



## **GUIDELINES** FOR HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

## FOREWORD

Where and how we live in Victoria will continue to change over the next three decades. Current trends indicate that the population will increase in number but will age steadily. Furthermore, household sizes will diminish so the number of households – single and two people – will increase as the population grows. New housing will be needed to accommodate this increase in population and change in household sizes, as current housing stock lacks the variety to adequately meet these needs.

*Melbourne 2030* sets out directions for accommodating the city's expanding and changing population over the next 30 years. The strategy identifies activity centres, which provide the focus for services, employment and social interaction – they are where people shop, work, meet, relax and live. Activity centres are expected to accommodate a broader mix of housing, shops and services to create vibrant, well-connected communities. The clustering of higher density housing in and around activity centres aims to encourage use of public transport, walking and cycling, improve the viability of activity centres which in turn will provide a wider range of services, facilities and employment opportunities, and housing types.

To take full advantage of available facilities and infrastructure, we need to promote housing intensification around activity centres and strategic redevelopment sites in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The development of higher density housing, designed in response to the local context, will contribute significantly to improving the diversity in housing choice in these areas.

While higher density residential development has the potential to support economic and social activity of activity centres, skilful design is needed to minimise unwanted off-site impacts related to neighbourhood character, amenity, overshadowing and access. These guidelines set out objectives and suggestions for designing and assessing higher density residential development. They will help to ensure that Victoria's reputation for quality architecture and urban design continues as we meet future housing needs.



**MARY DELAHUNTY, MP**  
Minister for Planning



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# INTRODUCTION



Quality architecture and vibrant and inclusive urban spaces are the central ingredients of liveable communities. Our aim should be to leave for future generations a legacy of design that continues Victoria's tradition of great architecture and urban design that responds to the challenges of today and serves the needs of the future.

These guidelines have been developed so that the planning system can promote well-designed higher-density housing in activity centres and other strategic redevelopment sites that are close to public transport.

Under Melbourne 2030, higher density housing is encouraged to locate in activity centres to:

- provide for the forecast increase in population and households
- ensure the available housing stock better matches changing demand by widening housing choice, particularly in middle and outer suburbs
- support opportunities for a wide range of income groups to choose housing in well-served locations
- increase local population base that supports activity centres and local businesses and
- encourages walking, cycling and public transport alternatives.

The guidelines will be supported by detailed local structure plans and local policies developed for activity centres.

## PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The State Planning Policy Framework sets out in clause 19.03 design principles that must be taken into account in the design of urban spaces and buildings. They include context, public realm, landmarks, views and vistas; pedestrian spaces; heritage; consolidation of sites and empty sites; light and shade; energy and resource efficiency; architectural quality and landscape architecture.

These Guidelines have been developed to assist designers and planners apply these design principles to proposals for higher density residential development. The Guidelines provide 'better practice' design advice for higher density residential development that promotes high quality public and private amenity and good design.

The Guidelines will assist:

- Developers and designers when developing proposals and preparing applications
- Councils when assessing applications.

The Guidelines are structured around six elements of design consideration:

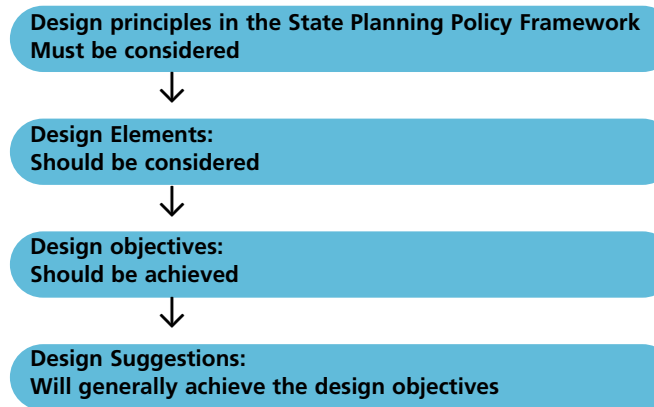
- Urban context
- Building envelope
- Street pattern and street-edge quality
- Circulation and services
- Building layout and design
- Open space and landscape design

Under each element is a series of general design objectives.

