, the number of residents aged 0–19 years will have increased by more than 2.4 million people – an increase of 24 per cent.

As demographics change, there will be a need for diverse options for housing, transportation and community buildings to support growing population groups. Design analysis and research can help understand how our older and younger generations want to live, where they want to live, and how to design places and spaces with these demographics in mind. Design is human focussed, responsive to the needs and aspirations of its people, and equitable, presenting opportunities for all.

Infrastructure and urban renewal

Government, together with the private sector, is delivering and upgrading infrastructure including transport, education facilities and hospitals together with a program of urban renewal on major government-owned sites.

Large-scale urban renewal projects are complex, often involving multiple projects being undertaken in close proximity. Good design processes can help understand disconnected parts more holistically, including understanding the layers of old and new, the user groups, and the required upgrades to infrastructure and public spaces of the area.

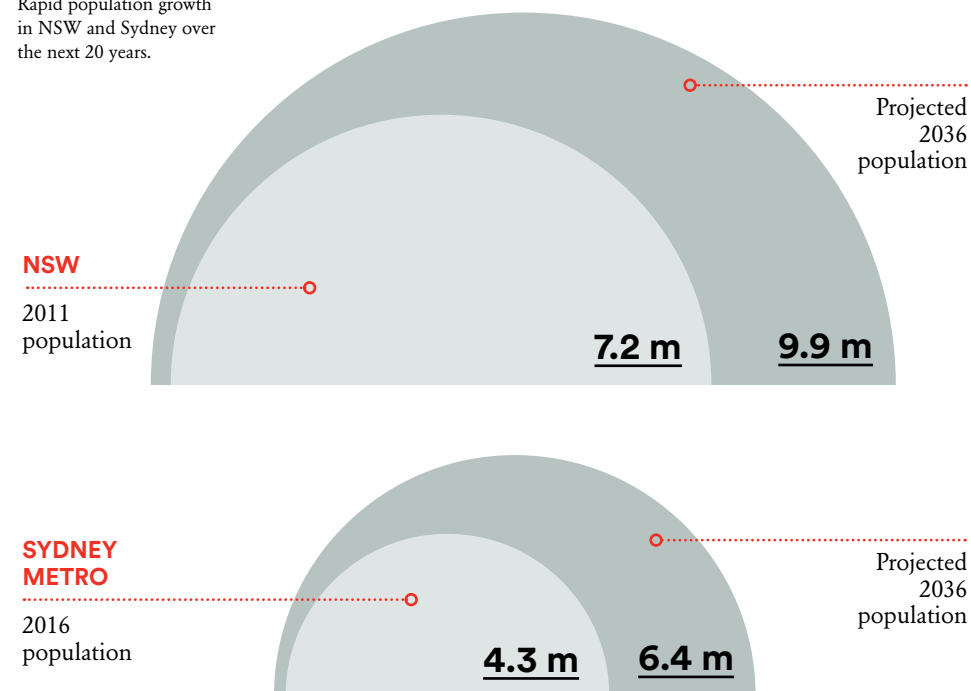
An integration of effective design processes will assist in maximising the benefits from this investment and ensure new infrastructure improves existing places and spaces, delivering even greater returns. The quality of built outcomes in the public domain is important and incorporating design methodologies early in the process will support well-considered and integrated outcomes.

Providing consistent and timely review of major projects

Better Placed will support the review and efficient delivery of major projects and State Significant Development. The policy provides industry and government with a clear and consistent definition for good design, supporting existing mechanisms such as Design Excellence and Design Review by providing a framework for best practice. In addition, **Better Placed** outlines and defines processes that support good design, placing an importance on the promotion of early and consistent advice as key to enabling good design, timely review and better outcomes. **Better Placed** advocates for good design as an efficient way to eliminate risk, maximise effect and create certainty.

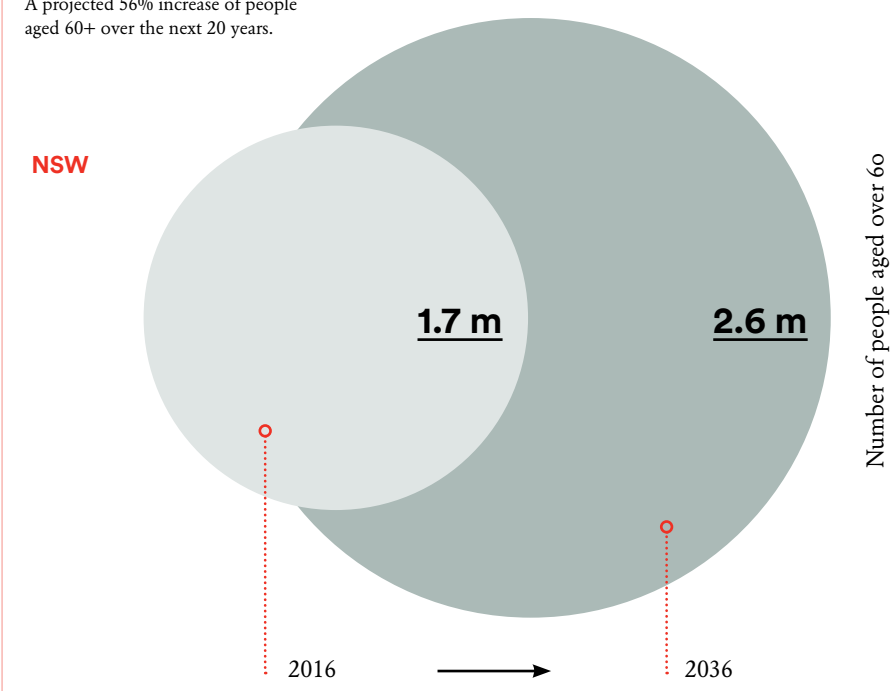
Population growth

Rapid population growth in NSW and Sydney over the next 20 years.



Ageing population

A projected 56% increase of people aged 60+ over the next 20 years.



The NSW Government has tasked the Government Architect to lead and deliver initiatives and strategies to promote good design to better address the challenges facing our state and the government’s priorities for action.

Better Placed is the first of these initiatives and provides the policy framework for better design in our built environment now and into the future.

“Design offers one of the most fertile grounds on which to draw connections between the ways in which we develop creative ideas and the effects that they have on other people, other species, future generations, and the planet as a whole.”

— Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World*



1.5 How to use Better Placed

Better Placed advocates for a shared responsibility in realising good design processes and outcomes for NSW. **Better Placed** can be used and referenced by multiple user groups and audiences in the NSW community.

State Government can use **Better Placed** as the framework to support good design processes and outcomes in the rigorous assessment of design through the development process. The methodology established in this policy supports design excellence and design review processes in the development of state-sponsored projects.

Local Government can use **Better Placed** to help structure their own design and evaluation skills. **Better Placed** provides a framework to support and develop tools for better design outcomes through locally-based policies and initiatives.

Politicians have a clear explanation of what ‘good design’ means and set of design objectives to help benefit the built environment in their communities.

The community can use **Better Placed** to understand good design practices and how they deliver benefit to their neighbourhoods, streets, cities and towns. **Better Placed** will also help the community to participate in the conversation about design and review processes that affect their local places.

Architects and design professionals can use **Better Placed** to support their approach, to promote the importance and value of design, and work with clients and communities to develop improved outcomes.

Developers can use **Better Placed** as a framework for good design that will help create, evaluate and deliver better projects. It may also be useful in establishing short and long term benefits for themselves and the community.

Planners can use **Better Placed** to advocate for design through both statutory and strategic planning processes, which will build and support professional capabilities in evaluating design proposals.

Engineers can use **Better Placed** to create stronger collaborations in the process of design. They can use the document to help define better processes and work to the design objectives in developing solutions that are efficient, practicable, and innovative.

Builders can use **Better Placed** to understand the upfront role of design decisions in a range of ways such as material selection, whole of life cost and sustainability. They can help resolve the design by responding to **Better Placed** objectives to help achieve better outcomes in construction and project delivery.

Peak industry bodies can use **Better Placed** to support the prioritisation of design in early procurement processes and policy advice, as well as articulating the value of design more broadly.

