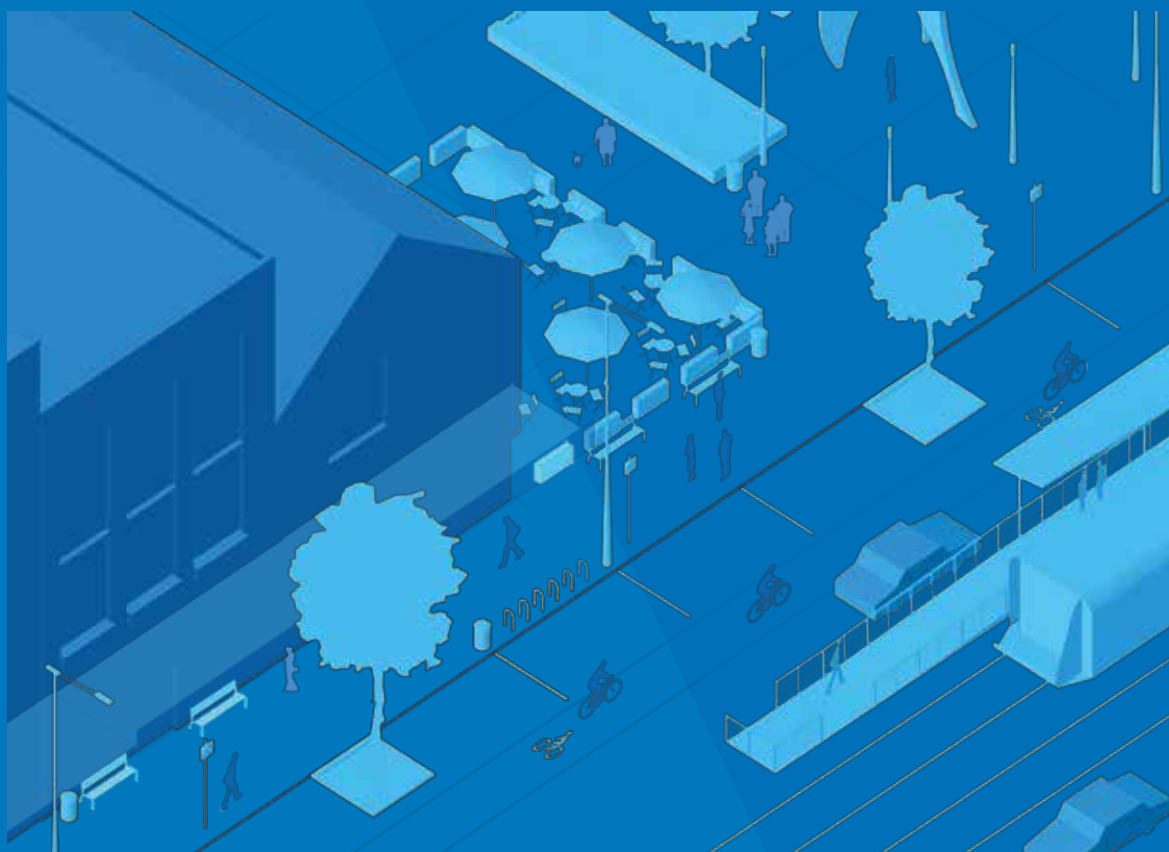# Element 6
Objects in the public realm

Element 6 Objects in the public realm

This element covers

6.1   Principles for objects in the public realm

The placement and arrangement of street furniture, utilities and small structures within the public realm.

6.2   Street and park furniture

Seats, drinking fountains, bins, automatic teller machines, and public art and sculpture, payphone cabinets.

6.3   Trees and planting

Trees, shrubs, ground covers.

6.4   Barriers and fences

Walls, fences and bollards.

6.5   Lighting

Lighting for the public realm.

6.6   Signs and way-finding

Information, instructions and advertising.

6.7   Small public buildings and structures

Shelters, toilets and kiosks.

