

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE ACT

NATIONAL CAPITAL DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

AUGUST 2019



**Australian Government**  
**National Capital Authority**



**ACT**  
Government

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# DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE ACT

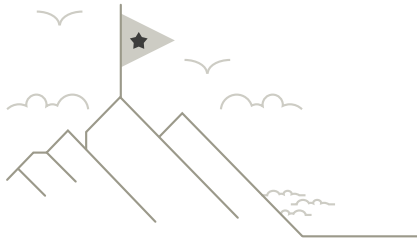
The *Design Principles for the ACT* support the National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP) process. The design principles contained within this document provide a consistent reference for panel members to review individual proposals to ensure that consistent and high quality advice can be provided. They are also a useful reference for proponents to understand how panel members will review individual proposals.

The *Design Principles for the ACT* enables the consideration of a range of issues including at a broader city, neighbourhood or site specific scale. They are based on similar design principles for the NSW Government as they are considered to be a good example for the promotion of good design and have been incorporated into NSW design review panels since 2002, when they were also introduced into NSW legislation.

The *Design Principles for the ACT* are also informed by the strategic directions set out in the Territory Plan and the Statement of Planning Principles within the National Capital Plan.

The following 10 principles have been developed to reflect the *Design Principles for the ACT*:

- **PRINCIPLE 1** Context & character
- **PRINCIPLE 2** Landscape
- **PRINCIPLE 3** Sustainability
- **PRINCIPLE 4** Density & connectivity
- **PRINCIPLE 5** Built form & scale
- **PRINCIPLE 6** Functionality & build quality
- **PRINCIPLE 7** Legibility & safety
- **PRINCIPLE 8** Diversity & amenity
- **PRINCIPLE 9** Community & public domain
- **PRINCIPLE 10** Visual appearance

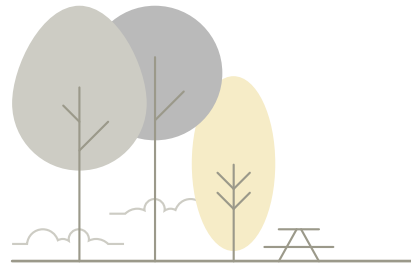


## Principle 1

# Context & character

For the consideration of context and character, good design will:

- Respond and contribute to its context, distinctive characteristics of a local area and a sense of place. Context is the key natural and built features of an area, their relationship and the character created when combined. It also includes social, economic, health and environmental conditions. Responding to context involves identifying the desirable elements of an area's existing or future character.
- Recognise the pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the Territory as Australia's National Capital, that respects the geometry and intent of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra and emphasises the national significance of the main approach routes and avenues.
- Respond to and enhance the qualities and identity of the surrounding areas including adjacent sites, landscape, streetscape and neighbourhood. Consideration of local context is important for all sites, including sites in established areas, those undergoing change or identified for future change.

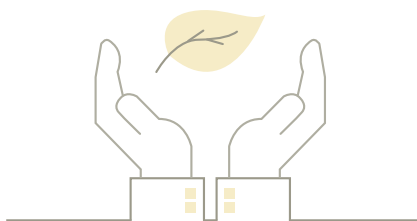


## PRINCIPLE 2

# Landscape

For the consideration of landscape, good design will:

- Recognise that together landscape and the built form operate as an integrated and sustainable system, within a broader ecological context that results in attractive development with good amenity.
- Maintain and enhance the landscape character of Canberra and the Territory as the setting for the National Capital and protect the undeveloped hill tops and the open spaces which divide and give form to Canberra's urban areas.
- Enhance the development's environmental performance by retaining valued natural features which contribute to the local context, co-ordinating water and soil management, reducing urban heat island effect and allowing good solar access, micro-climate, tree canopy, habitat values and preserving important green networks.
- Optimise the landscape's amenity, useability and privacy to provide opportunities for social interaction. This includes creating engaging places that contribute to the local identity and character, ensuring equitable access and respect for the public and neighbours' amenity and provides for practical establishment, long term management and maintenance.