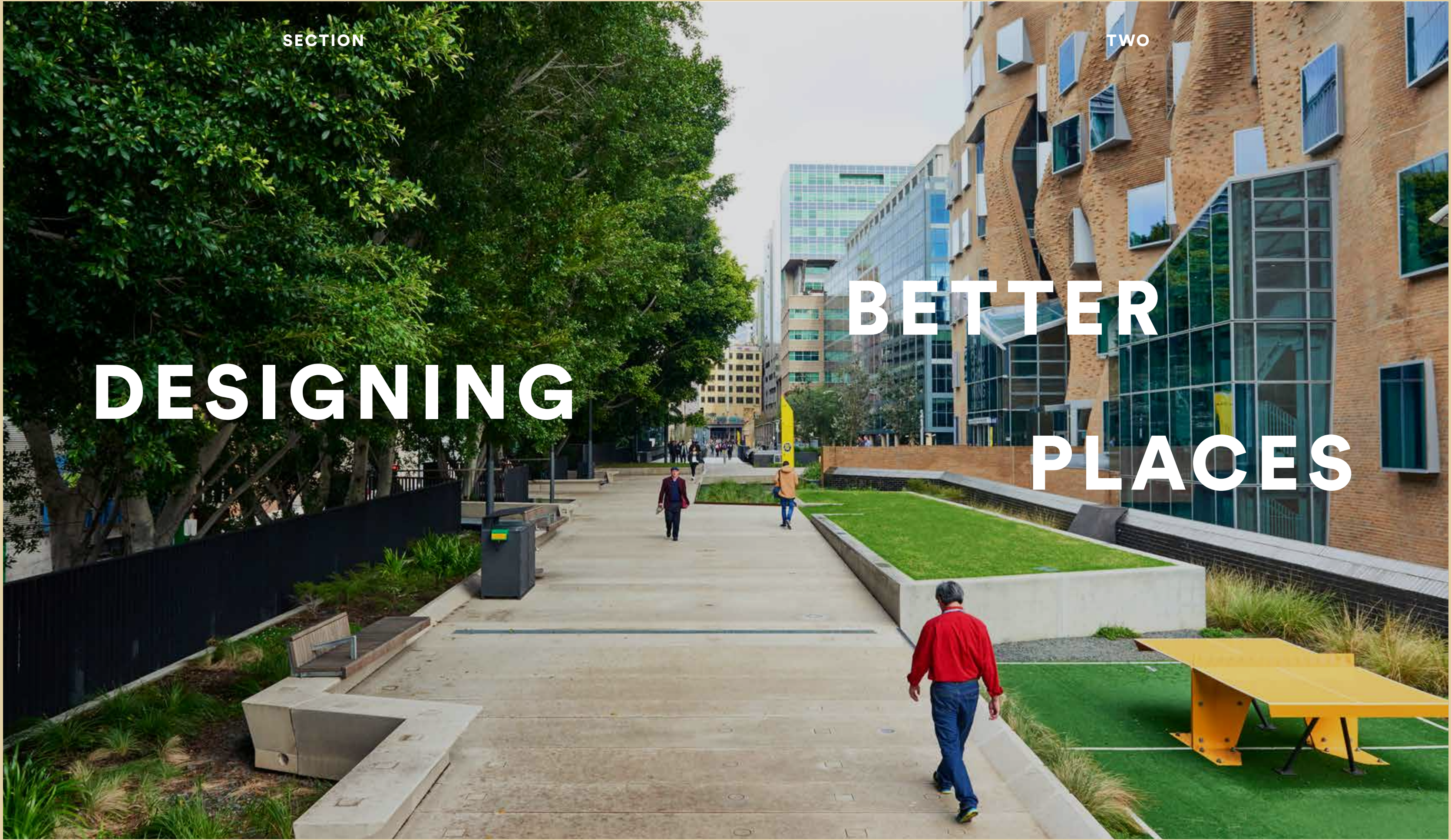
Businesses can use **Better Placed** to understand benefits of good design for their commercial facilities, and their contribution to creating, maintaining and looking after local built environment places.

SECTION

TWO

DESIGNING

**BETTER
PLACES**



2.1 What is a well-designed built environment?

A well-designed built environment is:

Healthy for all members of our communities, promoting physical activity and walkable environments, social cohesion, and community safety and security to support people's well-being.

Responsive to the needs and aspirations of local people, now and into the future, inviting innovative use and habitation, interaction, productivity and enjoyment.

Integrated, by drawing together the relationships between parts and elements, considering interfaces at multiple scales, and working to common goals and aspirations.

Equitable by presenting opportunities for all segments of our community so residents and visitors have access to and can move about freely between public domain, infrastructure, open space and buildings.

Resilient to the dynamic, challenging conditions of our time, to adapt and evolve while retaining essential qualities and values.

In places that reflect these qualities, each building, area or space:

Is a **better fit** within a rich, evolving and diverse environment, and contributes to the character and quality of place.

Performs better by existing in balance with natural systems and resources, supporting comfortable living and the natural benefits of air, sun, light and views without detrimental environmental impacts.

Is **better for the community**, where all residents and visitors feel welcome, included and valued, and where the streets, open spaces and community buildings are inviting and accessible.

Is **better for people** because they are safe, comfortable and vibrant, supporting social interaction and enjoyable, healthy lifestyles.

Is **better working** by accommodating fit for purpose activities, and also responding to changes over time, where interventions create new use potentials, while retaining the embedded value in our built environment.

Delivers **better value** economically, socially, environmentally and culturally for clients and users, and in return are highly valued by community.

Reflects a **better look and feel** because they are refined, aesthetically considered and built to last, creating an engaging, rich and balanced experience for residents and visitors.

Places like this can be designed. We can support this positive vision for the future by investing in good design.

2.2 What we don't want

Many of our best buildings and spaces in NSW put people first, are highly responsive, sensitive and contribute to the local sense of place. They are delivering best practice sustainable outcomes, articulating a bold future of green, high-performance design and support enjoyable experiences for people. However, there is potential to do better.

Poor design and even 'business as usual', are likely to have significant adverse environmental, social and even economic effects. Poor design can make spaces and places into liabilities rather than being beneficial to the public. The following indicators of poor design outcomes support the need for good design and better places:

POOR 'FIT' AND NOT RESPONDING TO CONTEXT

A community's sense of place can be undermined and existing attractors devalued when:

Design has little sense of the 'local' character, materials or landscape.

The position and arrangement of new elements causes obstructions to use of the public realm.

Buildings are disconnected from and make no contribution to the experience of the public realm.

Buildings mimic neighbouring buildings, or clumsily reference local character.

POOR PERFORMANCE

An increased operating and maintenance cost burden for end users can occur when:

Buildings do the "minimum" in responding to environmental imperatives.

Budget-related imperatives override environmental performance.

Poor design outcomes impact both comfort and use, as well as natural resources.

POOR FOR COMMUNITY

Community cohesion can be eroded and problems of social inequity can be reinforced when:

Urban areas fail to provide inclusive and accessible shared public spaces.

A lack of integration of uses and tenure types creates social separation and exclusion.

Dispersal of activity creates fragmentation of the public domain.

POOR FOR PEOPLE

People's health can be undermined and their sense of risk and isolation increased when:

Poor access, orientation or spatial arrangements compromise human comfort or safety.

Activity in the public realm is discouraged through poor interfaces.

Construction efficiency is prioritised over livability or health.

POOR FUNCTIONALITY

Quality of life for people and communities, as well as their resilience to change, is lower when:

Particular usage patterns are locked-in, restricting change and adaptation over time.

Efficiency and productivity is constrained by poor spatial arrangements or relationships

Overly pragmatic design limits the human experience of a place.

POOR VALUE

Buildings and places can lose value and even detract from local value over time when:

Costs increase over time as a result of failing to meet current standards.

Costs increase over time due to ongoing maintenance and repair due to poor design.

They do not reflect the sufficient commitment to delivering high quality experience for people, and as a result are not highly valued or cared for by the local community.

POOR LOOK AND FEEL

Buildings and places can undermine the value and quality of the surrounding urban environment when they:

Appear clumsy, unresolved, flimsy or cheap.

Lack design consideration and refinement.

Reflect poor choices of materials, elements and/or overall composition.

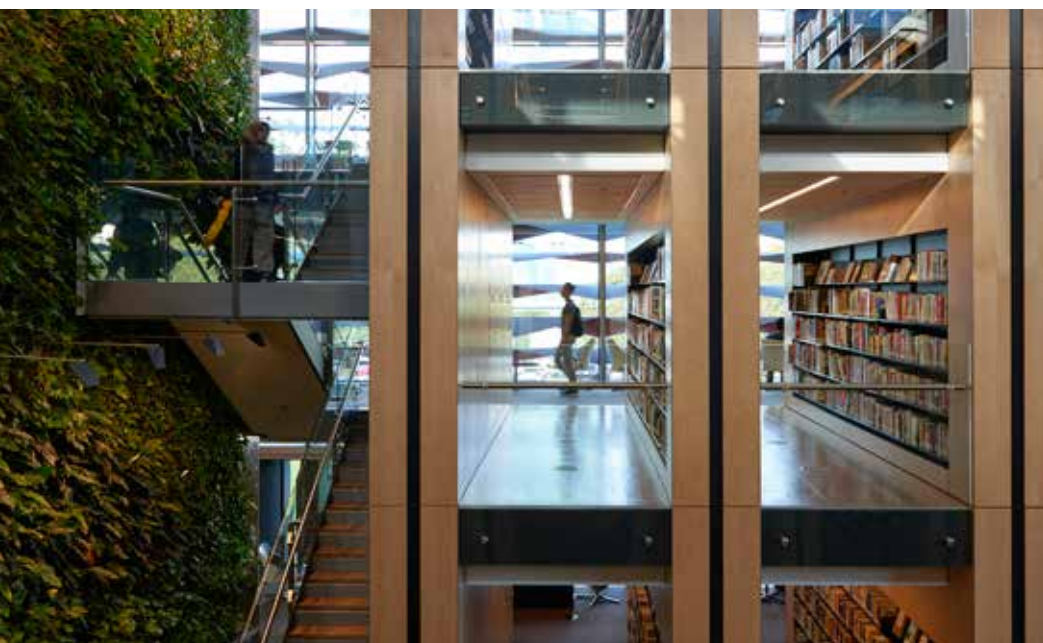
This is our starting point for Better Placed, to avoid these outcomes and continue working towards better design outcomes across NSW.

2.3 How Better Placed will help

Better Placed will help deliver good design across NSW by guiding best practice design processes and aligning with a clear set of objectives. It will steer projects toward delivery of the best possible outcomes. It advocates for early integration, connection and collaboration between design, planning and development. It seeks to foster long-term, coordinated decision making in rethinking complex problems, systems and processes. It offers a way to utilise more effective processes that can respond to the rapidly changing environments in which government, the planning system and the market operates.