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6.1 Principles for objects in the public realm

Objects in the public realm include those items located in streets and public spaces that are either for public use and convenience, or for utilities infrastructure and services. Objects include street furniture, service cabinets, trees and planting, barriers and fencing, lighting, signs and small public buildings and structures. Some objects for people to use are seats, drinking fountains, post boxes, payphone cabinets, kiosks and public toilets; some objects enhance the amenity and safety of a space, such as trees, lighting, barriers and signage. Other objects, such as service cabinets, power and telecom poles are not directly used by the public although they are located within the public realm.

Why is it important?

Street furniture and utilities infrastructure are installed and managed by many public bodies, agencies and service providers. Locating objects in the public realm can affect the accessibility, functionality and safety of a place. The location, design and management of objects in a public space, can support street function, complement existing activities and contribute to a sense of place. Poorly located objects can contribute to diminished safety, and physical and visual clutter.

These guidelines introduce general principles for the placement, integration, form and management of objects in the public realm. Further guidance on the placement of specific utilities can be found in other technical publications and codes, noted in Guidelines sources and references.

Related guidance

Element 2   Movement network

Element 3   Public spaces

Element 4   Public transport environs

Element 5   Buildings

# 6.1 **Principles for objects in the public realm**

Objective 6.1.1   To ensure that objects in the public realm support safety and amenity

6.1.1a   Place only the necessary objects in public spaces.

→ **TIP** While placing service cabinets and other objects in public spaces can appear an easy option, the accumulation of many objects can detract from the safety and amenity of a place.

6.1.1b   Where practical, combine or co-locate two or more street furniture functions into a single object.

→ **TIP** To minimise clutter, a tree guard may also provide support for a seat or bicycle parking post; a lighting pole may also support telecommunications.
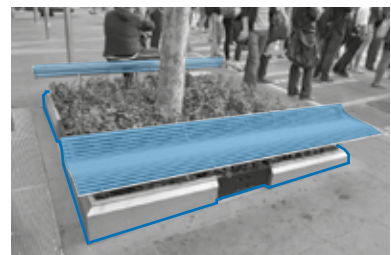
6.1.1c   Place all objects outside main pedestrian or bicycle travel paths and away from street corners.

→ **TIP** When placing objects, avoid creating concealment opportunities, collision or tripping hazards or blocking critical sightlines.
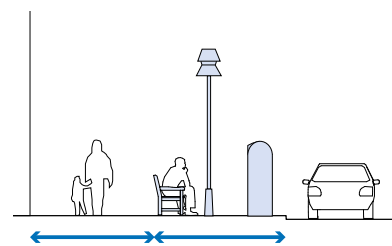
6.1.1d   Place all objects outside view lines to significant landmarks and cultural elements.

6.1.1e   Where practical, conceal services infrastructure objects within landscaping or adjacent building.

6.1.1f   Allocate space for temporary objects such as on-street shop display, cafe tables, vendor stalls, advertising boards, temporary barriers and signs.

6.1 Principles for objects in the public realm

Objective 6.1.2   To ensure objects in the public realm that are robust and easy to maintain

6.1.2a   Develop a simple, standardised palette of materials and designs for street furniture and objects.

→ **TIP** Where objects have a simple design and use a minimal palette, people rather than the object provide the visual richness.

6.1.2b   Use resilient materials that are easily cleaned, maintained and repaired or recycled.

→ **TIP** Quality materials are durable and maintain their appearance over time.

6.1.2c   Develop and use local design standards for furniture, objects and materials.

→ **TIP** Design standards for furniture and materials facilitate maintenance, repairs and replacement.

6.1.2d   Conduct periodic reviews of street furniture for changes in use patterns and performance

6.1.2e   Develop and implement an area wide public art strategy.

→ **TIP** Public art is not an expedient to fill an available corner or space; each artwork has its place and purpose. Placement and selection should be guided by a precinct or council-wide plan or strategy.