Each objective has a corresponding set of related design suggestions that will generally achieve a good design response.

Designers will need to determine the merit of the specific suggestions in the context of their proposed development and the objectives in these Guidelines. Where designers consider a design suggestion should not apply, they should be able to express clear reasons why this is so and put forward alternative ways of meeting the objective.

The diagram below shows the relationship between design objectives and suggestions.



## WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD DESIGN?

Good design of higher density residential developments is a creative process that can be said to be achieved where a proposal:

- responds and contributes to its natural and built context
- provides an appropriate scale in terms of the bulk and height relative to the scale of the street and surrounding buildings (in keeping with existing or preferred neighbourhood character)
- achieves an appropriate built form for a site and building in terms of building alignment, proportions, building type and elements
- has a density appropriate for a site and its context (in keeping with existing or preferred neighbourhood character)
- recognises that landscape and buildings operate as an integrated and sustainable system
- optimises safety and security for internal and public spaces
- responds to its social context in terms of access to housing diversity and to services
- makes efficient use of natural resources, energy and water throughout its full life cycle

The guidelines have been prepared with these aims in mind.



## RELATED GUIDELINES

### Sustainability

The achievement of sustainable design outcomes needs to be considered. The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has published Environmentally Sustainable Design and Construction: Principles and Guidelines for Capital Works Projects (July 2003). This document encourages Government Departments and building professionals to address the following principles for reducing the ecological impact of capital works:

- Energy conservation
- Water conservation
- Minimisation of fossil fuel usage associated with transport
- Preservation of natural features of sites
- Building materials conservation
- Waste minimisation
- Enhancement of indoor environmental quality
- Appropriate landscaping
- Enhancement of community life
- Maintenance

These guidelines focus on achieving sustainable outcomes by comparing construction costs derived from triple bottom line objectives with conventionally designed buildings.

New regulations will be introduced under the Building Code of Australia from July 2005, that require all new multi-storey residential developments to achieve a 5 star energy rating. This will become a mandatory requirement that will affect the design of higher density housing.

### Safety

Design for safety is also a significant issue. It aims to minimise the opportunity for crime and reduce the fear of crime for people using private and public space. The Safer Design Guidelines for Victoria have been developed to provide design objectives and suggestions that will assist in creating urban environments with enhanced personal safety and property security. The guidelines are based on the following set of principles:

- maximise visibility and surveillance of the public environment
- reduce the isolation of people, houses and areas that make them vulnerable to crime
- clearly define public and private space with active building fronts facing public space
- manage public space to ensure that it is attractive and well used.

### **Activity Centres**

Activity Centres provide a focus for retail services, employment and social interaction in cities and towns. Design guidelines have been developed for Activity Centres that set out objectives and suggestions for buildings and public places based on the following principles.

- develop a good-quality public domain
- promote street based patterns of connection
- improve community safety
- encourage a mix of uses
- improve pedestrian and cycling amenity
- promote a public transport focus
- increase accessibility and integration
- encourage environmental sustainability

Where higher density residential development is proposed in Activity Centres, consideration will need to be given to these guidelines.

## ELEMENT 1 URBAN CONTEXT



Urban context concerns the broader setting of a development – including its existing physical surroundings, its social and economic environment, and a strategic view of the area in which it is located and its role over time. One key aspect of urban context is understanding neighbourhood character – how the features of an area come together to make a particular place distinctive. All new development should make a positive contribution to an area's character, protecting and contributing to its valued natural, built and community qualities. However, higher density development implies a context that is changing – at least to some degree. Consequently, a second key aspect is to consider how the area is likely to change over time.