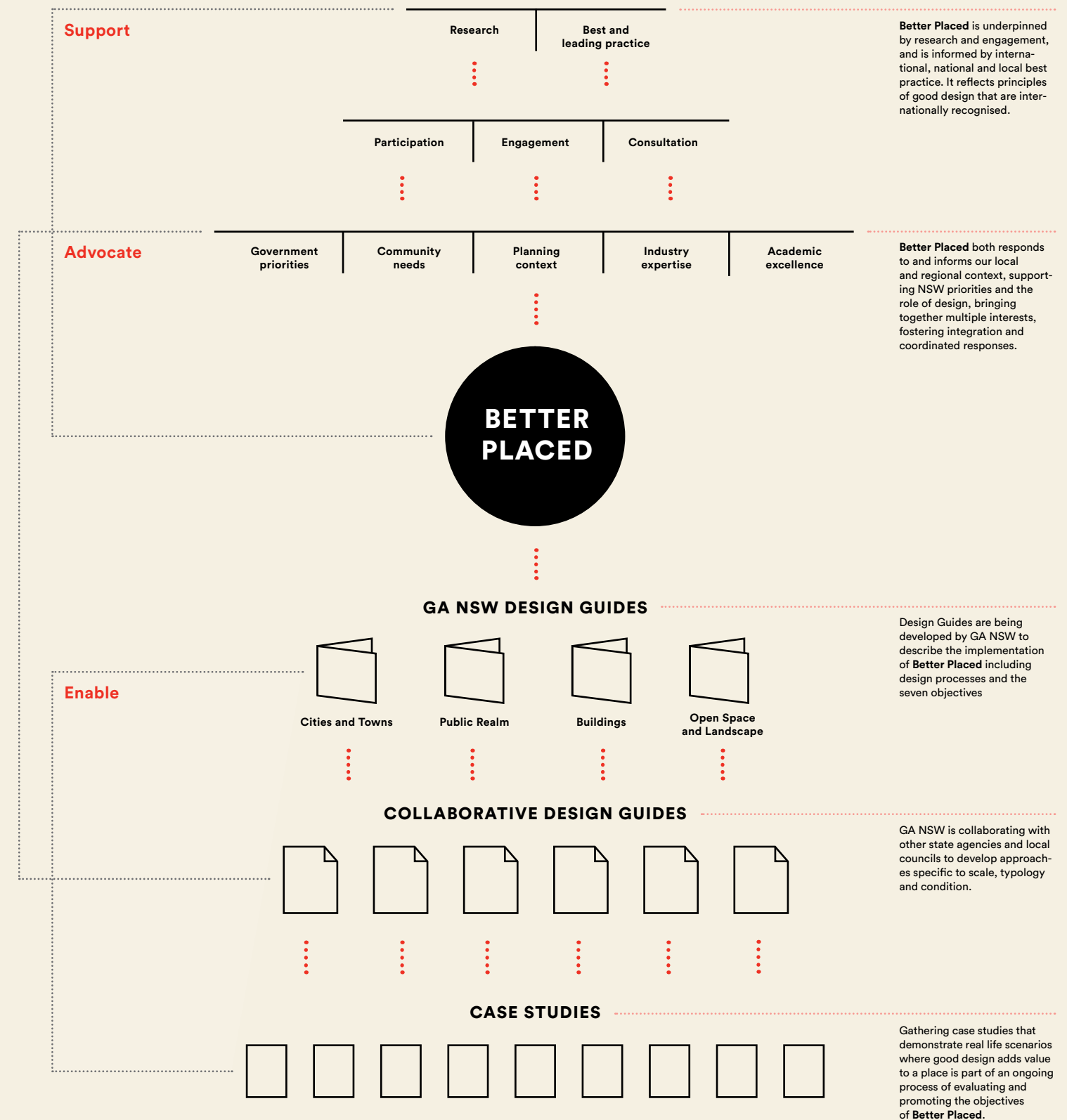
Better Placed sets out objectives intended to be adopted by industry, professional and government agencies, as well as by the communities that inhabit the places and spaces of NSW. The objectives in this document can help support better planning processes and guide the determination of planning applications.

Documents supporting Better Placed in the form of design guides, manuals and case studies will describe the objectives in more detail according to scale, type or conditions. The guides, case studies and manuals will be collaborative; working with departments, agencies, regions and local governments to capture specific needs and requirements while meeting the ambition of the Better Placed objectives.



Better Placed

Better Placed is part of a suite of documents that are all about supporting better design and enhancing the quality of our built environment.



GOOD DESIGN PROCESSES



Design is both a process and an outcome – a way of thinking and a result of making. Better Placed must respond to both of these components in order to achieve its vision. Good design outcomes result from good processes.

Design processes should embrace uncertainty and diversity, filter inputs and reviews to continually refine design outcomes. This section explains best practice for design processes, as well as what already exists in NSW. The objectives of Better Placed have been formed as a framework for good design outcomes, and are detailed later in this chapter.

A design process involves a series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end. Design processes are not linear; they are iterative, collaborative and at times circular, where feedback and ideas are continually intertwined. Design processes help provide solutions to complex problems where many inputs and concerns are needed to be resolved simultaneously.

A good design process is based on an understanding of place through research, analysis and precedent studies and considers alternatives and options. Good process involves many diverse groups of people through consultation that synthesises their issues. Scenarios and options are sorted and improved with testing, competition and critical thinking.

Design process

The design process is **iterative – in a cyclical way, and each iteration of an idea informs the next. Each step in the process is revisited at key stages of a project’s development – with different parameters but working towards a better resolved solution with every iteration.**

DISCOVER

DEFINE

Establish a clear intent for the problem by finding the right questions to ask.

Understand the requirements of the task and develop a balanced brief based on requirements.

Think about the brief in the short and long term – look into the future for alternate problems, functions, possibilities or requirements.

Understand budgets and timeframes and organise workflows.

INVOLVE

Involve relevant stakeholders and communities.

Embrace diversity and collect knowledge, opinions and perspectives from a wide range of user groups. The best solutions often appear when a diverse set of people with disparate views collaborate.

Consult widely within a variety of disciplines. Collaborate with the design team to understand the entirety and extent of the problem.

Engage the community and observe culture, habits, and lifestyles.

RESEARCH

Understand and analyse the context of the problem including social, environmental and statutory planning.

Use precedents and best practice case studies.

Analyse existing research and undertake new research if required.

Consider social, economic, environmental ecologies and systems.

CREATE

EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES

Collate multiple strands of information in unique ways.

Think divergently by generating and exploring multiple solutions.

Create scenarios, possibilities, solutions, define directions, and frame opportunities.

SYNTHESISE

Look for links between different modes of knowledge.

Identify gaps and opportunities.

Collaborate with the team and identify opportunities, critically think about how to link multiple problems to find solutions.

DEVELOP IDEAS

Create many iterations of the idea.

Challenge assumptions, conventional methods, mainstream ways of working.

Visualise and communicate ideas by drawing, diagrams, models and graphics.

Envision futures through insight and inspiration.

DELIVER

PROTOTYPE

Test a range of ideas to understand their viability.

Imagine alternatives and iterate.

Explore problems in detail and test solutions to obstacles.

EVALUATE

Identify the optimal directions and options.

Examine and analyse each option based on research.

Use design review to survey opinions and test solutions.

Understand and assess balance of time, cost and quality.

Use shared or agreed objectives, vision, values and process to determine if good design solutions are being met.

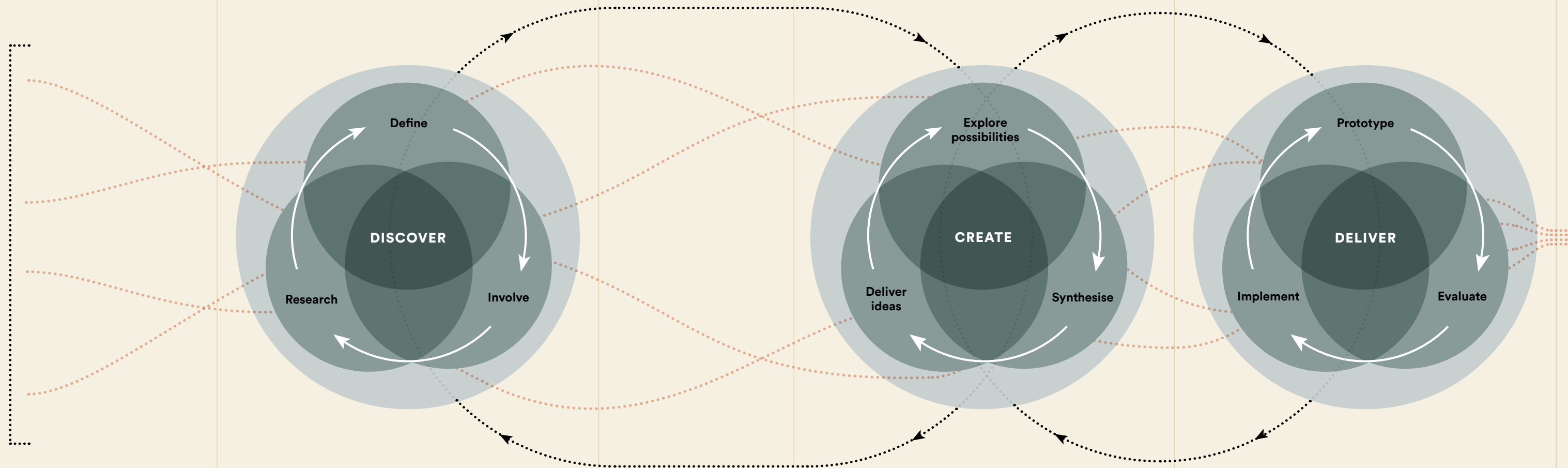
IMPLEMENT

Carry the design intent and retain through the delivery process.

Design process should continue through procurement, into delivery and construction.

Undertake post occupancy evaluation to learn lessons for future projects.

Multiple inputs and influencing factors are resolved and integrated through the design process.



2.4.1 Mechanisms to help examine, measure and evaluate design

Design occurs through the entirety of a project from site planning and concept through to construction and delivery. Good design does not occur in isolation and NSW already has a variety of established mechanisms to support good design processes such as Design Excellence and Design Review. A description of these NSW specific processes and how they relate to Better Placed is contained in the glossary.

Different mechanisms are appropriate at different stages of the design process, and the most useful mechanisms to support good design respond to the scale, site, type and complexity of the project.



Collaborative process and community participation

Design ideas for street upgrades in Tamworth were tested with the community at a pop up street party. Ideas included road paintings and moving temporary street trees into different locations.

Design review

Design review is a tried and tested method of promoting good design. Done well, it is a cost effective and efficient way to improve quality. It offers independent, impartial and expert advice on the design of buildings, infrastructure, landscapes and public spaces.