6.2 Street and park furniture

Street and park furniture includes seats, waste bins, drinking fountains, café furniture, bicycle parking hoops, post boxes, parking meters, payphone cabinets, vending and ticket machines. This element also includes public art, play and active recreation equipment.

Street and park furniture and public art support the function and vitality of public places. Equally important is their contribution to the enjoyment of being in public spaces.

The presence of seats and other amenities invites people to gather and linger in a place. Public spaces are also safer and more attractive when people are present. Seats and other amenities should be located where as many people as possible will want and be able to use them.

Related guidance

Element 6.1   Principles for objects in the public realm

6.2 Street and park furniture

Objective 6.2.1   To locate street and park furniture in accessible and convenient places

Seating is the most frequently used type of furniture, followed by waste bins and bicycle hoops.

6.2.1a   Locate seats at public transport stops, in parks and plazas, and along pedestrian routes.

6.2.1b   Place seats where people gather and linger, and at locations where people can enjoy views or watch activities.

> → **TIP**   Where people are expected to sit for more than 15 minutes, provide comfortable seating.

6.2.1c   Place seats on main pedestrian routes at 100m intervals or more frequently.

6.2.1d   Locate waste bins adjacent to litter generators such as food vendors, cafes or picnic areas.

> → **TIP**   Waste bins may be co-located with other utilities infrastructure, such as poles, to minimise clutter.

6.2.1e   Locate drinking fountains adjacent to and visible from frequently used pedestrian and bicycle routes.

6.2.1f   Position play equipment where children would naturally play.

> → **TIP**   Children will not feel safe using play equipment located in isolated places.

6.2.1g   Position post boxes near a safe road crossing.

> → **TIP**   Boxes are used by people of all abilities and need to be safely accessible from the neighbourhood they serve.

6.2.1h   Position bicycle parking hoops to accommodate a bicycle on either side.

> → **TIP**   Bicycle hoops can also double as tree protectors.

Objective 6.2.2   To ensure that seating is attractive and comfortable

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6.2.2 a   Locate seats in a sheltered position with access to summer shade and winter sun.

→ **TIP** By combining seating with a tree guard, you can minimise clutter and provide shade.

6.2.2 b   Orient seats with backs against a wall or fence, facing forwards, with an interesting outlook to activity or views.

6.2.2 c   Arrange seating with clear views of activities and entries.

→ **TIP** Places where people sit and relax need good sightlines of the whole space and its entry points.

6.2.2 d   Locate seats with no back in busy open areas where people can sit on either side.

6.2 Street and park furniture

Objective 6.2.3 To ensure that the location of street and park furniture supports safety and amenity

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6.2.3a Place waste bins a minimum distance of 2m from public seating or play areas.

→ **TIP** Odours from bins may deter people from using seats or play equipment.

6.2.3b Place post boxes, payphone cabinets, parking meters, vending and ticket machines to be accessible from, but not obstructing, the pedestrian path.

6.2.3c Locate bicycle parking hoops near to an active street or use.

→ **TIP** Proximity to active uses provides informal surveillance opportunities.

Objective 6.2.4 To provide for engaging, accessible active recreation and play equipment

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6.2.4a Select play equipment that stimulates imagination and active play.

6.2.4b Provide a variety of active recreation and play equipment suitable to a range of ages and abilities.

→ **TIP** Both young and older children need to engage in stimulating imaginative play. Adults may also enjoy play and recreation equipment.

6.3 Trees and planting

Planting trees, shrubs and ground covers in urban areas contributes visual interest and microclimate moderation. Trees can provide shade, shelter, and cool air pockets; they can screen an unsightly view, act as landmarks, or provide a sense of enclosure with leafy walls and ceilings.

Trees are frequently the most important element for setting the character of an area. A tree-lined street can be beautiful even when the architecture is mundane. Trees lining streets and paths in parks make the space comfortable and desirable. Places with trees tend to attract more people. A landscape changes with the seasons and gives people a sense of passing time and dynamic vitality.