UNDERSTANDING THE SITE WITHIN ITS  
CONTEXT MUST BE THE STARTING POINT  
OF THE DESIGN PROCESS & INVOLVES  
BALANCING NEIGHBOURHOOD  
CHARACTER & STRATEGIC PLANNING  
OBJECTIVES.



## NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

A comprehensive understanding and appreciation of context and the balancing of neighbourhood character and strategic planning objectives must be the starting point for any design. This requires an understanding of a proposed development and its relationships to the surrounding public setting, neighbouring properties, and any identified strategic issues relating to the site.

Local councils and their communities may choose to maintain the existing neighbourhood character or identify a preferred future character for an area to guide its development. Neighbourhood character may concentrate on physical attributes or less tangible qualities to which good design can contribute. These might include:

- more public open space
- more vibrant, active streets and public spaces
- protection of valued qualities within the public realm
- better defined streets
- improved pedestrian and cycle linkages
- increased provision and patronage of public transport services
- better location for commercial/office activity
- greater mix of uses
- more residents
- greater viability for local businesses, perhaps of particular types
- improved safety and informal surveillance
- more evening activity.

In some instances, councils will have documented the valued aspects of neighbourhood character, while in others it will be necessary for developers to make their own reasoned assessment as part of a development proposal.

**OBJECTIVE 1.1:**

**To ensure buildings respond creatively to their existing context and to agreed aspirations for the future development of the area. This should take the form of an urban context report.**

DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.1.1: PREPARE AN URBAN CONTEXT REPORT THAT DOCUMENTS THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA AND IDENTIFIES OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE SITE.

The urban context report will have regard to the design principles outlined in clause 19.03 of the State Planning Policy Framework.

The report will generally include:

- an assessment of neighbourhood character
- information on the site and neighbouring buildings.

While urban context reports must be thorough in their identification and analysis of issues requiring an appropriate design response, they will vary in their content and detail depending on the complexity of the site and surrounding area.

The report may include a site plan, photographs or other techniques and must incorporate an accurate description of:

- shape, size, orientation of the site and easements
- levels and contours of the site and the difference in levels between the site and surrounding properties
- the location and height of existing buildings on the site and surrounding properties
- the use of surrounding buildings, including location of habitable rooms
- the location of private open space of surrounding properties and the location of trees, fences and other landscape elements
- solar access to the site and surrounding properties
- views to and from the site
- street frontage features such as poles, street trees, footpaths and kerb crossovers
- the location of shops, public transport services and public open space within walking distance
- movement systems through and around the site.
- Any other notable feature or characteristic of the site or surrounding areas
- constraints and opportunities such as heritage places
- current access to direct sunlight in summer and winter

An assessment of the character of an area would include the following where appropriate:

**Environment**

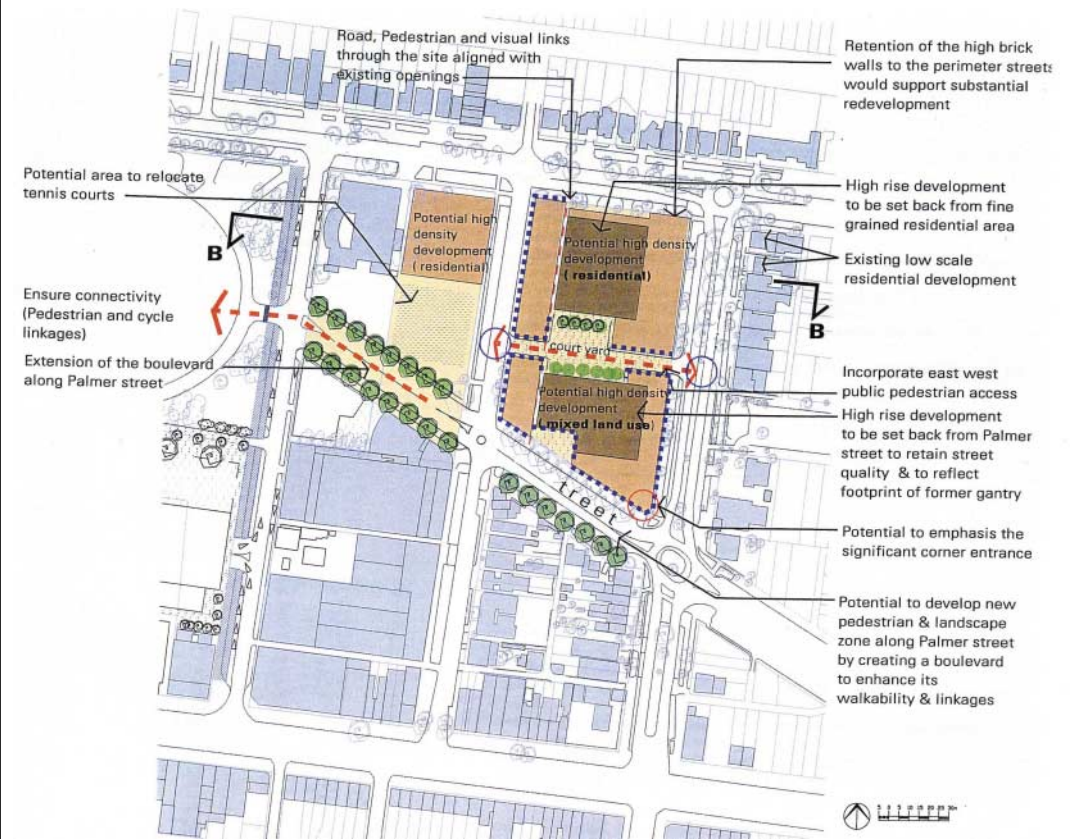
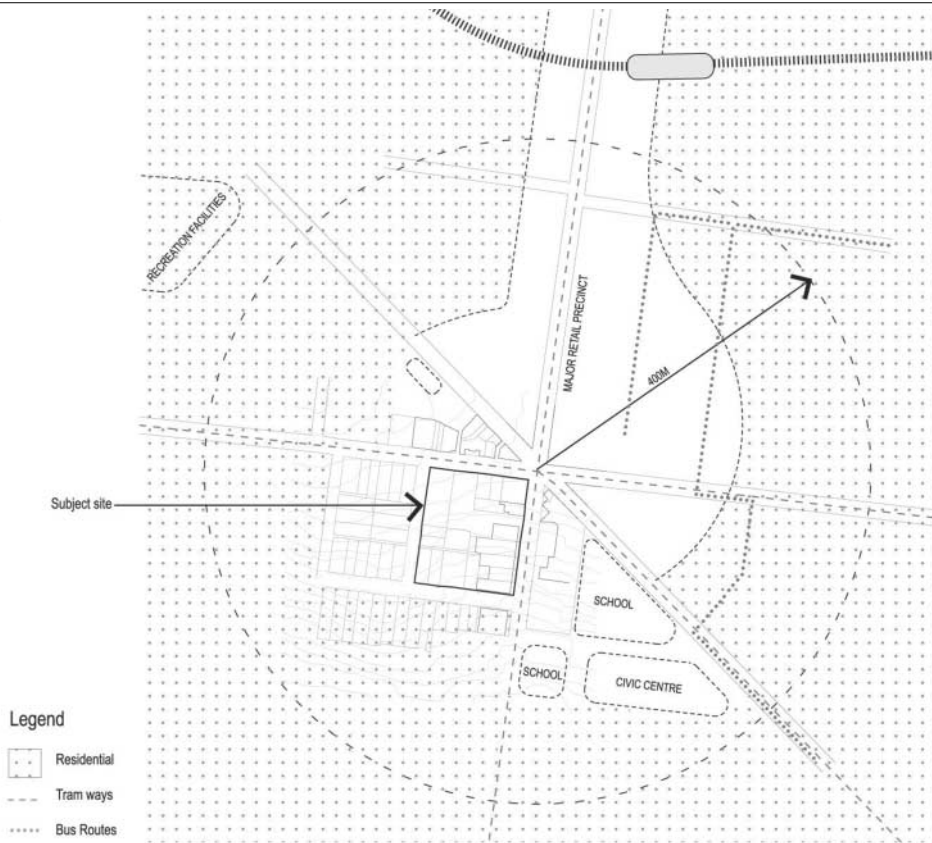
- Topography
- Views to and from the site
- Waterways
- Vegetation – extent and type
- Public open spaces – their attributes, access points and functions
- Microclimate