For large projects, it is best done by panels comprising leading cross-disciplinary, built environment experts providing independent early assessment of proposals.

Design review for a smaller simpler project might be internal consultation with colleagues. Different approaches are appropriate for different scales of project dependent on complexity and impacts.

For significant projects a formal and independent design review process should be undertaken, with statutory planning regulations informing the panel's terms of reference.

Competitive design processes

Competitive design processes are often used to generate new design ideas or seek solutions to complex problems and briefs. A competitive design process works by stimulating creativity in a collaborative environment to interrogate ideas and possibilities, often leading to a built outcome. Design competitions are commonly utilised by both the public and private sector to drive good design outcomes.

Procurement approaches

The process of procuring design for the built environment can have a significant impact on design outcomes. Improving procurement and delivery practices will support good design. A good design outcome relies upon successful procurement processes, including early integrated thinking and the engagement of a high quality design team.

Key to good design is engaging designers early in the process and using design skills to help research and analyse environments, synthesise complex problems, reframe problems and develop vision statements and opportunities.

Project formation, including brief development

Early involvement in project formation and brief development are key aspects to influence design outcomes. Selecting the right design team is critical to the long-term success of a project. Allowing enough time to select a team that is capable of delivering project ambitions and client objectives is key to creating a good working relationship with the client and other team members. The briefing document reinforces the ambitions, objectives and needs of the project without prescribing a solution or aesthetic for the entire project team.

A good brief is an evolving document becoming more complex and detailed as the project develops. Clear, concise and well-conceived briefing documents can support the design process by helping with testing and evaluation of proposals against aims and objectives of the project.

Stakeholder and community workshops and participation

Stakeholder and community involvement in project definition, design options and testing enables broad-based input, the creation of shared visions and assessment of proposals as they are developed. This contributes to more considered and inclusive proposals, better suited to place and people. Design processes are well suited to enable participation and engagement.

Guidelines, manuals and case studies

Documents in the form of design guides, manuals and case studies support good process by outlining best practice and ways to understand projects. Case studies can provide useful knowledge and precedents on successful processes to achieve desired outcomes. Case studies can highlight project successes, as well as lessons learnt, for the benefit of future projects.

Design research

Research in its broadest sense involves gathering data, information and facts for the advancement of knowledge. The act of design in research uses divergent and creative thinking as a method of synthesis and analysis, showing how integrated data, information and facts can reveal opportunities and strategies for addressing the challenges and complex, competing requirements of a site, a precinct, a neighbourhood or a whole city.

THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER

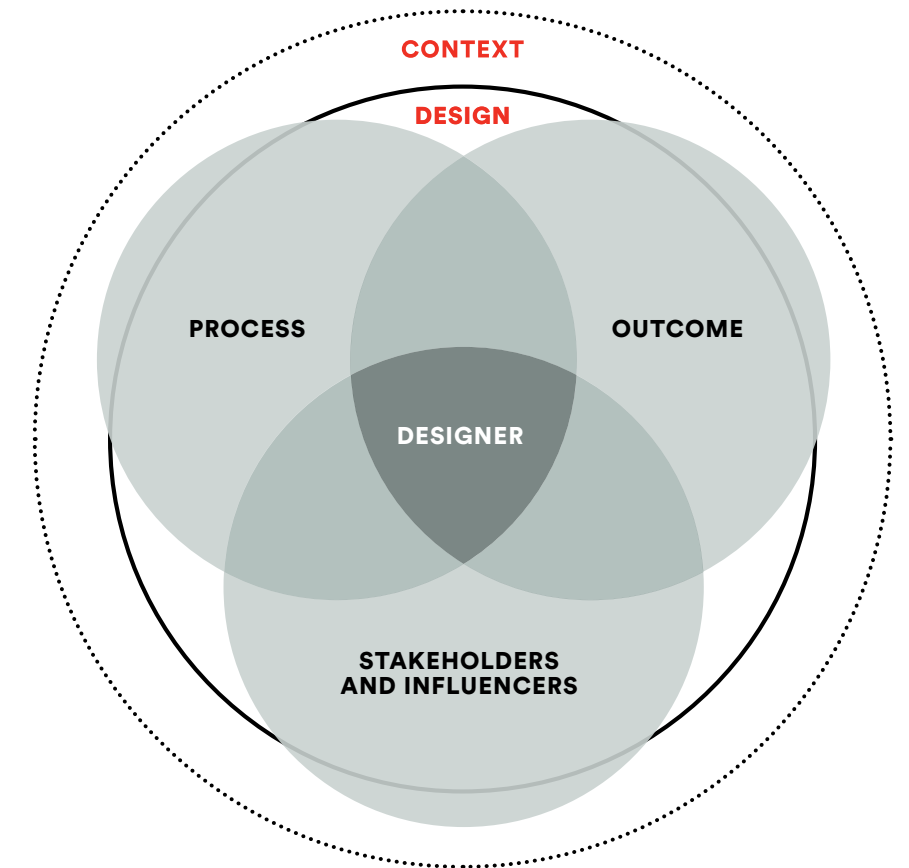


Architects, landscape architects and urban designers have specialist training and expert skills in design. The process of design is collaborative, involving multidisciplinary teams, whereby the designers have the experience and methods needed to synthesise inputs to create good design outcomes.

While the objectives in Better Placed highlight important factors that contribute to good design outcomes, the role of design expertise in applying specialist knowledge is essential to the creation of better places. The designer is the connector linking good process to good outcomes.

The designer

The designer is the connector linking stakeholders, influencing factors, process and outcome – applying experience and expertise to ensure continuity from original concept to final outcome – and beyond.



2.6

GOOD DESIGN OUTCOMES

Better Placed is focused on delivering the kinds of places we collectively aspire to and the best ways to understand and capture the benefits of good design. Seven distinct objectives have been created to define the key considerations in the design of the built environment. It is helpful to consider, discuss and assess design proposals and outcomes through these series of distinct yet interrelated lenses.

The objectives are applicable at any scale from cities and towns, to the public realm, to landscape and open space, to an individual building. They address the broad range of issues, considerations and parameters that should be considered when designing for the built environment.

While it is important to consider all the objectives outlined here, the application of these may be weighted differently relative to the nature of the project, problem or opportunity. The design guides and case studies that support this document have been provided to outline how the objectives are implemented and applied into different scenarios.

Seven distinct objectives have been created to define the key considerations in the design of the built environment. Achieving these objectives will ensure our cities and towns, our public realm, our landscapes, our buildings and our public domain will be healthy, responsive, integrated, equitable, and resilient.



OBJECTIVE 1.

Better fit

**contextual,
 local and
 of its place**

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

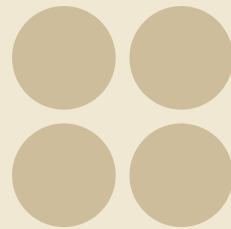


OBJECTIVE 2.

Better performance

**sustainable,
 adaptable
 and durable**

Environmental sustainability and responsiveness is essential to meet the highest performance standards for living and working. Sustainability is no longer an optional extra, but a fundamental aspect of functional, whole of life design.



OBJECTIVE 3.

Better for community

**inclusive,
 connected
 and diverse**

The design of the built environment must seek to address growing economic and social disparity and inequity, by creating inclusive, welcoming and equitable environments. Incorporating diverse uses, housing types and economic frameworks will support engaging places and resilient communities.

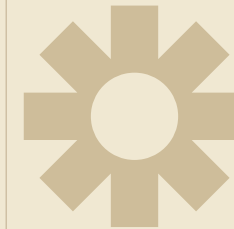


OBJECTIVE 4.

Better for people

**safe,
 comfortable
 and liveable**

The built environment must be designed for people with a focus on safety, comfort and the basic requirement of using public space. The many aspects of human comfort which affect the usability of a place must be addressed to support good places for people.



OBJECTIVE 5.

Better working

**functional,
 efficient and
 fit for purpose**

Having a considered, tailored response to the program or requirements of a building or place, allows for efficiency and usability with the potential to adapt to change. Buildings and spaces which work well for their proposed use will remain valuable and well-utilised.



OBJECTIVE 6.

Better value

**creating and
 adding value**

Good design generates ongoing value for people and communities and minimises costs over time. Creating shared value of place in the built environment raises standards and quality of life for users, as well as adding return on investment for industry.



OBJECTIVE 7.

Better look and feel

**engaging,
 inviting and
 attractive**

The built environment should be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing, encouraging communities to use and enjoy local places. The feel of a place, and how we use and relate to our environments is dependent upon the aesthetic quality of our places, spaces and buildings. The visual environment should contribute to its surroundings and promote positive engagement.

OBJECTIVE 1.

Better fit

contextual, local and of its place

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

LOCAL

A building, place or space that relates to an area, or neighbourhood.

CONTEXTUAL

A building, place or space that responds to the context in which it is designed.

OF ITS PLACE

A building, place or space that relates to its surrounds.

Why is this important?

Good buildings and spaces resonate with place and setting and feel responsive, sensitive and relevant.

Cities and towns evolve and change, but valued qualities and distinctive characteristics are retained and reinforced, even with significant growth and development.

Places build and retain their unique qualities and unique characteristics.

New developments can also contribute to context and character, adding further richness, diversity and quality. They create a dialogue with established places

Local people accept and adopt new developments, identifying with the built environment and developing a sense of ownership.

New buildings and spaces become part of a place, its unique character, and are valued by local people.

How does this create better outcomes?

Buildings and spaces that resonate and fit within community are better maintained, cared for and looked after.

The place 'brand' of cities or towns and overall desirability is enhanced, attracting residents, businesses and visitors.

Cohesive, integrated and well-designed places are highly desirable places to live and work and attract more investment.

People and communities develop stronger affiliations with places.

Upfront costs and investments are protected through good design which retains quality and relevance over time.

OBJECTIVE 2.

Better performance

sustainable, adaptable and durable

Environmental sustainability and responsiveness is essential to meet the highest performance standards for living and working. Sustainability is no longer an optional extra, but a fundamental aspect of functional, whole of life design.