Related guidance

Element 6.1   **Principles for objects in the public realm**

6.3 **Trees and planting**

Objective 6.3.1   To select trees and planting that are fit-for-purpose

In selecting plants, have regard to the landscape heritage, size of plants at maturity, microclimate and soil conditions.

6.3.1a   Select lawn types that are suitable for sitting on and for recreation.

  → **TIP** If a public space is heavily trafficked then a hard-wearing surface may be more suitable. Synthetic lawn surfaces may be an option.

6.3.1b   Use drought-resistant plant species when irrigation is not available.

6.3.1c   Use plant species appropriate to the available root space.

6.3.1d   Select deciduous tree species where winter sun is desired.

6.3.1e   Select dense, canopied tree species where summer shade is desired.

6.3.1f   Select evergreen species with dense foliage where wind protection or screening is needed.
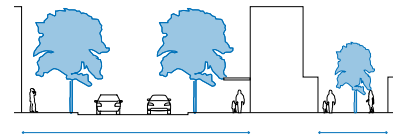

6.3 Trees and planting

Objective 6.3.2 To ensure trees and planting contribute to local identity and context

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6.3.2a Select trees and planting appropriate to the cultural context and local identity.

6.3.2b Provide trees and planting that engage the senses.

→ **TIP** Plants that change appearance with the seasons provide a dynamic experience and enhance a sense of place. The sounds and scents of plantings are also important considerations.

6.3.2c Select trees in keeping with the scale of the street or public space.

6.3.2d Position trees and planting to define a street or path.

→ **TIP** Trees placed between a pedestrian path and a traffic lane can provide both psychological and physical protection from vehicles.


6.3.2e In wide streets or large open spaces, position trees to form a canopy and enclose the space.

Objective 6.3.3 To ensure trees and planting support the safety and amenity of public space

6.3.3a Select tree species with clear trunks, and no branches or foliage below 2500mm in height.

> → **TIP** Foliage free zones between 600mm and 2500mm from the ground allow clear sightlines and eliminate opportunities for concealment.
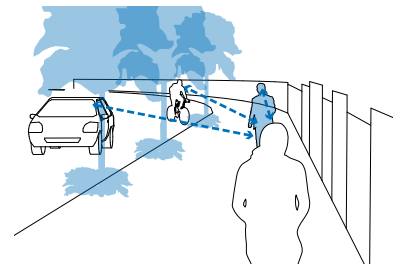
2500mm
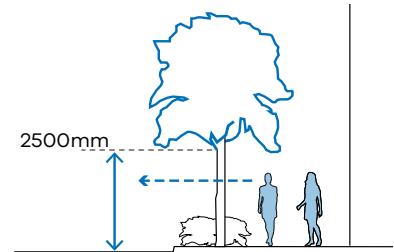
6.3.3b Select shrub and ground cover plantings to be no more than 600mm in height.

> → **TIP** In areas behind a non-climbable fence or screen, plantings may be greater than 600mm, as the fence provides protection.
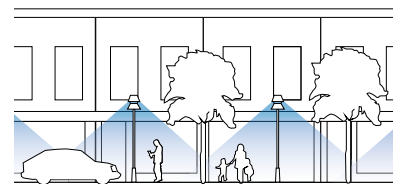
600mm
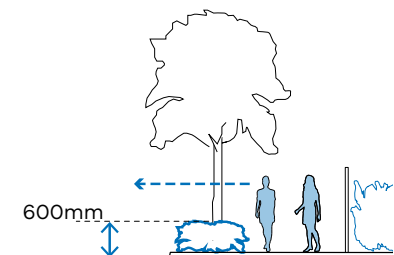
6.3.3c Position trees and planting to allow clear sightlines along streets and across the different mode paths.

6.3.3d Position trees away from overhead wires and public lighting to limit overshadowing of public lighting and interference with overhead wires.

> → **TIP** This will require coordination between utilities agencies and local councils.