**Subdivision**

- Street pattern – widths, orientation, shape, variation and continuity
- Block size and shape
- Subdivision lots – pattern, sizes and shapes
- Other easements



RECORD AND ANALYSE INFORMATION ON THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.  
Image: MGS Architects



ENSURE A DEVELOPMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE STRATEGIC LOCATION OF THE SITE. Image: MGS Architects

ACCURATELY ASSESS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS. Image: MGS Architects

**Street details**

- Typical cross section widths and details of footpaths and carriageways, including the presence and depth of verandas and canopies
- Access points and vehicle crossovers
- Street trees
- Car parking
- Landscaping and vegetation on adjoining lots
- Intensity of vehicle and pedestrian movement

**Building mass and rhythm**

- The pattern of building heights in the area
- Relation of building height to street width
- Position of buildings on their lot and spaces around and between buildings
- Site coverage, extent and character of private open space
- Fences (style and height)
- Porches, verandas and balconies on private land

**Connection to the public realm**

- Patterns of use and occupation adjacent to the street or other public spaces
- Connections (physical and visual) between and across public and private spaces

**Architectural character**

- Architectural style – consistency or variation of nearby buildings
- Roof forms, fenestration patterns and other relevant building details
- Materials and colours

**Social and economic activity**

- Areas within a 5 to 10 minute walk of the site and major public destinations (e.g. transport stop, shopping street, post office, community facility)
- Community facilities and other local destinations of social significance
- Relationship to local retail and business centres

**Cultural identity**

- Heritage elements of subject site or local area
- Elements or facilities of cultural significance
- Public art
- Significant local events and their location

The assessment of character should explain the pattern of development in the area and its salient features rather than simply presenting a list of unrelated facts or measurements. For example, in seaside locations it may be elements of exuberant architecture and striving for a sea view that define the character, rather than a more traditional analysis of housing styles.

DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.1.1: IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT EXISTING PLANNING SCHEME OBJECTIVES AND REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO THE SPECIFIC SITE. INCLUDE THESE IN THE URBAN CONTEXT REPORT.