SUSTAINABLE

Relates to the endurance of systems, buildings, spaces and processes – their ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, which contributes positively to environmental, economic and social outcomes.

ADAPTABLE

A building, place or space that is able to adjust to new conditions, or to be modified for a new purpose.

DURABLE

A building, place or space that is built to be able to withstand wear and pressure.

Why is this important?

The built environment is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impacts through energy and water consumption.

Building materials encapsulate extensive embodied energy in their production, and construction processes are also energy intensive.

Buildings are essentially permanent, so their design 'locks in' environmental impacts or benefits for the long-term.

We spend much of our lives inside buildings, so their efficiency and performance levels can greatly affect our impacts on natural resources and environmental impacts.

Buildings can also incorporate systems to create positive environmental benefits, such as energy generation and water recycling.

How does this create better outcomes?

Effective design can create ongoing savings through reduced energy and water demand.

Adaptable buildings can adjust to changing requirements over time, without requiring significant changes or replacement.

Energy-efficient buildings are also more comfortable for people, in temperature, air quality, access to natural light and fresh air.

As regulatory requirements demand higher-performance buildings, those which exceed performance standards will be more attractive and valuable to tenants and residents into the future.

Spaces and buildings which use locally sourced materials encompass less energy in transport and production, reducing the environmental impact of the proposed development.

Better for community

inclusive, connected and diverse

The design of the built environment must seek to address growing economic and social disparity and inequity, by creating inclusive, welcoming and equitable environments. Incorporating diverse uses, housing types and economic frameworks will support engaging places and resilient communities.

INCLUSIVE

A building, place or space that embraces the community and individuals who use it.

CONNECTED

A building place or space that establishes links with its surrounds, allowing visitors and residents to move freely and sustainably.

DIVERSE

A building, place or space that embraces a richness in use, character and qualities.

Why is this important?

Cities and towns provide people with opportunities and access to employment, education, social interaction and cultural experiences, providing optimal opportunity to address and reduce the impact of wider economic and social trends.

While growing social disparity and economic polarisation result from wider global forces, they are made manifest in, and perhaps reinforced by, our cities and towns. Design can enhance or reinforce disparities across populations.

Cities and towns which are diverse and provide opportunities are socially and culturally richer, safer, and better valued.

The density and structure of cities and towns are major factors in social outcomes. While effective urban design and planning can facilitate these outcomes, poor design can lock in longer-term social challenges.

The public realm is the space of equal access and coming together in the community – our shared domain for social engagement, events, interaction and recreation.

How does this create better outcomes?

Accessible cities and towns make service delivery much more cost effective including health services, public transport and community facilities.

Environments which support accessibility and social interaction promote community physical and mental health, reducing longer-term health impacts and costs.

Multiple environmental and health benefits are created through walkable access, cycling and public transport by reducing private car usage, traffic impacts, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and household transport costs.

Developments which include a range of housing and tenure types provide resilience in the face of changing requirements.

Streets and public spaces which are welcoming and accessible for all are more vibrant, interesting and safe.

Better for people

safe, comfortable and liveable

The built environment must be designed for people with a focus on safety, comfort and the basic requirement of using public space. The many aspects of human comfort which affect the usability of a place must be addressed to support good places for people.

SAFE

A building, place or space that protects its people from harm or risk of harm.

COMFORTABLE

A building, place or space that provides physical and emotional ease and well-being for its people.

LIVEABLE

A built environment which supports and responds to people's patterns of living, and is suitable and appropriate for habitation, promoting enjoyment, safety and prosperity.

Why is this important?

The design of streets, spaces and buildings can be a major factor in public safety, both actual and perceived.

Urban environments and buildings significantly affect the way people live – internal air quality and access to views, natural light and air all help to create liveable, user friendly environments.

Cities, towns, buildings and spaces are ultimately for people and so they should provide optimal conditions for the people inhabiting them, supporting a safe, comfortable and enjoyable experience.

How does this create better outcomes?

Buildings and spaces which people enjoy using will be better maintained and cared for. They will last longer as valuable parts of the city or town and minimise the need for replacement.

Safety and comfort reinforce each other: an environment which feels safe and comfortable encourages walking and activity, and more people on the street makes places feel safer and more interesting and enjoyable.

Places which feel safe and comfortable attract people and investment.

Liveable spaces support people and lifestyle, promoting safety, healthy, comfort and well-being for all.

Better working

functional, efficient
and fit for purpose

Having a considered, tailored response to the program or requirements of a building or place, allows for efficiency and usability with the potential to adapt to changes over time. Buildings and spaces which work well for their proposed use will remain valuable and well-utilised.

FUNCTIONAL

A building, place or space that is designed to be practical and purposeful.

EFFICIENT

A building, place or space that is constructed and functions with minimal wasted effort.

FIT FOR PURPOSE

A building, place or space that works according to its intended use.

Why is this important?

Buildings, streets and spaces must support their proposed use in an optimal and efficient manner. They should enable activities to be easily performed.

Poorly designed buildings and spaces can restrict usage

Functional requirements can change, perhaps many times over the life of a building or space. Good design balance encourages adaptability.

Working, living, relaxing and social interaction are supported by good design and arrangement of spaces. Inappropriate design can hinder and constrain these activities.

Good design can support both formalised, structured activities, as well as informal or spontaneous activity giving users access to appropriate buildings and spaces as they need them.

Good design can reduce the impact of age and maximise functionality and performance.

How does this create better outcomes?

Facilities and spaces which effectively support usage will be used more frequently than less well-designed ones.

Work and education environments which are well-designed support enhanced productivity and effectiveness for organisations.

Living environments which work well for occupants and evolving lifestyles will increase in value.

Long-term functionality in buildings and spaces protects and enhances the initial investment in creating these spaces and minimises the need for change or replacement.

Better value

creating and adding value

Good design generates ongoing value for people and communities and minimises costs over time. Creating shared value of place in the built environment raises standards and quality of life for users, as well as adding return on investment for industry.

CREATING VALUE

Conceiving and designing in new opportunities to a building, place or space for increased social, economic and environmental benefits to the community.

ADDING VALUE

Leveraging and building on the existing characteristics and qualities of a building place or space to increase social, economic and environmental benefits to the community.

Why is this important?

The process of creating urban precincts, spaces and buildings requires a significant investment and commitment. The impetus to manage time and costs is ever-present and relevant.

Returns on investment can take place in a financial sense, as well as in social capital, environmental benefits and other forms of value.

The original investment has a significant bearing on the longer-term returns.

The ongoing value and return on investment may, in some cases, be non-financial, such as in the social benefits of a new or enhanced public space. This value needs to be considered in relation to the initial financial cost or investment.

Good design, effective materials and construction protect and enhance value by maintaining the appearance and usability of the building or space and reducing the impacts of time, climate and use.

Cost-cutting during the design and delivery process is a short term-focussed activity that can detract from the longer-term value of the investment.

How does this create better outcomes?

Investment in good design and high quality construction delivers social, environmental and economic benefits to investors and community.

While good design does not necessarily cost more, investment in good design is rewarded in the longer-term by more user-friendly, high-performance and lower-maintenance places and buildings.

Good design can be highly pragmatic, efficient, streamlined and cost effective while delivering long-term returns for investors and users of the building or space.

Good design in a location tends to support and encourage further good design in the locality or neighbouring areas, raising the standards of the wider area, and multiplying value over time.

Better look and feel

engaging, inviting and attractive

The built environment should be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing, encouraging communities to use and enjoy local places. The feel of a place, and how we use and relate to our environments is dependent upon the aesthetic quality of our places, spaces and buildings. The visual environment should contribute to its surroundings and promote positive engagement.

ENGAGING

A building, place or space that draws people in with features that generate interest.

INVITING

A building, place or space that is welcoming to visitors, community and individuals.

ATTRACTIVE

A building, place or space that is aesthetically pleasing, or appealing.

Why is this important?

The visual setting of our cities and towns is, perhaps, the primary and most immediate factor in our response or reaction to it. Whether it is inviting, engaging and attractive or more confronting visually will largely determine its value and usage by the community.

While there are no rules or formula for achieving appropriate visual design in buildings and spaces, a considered balance of materials, finishes, proportions and details is usually considered.

Significant interventions in the built environment can, where appropriate, instil excitement, energy and interest, encouraging visitors, activity and enjoyment.

Contemporary design can also be challenging visually, contributing to a rich and diverse urban setting.

The urban environment is inherently complex, multi-layered and diverse, reflecting the evolving nature of our cities and towns. Good design contributes to this complexity, but in a considered approach.

Places can also be 'gritty' or edgy, tough and robust while highlighting good design.

How does this create better outcomes?

Attractive places invite visitors, residents and business activity, bringing investment and fostering a sense of local pride and identity.

Buildings and spaces which 'look great' are more likely to be well maintained and invested in.

Buildings that are visually attractive and engaging will be more valuable to prospective residents and commercial tenants in delivering a sense of identity and brand support.

Good design can ensure buildings and spaces maintain their appearance over time, through appropriate selection and application of materials, detailing, fenestration and weather protection.