6.3.3e Where protective barriers are required around landscaping, combine with other street furniture such as seating, bicycle posts, or public artwork.
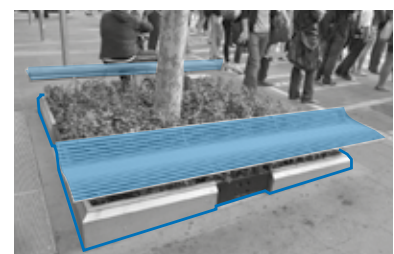
6.3.3f Provide tree grates that are flush with the surrounding pavement surface.

> → **TIP** Making grates flush with the pavement surface avoids trip hazards and allows the potential for water gathering. Porous pavements may be an effective alternative.

Objective 6.3.4   To ensure trees and planting are managed and maintained

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6.3.4 a   Manage ongoing maintenance and replacement of trees and planting according to a precinct-wide plan.

→ **TIP** When undertaking street or path works, replant missing trees.

6.3.4 b   Manage street planting to maintain clear sightlines along paths and streets.

→ **TIP** Landscaping along roads, streets, pedestrian and bicycle paths should not block sightlines for drivers, pedestrians or cyclists.
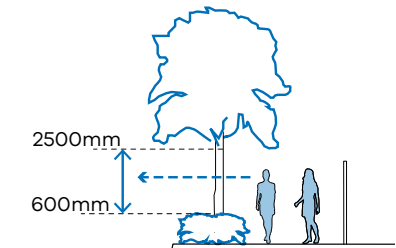
6.3.4 c   Maintain vegetation clear of lighting to allow direct illumination of paths.
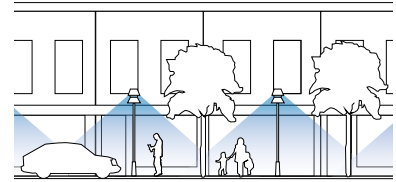
6.3.4 d   Maintain trees clear of overhead wires.

6.4 Barriers and fences

Barriers such as bollards and fences can define boundaries and protect people from traffic hazards and level changes. They also protect trees and shrubs from people and vehicles. A barrier may be made as bollards, screens, rails, fences, kerbs and walls. Barriers and fences can provide an opportunity for public art or to communicate local stories. They may also provide opportunities for seating.

Related guidance

**Element 6.1**   **Principles for objects in the public realm**

6.4 Barriers and fences

Objective 6.4.1 To ensure barriers and fences support amenity and safety

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6.4.1a Locate bollards to allow free pedestrian movement, while controlling vehicle access to an area.

> → **TIP** Use bollards where the purpose is to filter movement modes. Bollards may be removable or permanent. Bollards are preferable to continuous a fence or barrier, as they allow choice of movement for pedestrians and cyclists, while limiting vehicle access.
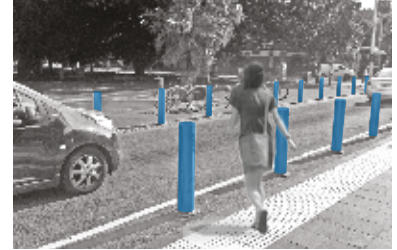
6.4.1b Position bollards to be highly visible to pedestrians, drivers and cyclists and of a height to avoid injury.

> → **TIP** Bollards should not be used in place of hazard markers. Use specific hazard marker signs.

6.4.1c Use highly visible barrier materials for both day and night visibility.

> → **TIP** People with vision impairment must also be able to detect barriers. Tactile ground surface indicators may also be needed.

6.4.1d Set back cafe screens or barriers an optimal 800mm (minimum 500mm) from the kerb, leaving a 3000mm clear path (minimum 1500mm).

> → **TIP** Cafe screens can define a street cafe area, protect customers from wind and provide psychological protection from vehicle traffic, but they can also block pedestrian movement on a footpath . Screens may be fixed in position or movable.