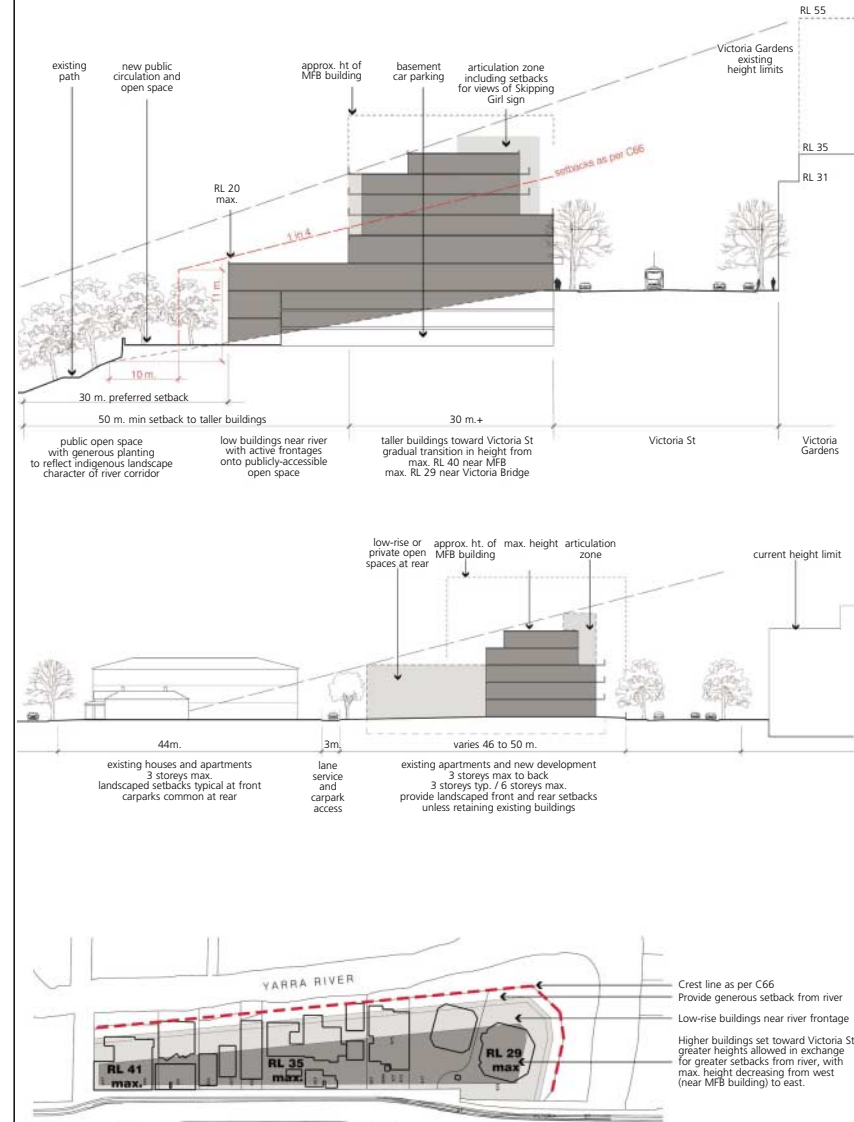
The following will need to be reviewed:

- Design principles in clause 19.03 of State Planning Policy Framework
- Municipal Strategic Statement and other relevant policies including Melbourne 2030
- Planning scheme controls and overlays
- Heritage controls.

DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.1.2: ENSURE A DEVELOPMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE STRATEGIC LOCATION OF THE SITE. ADDRESS THIS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT REPORT.

Some locations are better suited to higher density buildings than others. There is a need to consider the site's local context and its strategic context, such as proximity to activity centres, public transport services and other community facilities.

DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.1.3: CONSIDER THE LIKELY LOCATION, SIZE AND EXPECTED IMPACT OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND POSSIBLE USES NEARBY WHEN DESIGNING NEW DEVELOPMENTS. ADDRESS THIS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT REPORT.



ACCURATELY ANALYSE THE CHARACTER OF THE SITE TO UNDERSTAND ITS EFFECT ON POSSIBLE DESIGN OPTIONS. Images: Jones and Whitehead



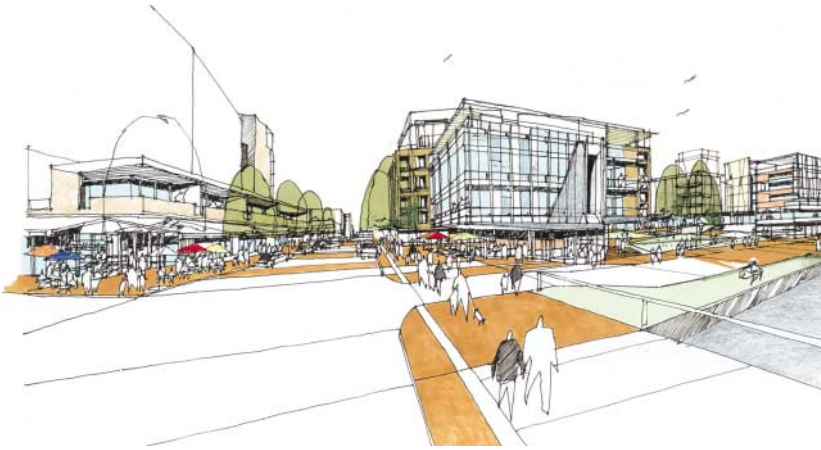


Image: Cox Architects.