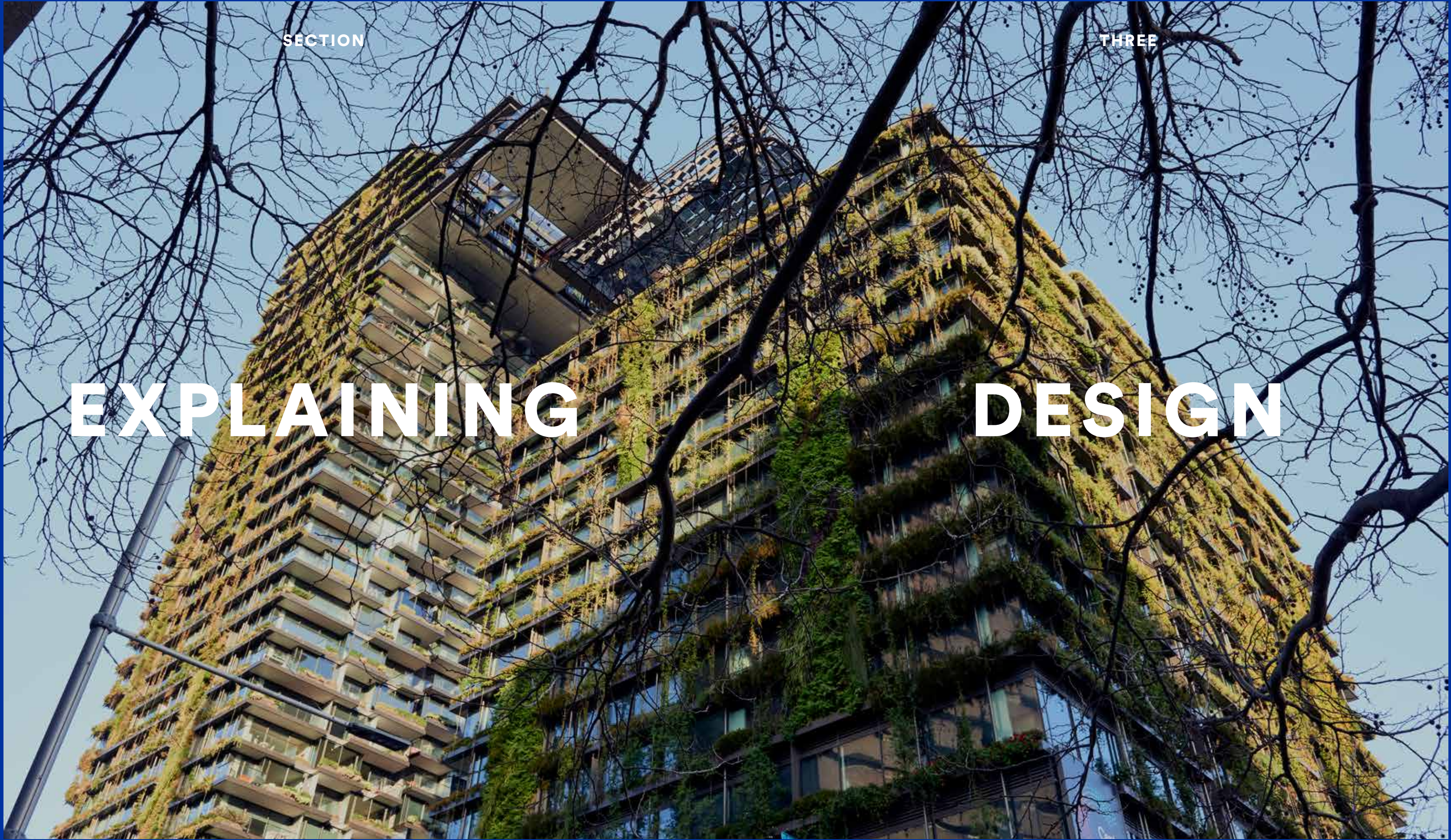


SECTION

THREE

EXPLAINING

DESIGN



3.1 What is design?

Design is a creative act. It is the way we decide how we want things to be. Everything we create is designed by somebody. Design can describe many things. It can result in creating something physical, like a building or it can be a series of analytical diagrams created to help reframe or solve a problem or a vision put forward to negotiate multiple interests and propose a solution.

“Design is not just a visual thing. It’s a thought process. It’s a skill. Ultimately, design is a tool to enhance our humanity. It’s a frame for life.”

— Ilse Crawford, *Celebrating Design Without Contending with It*, *The New Yorker*

It is important to understand design as a verb and a noun; and both a problem defining and problem solving activity that brings together many different pieces of information in order to identify and develop new opportunities. Design should be understood as both a **process** put in place to do something, and an **outcome** of creating something.

Characteristically, design is an iterative process where scenarios may be developed for testing and many options are considered and evaluated. The design process is non-linear, requires multiple attempts, iterations, reviews, feedback and testing of proposals in order to achieve a successful outcome. It is often highly visual in output, where solutions are presented through drawing, modelling and other means of graphic communication.

To seek out best outcomes, many courses of action can be examined simultaneously including pragmatic requirements, budgets and timelines, conceptual ideas and innovations, economic realities, environmental challenges, regulatory contexts, and community aspirations. Innovative solutions are often found between disciplines – a key role of the designer being to understand the interconnectedness of its parts by synthesising multiple elements into the best possible outcome.

Finally, design is an activity based on critical thinking and collaboration, where the designer is often required to vision an unplanned future. The designer must synthesise from the process undertaken and create outcomes that change existing situations into preferred ones, unlock new potentials, drive innovation, and deliver social, economic and environmental value.

Good design

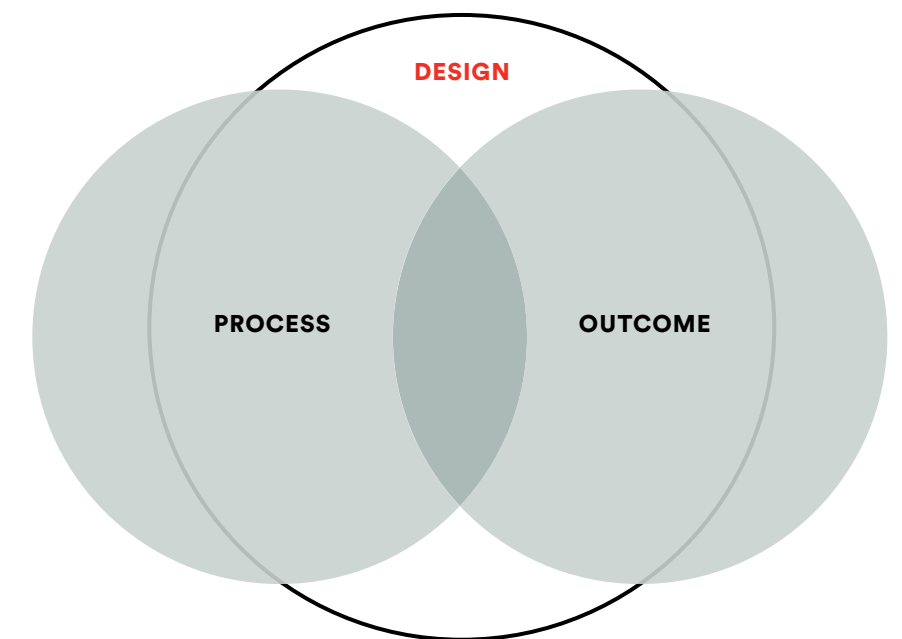
This policy establishes a baseline of what is expected to achieve good design, across all projects in NSW. Good design is a phrase that encapsulates the aspirations of **Better Placed** including its vision for NSW, its definition of good process, and its outline of objectives for the built environment.

Good design creates useable, user-friendly, enjoyable and attractive places and spaces, which continue to provide value and benefits to people, the place and the natural environment over extended periods. Good design brings benefits socially, environmentally and economically, and builds on these benefits over time – it adds value.



Design

Design is both process and outcome – its methods of open ended enquiry, synthesis and testing are pathways to create a vision and find the most appropriate outcome.



3.2 Good design adds value

Buildings, public spaces and infrastructure are expensive and represent major investments with long-term implications for individuals, families, businesses and government. The design of buildings, facilities and spaces has a lasting and significant impact on their operation and management. The perception that design is expensive can be easily dispelled if the breakdown of a building's whole-life costs is understood. Well-designed buildings can cost less over their life.

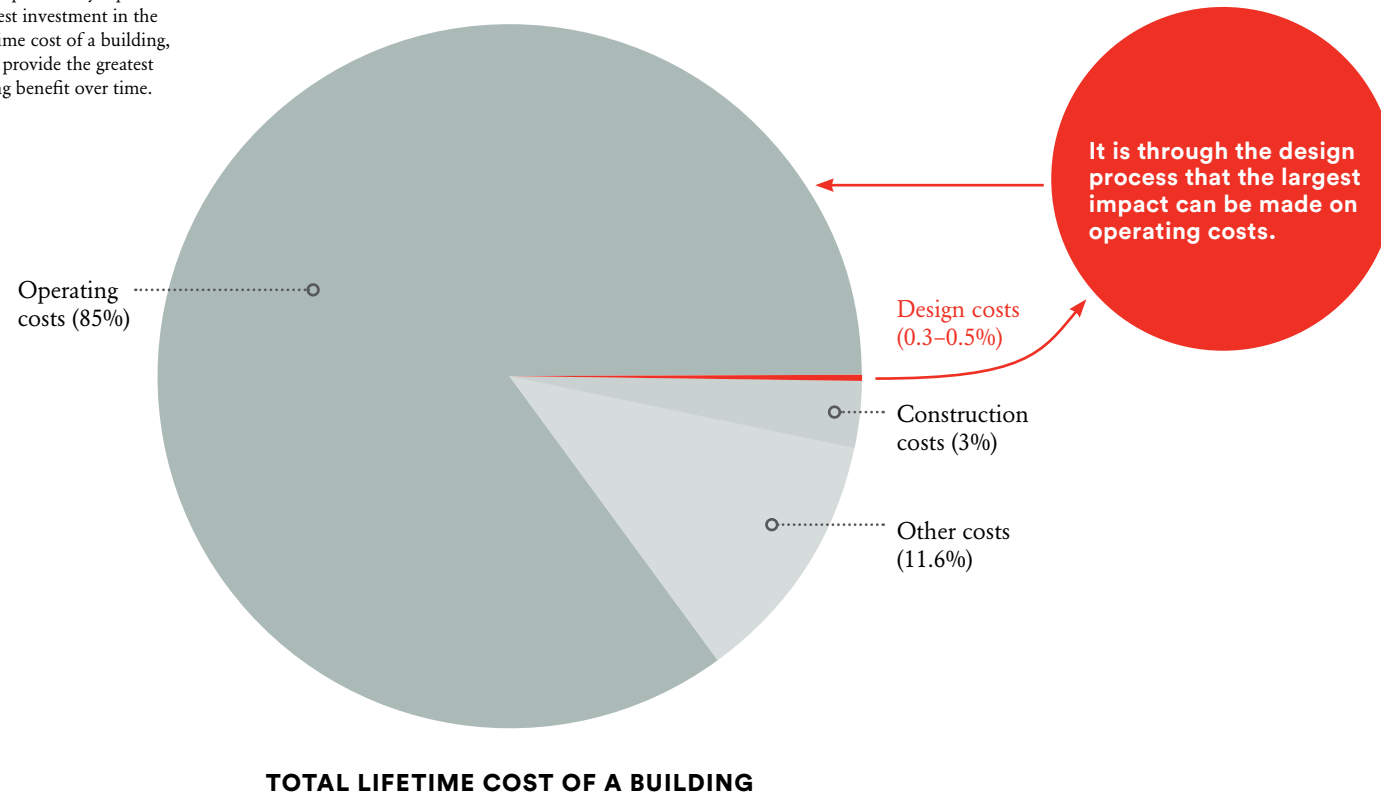
Over the lifetime of a building, the construction costs are unlikely to be more than three per cent of total costs, but the operating costs will often constitute 85 per cent of the total. On the same scale, the design costs are likely to be 0.3–0.5 per cent of the whole-life costs, and yet it is through the design process that the largest impact can be made on operating costs (CABE, Improving Standards of Design).