1500–3000mm   500–800mm
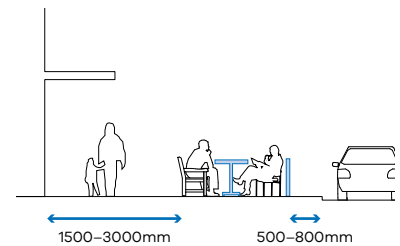
6.4.1e Provide barriers and fences with a non-injurious top rail detail.

> → **TIP** Low level fences with pointed prongs are a hazard and have resulted in accidental injuries.

6.4 **Barriers and fences**

Objective 6.4.2 To ensure that barriers and fences contribute to the character of the area

6.4.2a Use a style, scale and materials for barriers that contribute to the existing or desired future character of an area.

→ **TIP** Front fences can be a strong visual element, especially in higher density residential precincts, and contribute significantly to the character of the street.

Objective 6.4.3 To ensure front fences support informal surveillance to the street and public spaces

6.4.3a On a property boundary abutting a street frontage or public space, use fence types that are low height or partially transparent.

→ **TIP** Low or transparent fences provide opportunities for informal surveillance of streets and public spaces.
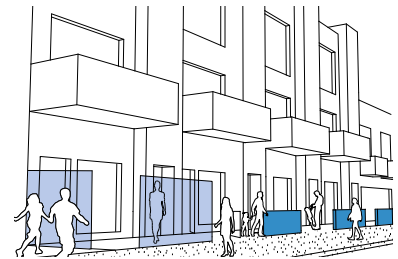
Objective 6.4.4 To ensure temporary barriers and fences support the safe use of public spaces

6.4.4a Implement a process to manage placement of temporary barriers and fences in public places by public and private entities.

→ **TIP** Temporary barriers can pose a hazard to pedestrians and cyclists at night.

6.4 Barriers and fences

6.5 Lighting

Lighting performs a number of functions, from supporting way-finding, orientation and safe movement at night to providing a decorative effect for building facades, landmarks and paths. Lighting systems can be large-scale and utilitarian or small scale and ornamental. They may use overhead lamps, bollards, up-lights, bulkhead or veranda lighting, feature and facade illumination. Shop display lighting can also contribute to overall public realm lighting levels.

Lighting is critical to creating a public realm that is safe and inviting for users. Well-located lighting can enable the use of public spaces for active recreation during the evening, especially in winter. These guidelines focus on public space lighting design for safety and amenity.

Related guidance

Element 6.1   Principles for objects in the public realm

6.5 **Lighting**

Objective 6.5.1   To ensure lighting supports night-time social and recreational activity, amenity and safety in the public realm

Path and street lighting should, as a minimum, meet Australian Standard 1158 Road Lighting.

6.5.1a	Locate lighting for safe travel and way-finding along pedestrian and bicycle paths, and to emphasise crossings, landmarks and destinations.
6.5.1b	Light only those public space areas and paths intended for night use. → **TIP** Absence of lighting can identify areas to avoid.
6.5.1c	Provide lighting on all pedestrian and bicycle path approaches to and through activity centres. → **TIP** In activity centres, lighting levels can be higher than surrounding areas.
6.5.1d	Where pedestrian and bicycle paths pass through public open space, light the paths to the same level as surrounding streets.
6.5.1e	Where a path passes through an underpass, light the approach and exit path to the same level as the underpass. → **TIP** Long underpasses and tunnels may require lighting during the day.
6.5.1f	Locate lighting at points of potential pedestrian-vehicle and pedestrian-bicycle conflict.
6.5.1g	Locate lighting in social spaces used at night for recreation, cafes or events.
6.5.1h	Provide lighting at public transport stops, pedestrian refuges and median openings, bicycle parking hoops, way-finding signs, and payphone cabinets.
6.5.1i	Light the interiors of public transport shelters to the same level as surrounding area and approach paths. → **TIP** Consistency between lighting at public transport stops and surroundings will mean surroundings do not seem dark by contrast.
6.5.1j	Install lighting at building entrances and car parking vehicle exits.