Image: ARM/NH Architecture/Neometro Architects

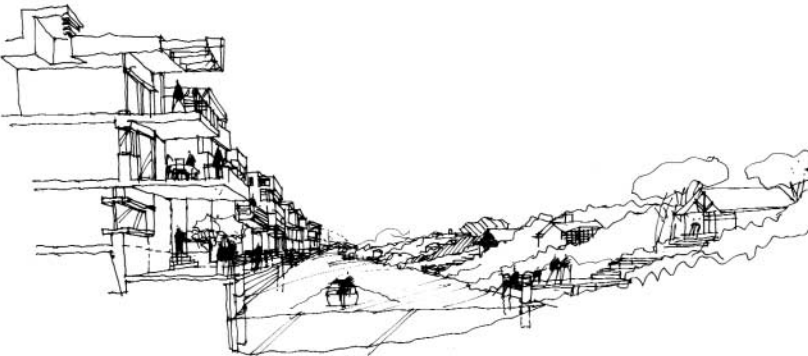


Image: Williams and Boag Architects

PROVIDE ILLUSTRATIONS OF A PROJECT WITHIN ITS CONTEXT.

Buildings need to respond to the existing context, and anticipate likely development on adjoining sites. In areas undergoing significant change, there will be a need to understand how the development will fit within the emerging pattern of development.

**DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.1.4: USE AN URBAN CONTEXT REPORT AS THE BASIS FOR PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS TO GENERATE AND TEST OPTIONS ABOUT THE SITE AND THE BUILDING DESIGN.**

Pre-application discussions based on the urban context report can significantly simplify approval procedures, with consequent savings in time and money for all parties involved.

For larger sites it might be useful to set design objectives for the site with the responsible authority before detailed design work begins.

## DESIGN RESPONSE

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

A design response provides a written and graphic explanation of the logic behind the preferred design.

### OBJECTIVE 1.2:

**To provide a creative design response that is based on a clear understanding of the urban context and neighbourhood character.**

**DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.2.1: STRUCTURE THE DESIGN RESPONSE TO EXPLAIN HOW IT RESPONDS TO RELEVANT PLANNING PROVISIONS THAT APPLY TO THE LAND, ANY RELEVANT HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER, URBAN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE PLAN, STRATEGY OR POLICY SET OUT IN THE RELEVANT PLANNING SCHEME AND THE URBAN CONTEXT REPORT INCLUDING:**

- why the massing and overall height is appropriate to the context
- how the development contributes to the quality of adjoining streets and other public spaces
- how the internal layout makes safe and efficient provision for residents
- why particular design treatments have been chosen.

The design response will often need to reconcile issues of broader context with those of local context. Where there is good access to public transport services and other facilities a broader context suggesting more intensive development may be appropriate while the local context and character might limit development potential to appropriate scale and medium density development.

The design response should explain the development proposal, build on the urban context report and show how the proposal meets the planning scheme objectives and requirements.

Shadow diagrams should be provided as part of the design response.

**DESIGN SUGGESTION 1.2.2: PROVIDE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PROJECT IN ITS CONTEXT.**

Even highly skilled architects can find difficulty in judging how a building will look when constructed and how it will sit in its context. Clear and relevant documentation of the proposal using two and three-dimensional representations is a mark of a good urban context report. Illustrations can assist in making these judgements. They need to be accurate, but not necessarily highly detailed.