While it is important to understand the economic benefits of good design, often value is only thought of in these terms, as it is easy to quantify cost. It is less easy to quantify quality of life, public benefit and community impact, but social and environmental factors are equally as important in understanding the value of design. Good design delivers great value to investors, end users and the wider community. The benefits of good design run deep, well beyond functionality and aesthetics. Great design enhances our lifestyle and personal health, as well as our productivity and enjoyment.

Design value should be a balance of three factors; social, economic and environmental.

The value of good design

Design proportionally represents the smallest investment in the total lifetime cost of a building, yet it can provide the greatest cost saving benefit over time.



“The great value that design has to offer the world lies in the systematic way in which its practitioners develop alternative futures for a situation and then rigorously assess those alternatives to find what best meets our needs within a budget and schedule we can afford”

— Thomas Fisher, *Designing Our Way to a Better World*



3.3 Who benefits from good design?

The benefits of good design are varied and expansive. Good design eliminates risk, maximises effect and creates certainty.

Good design is proven as successful in solving complex problems, creating efficient use of resources.

Good design can manage risk, and create certainty and confidence.

Good design has the potential to reduce communities' fear of growth or change.

Good design promotes healthy living and productive economies.

Good design makes places that are long lasting and enjoyable to be in, helping to improve liveability and quality of life.

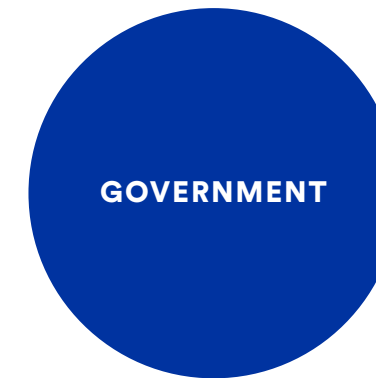
Good design can enhance urban economic performance by attracting new people, businesses and skills to a particular area.

Good design can enhance land values and returns.

Good design can reduce economic costs such as maintenance, and energy consumption.

Good design can help reduce public expenditure in areas such as health and crime prevention.

Good design can improve green space, biodiversity and impact positively on the natural environment.



Can maximise the value of investment and reduce risk.

Assists in delivering policy, and strategic and integrated goals.

Design based approaches can offer insight into difficult problems, and foster collaboration.



Good design outcomes are accessible and inclusive, improving community cohesion and liveability.

Fosters civic pride, and culture.



Leads to increased land and property values, higher rentals, and returns.

Lessens long-term costs such as maintenance.

Enhances company reputation for repeat business.



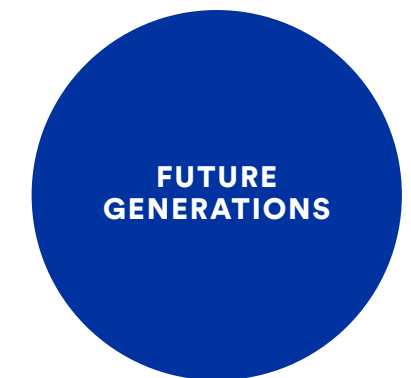
Improves health and well-being, leading to happier, more productive and more comfortable inhabitants.

Fit for purpose design increases use and long term value.



Helps the design professional build capacity, awareness, skills and knowledge.

Good designers are better participants in the process and are more attractive to clients, bringing repeat business, and collaborative opportunities.



What we design and construct now will be enjoyed, or not, by future generations. It is essential that we remember the long-term or permanence of built environment interventions to benefit and enhance the future heritage of NSW.

GLOSSARY

Better Placed sets a standard for the whole of NSW. Key terms of this policy have been defined to allow for consistency of language in the communication of design across NSW.

Given existing processes and expectations, it is important to understand Design Excellence and Design Review as two existing NSW processes, and their relation to Better Placed, as outlined at the start of the glossary.



Design Excellence in NSW

Design Excellence is a term that exists in statutory planning documents, most notably Local Environment Plans (LEPs) and State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs). It describes a variety of requirements intended to lift design quality. Design excellence provisions vary and range from the need to:

- consider urban design themes
- undertake a competitive design process
- undertake a specific form of design competition.

Design Excellence and competitions

A number of documents exist that outline the process that must be followed to meet the obligations of a competitive design process or design competition where this is required, these include; the Director General's Design Excellence Guidelines (2010)*, Parramatta City Design Excellence Competition Guidelines and the City of Sydney Competitive Design Policy, among others. Triggers for design competitions and competitive design processes vary across jurisdictions but are typically associated with height, site area, capital investment value or location (a 'key site').

Projects following a State Significant Development approval pathway may also have competitive design process requirements called up in the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), where there is a statutory requirement to do so, for example through a relevant LEP or SEPP.

Most LEPs and SEPPs, and by extension SEARs, refer to the Director General's Design Excellence Guidelines, which provide guidance around the purpose of a design competition and describe the processes applicable. Please refer to the GA NSW website for the most current information on the status of the Director General's Design Excellence Guidelines.

Design Excellence and design quality

In addition to describing requirements, the term 'Design Excellence' is often also used within LEPs and elsewhere to describe an expected or required level of design quality of a competed building or project. In these cases the definition of Design Excellence is fairly consistent across planning legislation where it is often summarised as "... **the highest standard of architectural, urban and landscape design**".

More recently, Design Excellence has been used within statutory regulations to describe or trigger other processes, including review of a project by an established Design Review Panel, or establishment of a Design Integrity Panel. These processes often result from a request to waive the requirement for a competition and are then referred to as "alternative design excellence processes".

In summary

- Design Excellence is a term used to describe a variety of requirements intended to lift design quality, as outlined in statutory planning documents such as LEPs and SEPPs.
- It is most commonly used in relation to a single building or development.
- Design Excellence usually refers to a competitive design process but has also come to be used to describe the design quality of a final building or project.

Design Excellence and Better Placed

- Better Placed** sets a standard for the whole of NSW. This includes projects that are required to undertake a Design Excellence process and the many that do not.
- **Better Placed** is an aspirational set of objectives, championing good design processes and outcomes across all project types and scales. Design Excellence is a specific process linked to statutory planning requirements and is typically directed at large or significant projects.
 - LEPs, SEPPs and competitive design guides provide minimum requirements for assessing Design Excellence. **Better Placed** offers a set of objectives that are holistic and aspirational with a wider focus for people, communities and the benefit of NSW.

History

'Design Excellence' emerged as a term in the year 2000 in the City of Sydney where it was used to describe an optional competitive design process to be undertaken at the concept design stage of new projects in return for additional Floor Space Ratio or height. The initiative was applied to any development exceeding 55 metres in height or with a site area larger than 1500 square metres. The competitive process was aimed at both lifting the design quality of significant buildings and diversifying the field of architectural practices engaged in their design.

*Please refer to the GA NSW website for the most current information on the Director General's Design Excellence Guidelines.

Design Review in NSW

Design Review is a widely used and accepted form of improving the design quality of projects across NSW. Design Review Panels (DRP's) or similar (Design Advisory Panels, Design Excellence Panels etc.) currently exist at a local government level, often in the form of SEPP 65 panels; at a state level for specific projects, such as the Metro DRP; at a precinct scale such as the Sydney Olympic Park Authority DRP; and within state agencies such as Transport and Urban Growth.

Although not a requirement, the Apartment Design Guide (ADG) strongly recommends the establishment of DRPs at a local level to review SEPP 65 buildings as part of their assessment. Part 5 of the ADG provides guidelines and templates for Design Review and encourages councils to use their DRP for other significant local projects such as planning proposals and local infrastructure.

Better Placed will support the delivery of quality design review across NSW through the articulation of an overarching set of best practice design objectives and the processes that support them.