6.5 Lighting

Objective 6.5.2   To ensure lighting contributes to local character and cultural values

6.5.2a   Use external lighting to enhance the appearance of a building or landscape feature.

6.5.2b   Integrate lighting with signs, landscaping and other public space elements.

Objective 6.5.3   To ensure lighting aids night-time way-finding

The overall lighting level in public spaces may comprise light from a combination of sources including street lights, signs, adjacent shops and buildings.

**6.5.3a**   Provide consistent, continuous lighting levels along paths.

→ **TIP** Infrequent large, single-point lights can result in glare and unilluminated patches, and are detrimental to people with visual impairment.

6.5.3b   Use lighting types that minimise distortion and glare, and maximise colour recognition of objects and surfaces.

→ **TIP** White light lamps provide better colour rendition and object recognition.

6.5.3c   Place lighting poles and lamps away from tree canopies, verandas and overhead wires.

→ **TIP** Where a street is narrow, light fittings may be fixed to building walls or suspended from catenary wires to minimise pedestrian path obstruction.
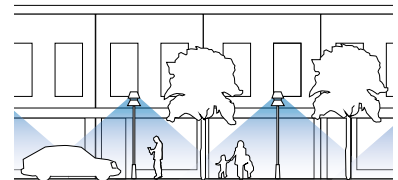
6.5.3d   Direct the path and activity lighting downwards to illuminate the immediate surrounds.

→ **TIP** Lights placed at eye level can prevent pedestrians and cyclists from seeing beyond the light source.
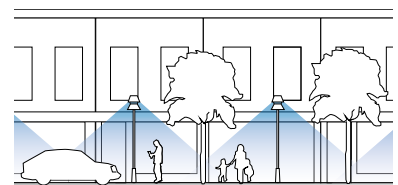
6.5.3e   Where lighting bollards are adjacent to pathways, direct the light beam downwards.

→ **TIP** Unhooded light bollards can cause glare for pedestrians, limiting visibility into the distance.

6.5.3f   Provide lighting levels that enable recognition of an approaching person's face from 10–15 metres away.

→ **TIP** Strong light sources produce deep shadows and can reduce local visibility and surveillance.

Objective 6.5.4 To ensure sensitive uses adjacent to public spaces are protected from light spill

6.5.4 a Control unwanted light spill to sensitive uses from public space lighting.

→ **TIP** Avoid lighting that shines upwards to limit general light pollution.

6.5.4 b Provide a gradual transition between bright-lit and dimmer-lit areas.

→ **TIP** Over-lighting an area can create the impression that surrounding places are under-lit.

Objective 6.5.5 To ensure effective management and maintenance of public space lighting

6.5.5 a Establish a standard design for public space lighting elements.

→ **TIP** Consistent use of standard details and parts supports efficient management and maintenance.

6.5.5 b Use low-energy, long-life, high-colour rendering index, glare-controlled light fittings.

6.5.5 c Maintain established trees foliage clear of path lighting.

6.6 Signs and way-finding

Signs give information about way-finding, directions, place and street names, cultural identity, buildings, uses and activities, or for advertising products. They can also act as a landmark. Signs may vary in scale and appearance, and may use maps, text, images or symbols to convey information.

These guidelines focus on designing and locating signs in the public realm, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.

Related guidance

Element 6.1   Principles for objects in the public realm

6.6 Signs and way-finding

Objective 6.6.1 To ensure signs inform pedestrians and cyclists and aid way-finding

Road signs are often designed to inform drivers. However, pedestrians and cyclists may find information on road signs misleading or unintelligible. It is important to provide signage useful to people on foot or bicycle.

6.6.1a Provide maps and signs in public spaces showing connections and destinations, and the location of public facilities and public transport routes.

> → **TIP** Maps and signs are particularly important in large public open spaces where there may be few other visual cues for locations.

6.6.1b Provide clear and regular sign posting on main pedestrian routes.

6.6.1c Concentrate pedestrian signs at node points on the pedestrian routes.

6.6.1d Position signs clear of pedestrian and bicycle spaces and paths.

> → **TIP** Incremental installation of signs can encroach on and obstruct paths, and clutter public spaces.

6.6.1e Position signs clear of vegetation.

6.6.1f Place pedestrian and cyclist signs at user eye level.

> → **TIP** Many streets signs are designed and located for driver information, elevated above pedestrian eye height.

6.6.1g Locate property street numbers to be visible from the street, day and night.

Objective 6.6.2 To ensure signs contribute to the amenity and local character of an area

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6.6.2a Scale advertising signs to be consistent with the surrounding urban context.

→ **TIP** Large signs can impede sightlines and views. Refer to detailed guidance in the Victoria Planning Provisions Clause 52.05 Advertising signs.
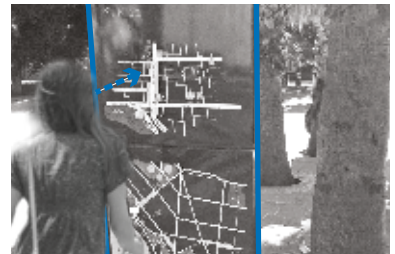

6.6.2b Consolidate multiple messages into a single sign.

6.6.2c Provide vandal-proof and graffiti-resistant signs.

Objective 6.6.3 To ensure signs can be read and understood

6.6.3a Orient perspective maps to be consistent with the viewer's position; orient plan view maps with north at the top.

6.6.3b Provide walking times or distance information to major destinations and facilities.

6.6.3c Provide operating hours information at entrances to public areas.

6.6.3d Illuminate signs in areas used at night.

6.6.3e Use strong colours, clear contrasts, non-reflective surfaces and simple graphics on maps.

6.6.3f Where the audience may not read English, use alternative communication methods to indicate pedestrian paths and destinations.

→ **TIP** International symbols, paving markings or changes in paving surfaces and materials are useful to indicate different paths, destinations and intended use, particularly for people who do not read English or have vision impairment.

Objective 6.6.4   To ensure sensitive uses adjacent to illuminated signage are protected from light spill

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6.6.4a   Where a sign is illuminated, shield light spill to adjacent sensitive uses.

→ **TIP** Illuminated signs can cause glare and dazzle viewers at night, and intrude into sensitive uses.

Objective 6.6.5   To manage the placement, currency and design of signs in public spaces

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6.6.5a   Undertake a periodic review of signs in public spaces.

6.6.5b   Maintain up-to-date information on signs, and remove redundant signs.

6.6.5c   Implement processes to coordinate the design and placement of signs.

→ **TIP** Signs erected by diverse agencies can lead to inconsistent styles and clutter in public spaces.

6.7 Small public buildings and structures

Small public buildings and structures include kiosks and vendor stalls, shelters, toilets, bicycle storage cages and utility buildings, such as electrical substations, which are most often located in public spaces. While most small public buildings and structures are permanent, some may be temporary or relocatable to allow for the flexible use of public spaces.

Related guidance

Element 6.1   **Principles for objects in the public realm**

Objective 6.7.1 To ensure small public buildings and structures are accessible and support use of public spaces

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6.7.1a Locate small public buildings and structures where there are opportunities for informal surveillance from nearby activities.

6.7.1b Locate small buildings and structures to be visible from a distance and adjacent to a busy pedestrian route.

> → **TIP** Passers by will provide a level of informal surveillance of the building.

6.7.1c Position small public buildings and structures to allow clear passage for pedestrian and bicycle paths.

Objective 6.7.2 To ensure small public buildings and structures are safe and attractive

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6.7.2a Provide an open approach path to the small public building or structure.

> → **TIP** People feel safer approaching the building where they have clear open sightlines to surroundings.

6.7.2b Site the building or structure to provide adequate circulation space around it.

6.7.2c Shape the exterior of a small public building or structure to eliminate potential concealment places.

6.7.2d Provide shelter from wind, rain and sun for visitors to the building.

6.7.2e Provide lighting to all sides of the building.