A	
Adaptable	A building, place or space that is able to adjust to new conditions, or to be modified for a new purpose.
Adding value	Leveraging and building on the existing characteristics and qualities of a building place or space to increase social, economic and environmental benefits to the community.
Attractive	A building, place or space that is aesthetically-pleasing, or appealing.
B	
Brief (design brief)	A set of instructions, aspirations and requirements that outline the specific task or job to be completed. The design brief outlines the ambitions, objectives and needs of the project (without prescribing a solution or aesthetic). A good design brief is an evolving document becoming more complex and detailed as the project develops.
Built environment	Comprises the extent of our human-made environment, as distinguished from the natural environment. It includes all aspects of our surroundings made by people that provide the place for human activity. The built environment can be understood to include cities and towns, neighbourhoods, parks, roads, buildings and even utilities like water and electricity.
C	
Case study	A specific building, place or space that has been researched and analysed in order to demonstrate and evaluate its worthiness. A case study can assist in the design of new spaces by understanding best practice as well as lessons learned.
Cities and towns	A large urban structure with complex and multiple considerations required for development including layout of streets, buildings, infrastructure and open space.
Comfortable	A building, place or space that provides physical and emotional ease and well-being for its people.
Competitive design process	Involves multiple teams who offer ideas, solutions and/or services to a brief to encourage multiple innovative outcomes. A competitive design process may involve a design competition.
Connected	A building, place or space that establishes links with its surrounds, allowing visitors and residents to move about freely and sustainably.
Contextual	A building, place or space that responds to the context in which it is designed.
Context	The physical, social, cultural, economic, environmental and geographic circumstances that form the setting for a place or building.
Creating value	Conceiving and designing in new opportunities to a building, place or space for increased social, economic and environmental benefits to the community.

D	
Design	See p46 What is design for full description.
Design competition	A design competition is a competitive process in which an organisation or government body invites designers to submit a proposal for a precinct, site or building. An independent panel of design professionals selects the winner based on an agreed selection criteria.
Design Excellence	See p54 Design Excellence in NSW for full description. Design Excellence is most commonly used to describe a competitive design process used in NSW and brought into effect by statutory planning regulations such as LEPs. It is often also used as an ‘umbrella’ term in planning legislation to describe ‘good design’.
Design guide	A set of standards outlining the application and implementation of given information in order to achieve best practice outcomes.
Design process	See p26 Design process for full description. A design process involves a series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end. Design processes are not linear; they are iterative, collaborative and circular where feedback and ideas are intertwined and continual. Design processes help provide solutions to complex problems where many inputs/concerns are needed to be resolved.
Design Review Panel	A panel comprising a diverse group of people with expertise in design and the built environment. The panel offers independent, impartial advice on the design to achieve the best built outcome for stakeholders.
Design thinking	Refers to creative strategies designers use in the process of designing.
Diverse	A building, place or space that embraces a richness in use, character and qualities.
Durable	A building, place or space that is built to be able to withstand wear and pressure.
E	
Efficient	A building, place or space that is constructed, and functions with minimal wasted effort.
Engaging	A building, place or space that draws people in with features that arouse interest.
Equitable	A built environment that is fair and accessible for all citizens.
F	
Fit for purpose	A building, place or space that works according to its intended use.
Functional	A building, place or space that is designed to be practical and purposeful.

G	
Green infrastructure	Green infrastructure describes the network of green spaces and water systems that deliver multiple environmental, economic and social values and benefits to urban communities. This network includes parks and reserves, backyards and gardens, waterways and wetlands, streets and transport corridors, pathways and greenways, squares and plazas, roof gardens and living walls, sports fields and cemeteries. Green infrastructure is the web of interrelated natural systems that underpin and are integrated into our urban fabric.
H	
Healthy	A building, place or space that promotes positive social, emotional and physical health for its people.
I	
Inclusive	A building, place or space that embraces the community and individuals who use it.
Integrated	A built environment that links communities and functions and activities within a cohesive place.
Inviting	A building, place or space that is welcoming to visitors, community and individuals.
L	
Liveable	A built environment which supports and responds to people’s patterns of living, and is suitable and appropriate for habitation, promoting enjoyment, safety and prosperity.
Local	A building, place or space that relates to an area, or neighbourhood.
M	
Manual	An instructive document to direct how an action is best performed.
Master plan	A framework document showing how development will occur in a given place and includes building parameters like height, density, shadowing and environmental concerns. It is a visual document that details a clear strategy or plan for the physical transformation of a place, supported by financial, economic, and social policy documents which outline delivery mechanisms and implementation strategies.
O	
Of its place	A building, place or space that relates to its surrounds.
Outcome	The result of a process, generally having a final product.
P	
Place	A social and a physical concept – a physical setting, point or area in space conceived and designated by people and communities. In this sense, place can describe different scales of the built environment – for example, a town is a place, as well as a building can be a place.

Place-making	Proposes a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. ‘Place-making’ looks at understanding the local community with the intention of creating public spaces that promote health and well-being.
Precinct	A designated area within real or perceived boundaries of a specific building or place. A precinct can be of different scales and usually responds to a study area of a particular place.
Public realm	The public realm is the collective, communal part of cities and towns, with shared access for all. It is the space of movement, recreation, gathering, events, contemplation and relaxation. The public realm includes streets, pathways, rights of way, parks, accessible open spaces, plazas and waterways that are physically and visually accessible regardless of ownership.
Q	
Quality	The standard of something, measured comparatively against things of a similar kind.
R	
Resilient	A building, place or space that can withstand or recover from difficult conditions.
Responsive	Buildings and spaces that are react positively to place and local character and context.
S	
Safe	A building, place or space that protects its people from harm or risk of harm.
Scale	The relative size or extent of something – scale is a device used to quantify objects in a sequence by size; for example a city scale, or a building scale. In architecture, scale is also used to describe a ratio of size in a map, model, drawing, or plan.
Spatial framework	A design and research document that is produced to provide background understanding and analysis to a particular area or place. It is completed prior to traditional design stages or master plan phases of a project. The framework follows a process of analysis, data collection and reporting in order to propose a delivery strategy and vision for the area being analysed.
Sustainable	Relates to the endurance of systems, buildings, spaces and processes – their ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, which contributes positively to environmental, economic and social outcomes.
T	
Typology	The comparative study of physical or other characteristics of the built environment into distinct types.
V	
Value (of design)	A measure of what design is worth. Value is not merely related to economics, but includes the understanding of social, and environmental factors as components contributing to the value of good design.

GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT NEW SOUTH WALES

The Government Architect provides strategic design leadership in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. In this role, the Government Architect supports the NSW Government in delivering quality, managing risk and fostering innovation to maximise public value in the built environment.

The role of the Government Architect is critical in helping deliver good design and planning outcomes across all projects in NSW. This strategic advisory role provides an opportunity to work across government, the private sector and the community to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes for NSW and its communities.

The Government Architect is charged with championing the **Better Placed** initiatives and supporting government agencies and local government to create and deliver high quality architecture and design outcomes.

The responsibilities of the Government Architect are to:

Champion good design and the importance of great places.

Establish policy and practice guides for achieving good design.

Champion design excellence processes for government.

Provide independent, professional and impartial strategic advice particularly for the delivery of public projects, to:

- cabinet and senior government executives
- government departments & agencies
- local government
- industry and community.

Promote and advocate the value and benefits of good design by:

- ensuring government has the ability to make informed design decisions
- developing, supporting and leading design-led processes and building capability

- strategic commissioning, including ongoing management of the Government Architect's Pre-qualification Scheme for Strategy and Design Excellence
- working to support and better educate industry on the value of design
- providing advice on performance, procurement and commissioning
- publishing design guides, case studies and other supporting documents
- partnering with others to ensure that the objectives of good design are reflected in their processes, policy and project delivery
- leading the Design Review for important public urban renewal, precincts and buildings.

Undertake research and provide thought leadership on design and the built environment.

Communicate the benefits of good design and design-based processes.

Foster collaborative approaches to improving design across government, with industry and academia.

Support and promote the development of pilot projects that demonstrate the benefits of good design.

Create a culture of learning and share global best practice that tackle design challenges facing NSW.

Support and nurture a culture of good design and great places together with the sharing of local and global best practice.

Government Architect NSW is supporting:

Good design in the built environment

Enabling built environment interventions and developments to contribute to better places for NSW cities and towns through improved design standards and quality in urban precincts, buildings and spaces.

These projects will be:

- **healthy** for all members of our communities
- **responsive** to local context
- **integrated** with the place, public realm, natural environment and use patterns
- **equitable**, welcoming and accessible for all
- **resilient** and adaptable to future change.

Better design processes for projects

Encouraging all new interventions to employ good design, through application of the design objectives outlined in this policy, and effective design and procurement methodologies by:

- providing a framework to influence creation, governance, appraisal and assessment of projects
- providing guides for delivery including methodologies (e.g. strategic frameworks), as well as building upon existing design review and advisory processes
- fostering design thinking, reframing problems, identifying opportunities, and testing scenarios and options early in project and planning processes.

Capacity building

Creating enhanced awareness of the role and value of design, and equipping local authorities and communities with the tools, guidance and references to encourage and demand well-designed urban environments by:

- fostering a change in design culture – design is not an ‘optional extra’, but essential from vision to conception to project completion
- creating a common language for design understanding, review and advice in consistent terms
- empowering others to champion design and influence the creation of great places.

A stronger design culture and active engagement

Encouraging community interest, participation and investment in better design, planning and development, raising awareness and expectations relating to design, facilitating better design, and supporting advocacy for better outcomes by:

- encouraging the building industry to communicate and collaborate with local communities
- providing an informative website where information about design and processes are accessible to all
- surveying communities to understand their thoughts on design, and to raise awareness about design
- providing case studies where successful design processes and outcomes have been achieved, so the NSW community can be proud of their great places.



Through a series of collaborative events and conversations, Government Architect NSW promotes public conversations about the value of good design.



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Eurobodalla Shire Council
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Orange City Council
Planning Institute Australia
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Property Council NSW Chapter
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Shoalhaven City Council
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**G
A**

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The role of the Government Architect is critical in helping deliver good design and planning outcomes across all projects in NSW. This strategic advisory role provides an opportunity to work across government, the private sector and the community to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes for NSW and its communities.

The Government Architect is charged with championing the Better Placed initiatives and supporting government agencies and local government to create and deliver high quality architecture and design outcomes.

Find out more
gansw.nsw.gov.au

Better Placed
through integrated design



Better fit
contextual, local and of its place



Better performance
sustainable, adaptable and durable



Better for community
inclusive, connected and diverse



Better for people
safe, comfortable and liveable



Better working
functional, efficient and fit for purpose



Better value
creating and adding value



Better look and feel
engaging, inviting and attractive