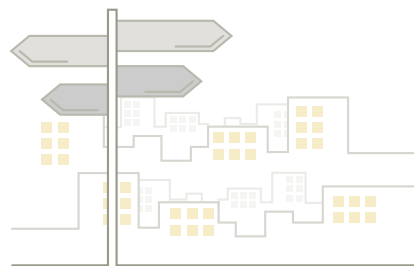


### PRINCIPLE 3

## Sustainability

For the consideration of sustainability, good design will:

- Optimise the sustainability of the built environment to deliver on-going positive environmental, social and economic outcomes through an integrated holistic approach. This includes seeking measures to mitigate against and adapt to the impacts of climate change over time to ensure development is resilient over its life cycle.
- Adhere to established principles for water-sensitive urban design to minimise negative impacts on existing natural features, ecological processes and connectivity for natural habitat. It will facilitate living infrastructure in all projects at all scales, with water-sensitive urban design; deep soil zones for ground water recharge, large canopy trees and vegetation.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in both construction and operational phases of development, by optimising passive thermal design to achieve amenity and liveability through orientation, sunlight, shade, heating and cooling and use of cross ventilation, designing in renewable energy generation, storage and use, and maximising energy efficiency. Good design reduces resource consumption and operational costs and generation of waste. It builds-in materials that are recycled and reused.



### PRINCIPLE 4

## Density & connectivity

For the consideration of density and connectivity, good design will:

- Achieve a high level of amenity for the users of the development by employing a density appropriate to the site and its context.
- Ensure that appropriate densities are consistent with the area's existing or projected population and that the densities can be sustained by existing or proposed infrastructure, public transport, access to jobs, community facilities and the environment. This includes along transit corridors and in retail centres.
- Establish connections within the site and consider midblock connections for public access to the surrounding area. This includes connections from the site to the surrounding public transport, vehicular, pedestrian and cycle network to support the residents or users of the development and those passing through the area.



## PRINCIPLE 5

# Built form & scale

For the consideration of built form and scale, good design will:

- Achieve a scale, massing and height appropriate to the existing or desired future character of the street, surrounding buildings and landscape setting to mitigate negative impacts on the amenity of neighbouring properties and the public domain.
- Achieve an appropriate built form for the site and the building's purpose in terms of building alignments, proportions, building type, and the articulation of building elements in an innovative manner. This includes that the spaces between buildings should be of a scale and character that is defined and suited to purpose.
- Ensure that the appropriate built form defines the public domain, provides a well-designed pedestrian experience at ground level, contributes to the character of streetscapes and parks including their views and vistas and provides internal amenity and outlook.



## PRINCIPLE 6

# Functionality & build quality

For the consideration of functionality and build quality, good design will:

- Meet the needs of users efficiently and effectively, balancing functional requirements to deliver optimum benefit and performance over the full life-cycle of the development.
- Create functional environments where the proposed design is suitable for the intended purpose and arranged to facilitate ease of use and good relationships to other spaces. It will also provide flexible and adaptable spaces to maximise utilisation and accommodate appropriate future requirements without the need for major modifications.
- Ensure that build quality is achieved by using good quality, robust, sustainable and complimentary materials, finishes, elements and systems. Projects should be well-detailed, resilient to the wear and tear expected from their intended use, and easy to upgrade and maintain. It will also accommodate the required services and infrastructure in an integrated manner, without detriment to the overall design outcome.





## PRINCIPLE 7

# Legibility & safety

For the consideration of legibility and safety, good design will:

- Optimise safety and security within the development and the surrounding public domain to minimise the risk of personal harm and support safe behaviour and use. It will also provide for quality public and private spaces that are clearly defined and fit for the intended purpose. This includes maximising passive surveillance of public spaces, connections and communal areas with appropriate lighting and signage.
- Ensure that places are easy to navigate with recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks while being well-connected to the surrounding movement networks. It will also improve legibility and benefit from a clear hierarchy of spaces with identifiable entries and logical wayfinding. Externally, buildings and spaces should allow their purpose to be easily understood including the provision of environments that are logical and intuitive at the scale of the building, site and precinct.

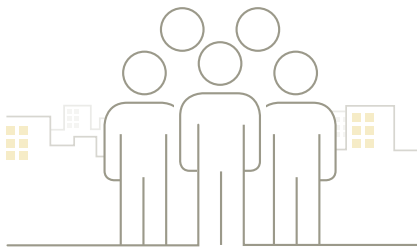


## PRINCIPLE 8

# Diversity & amenity

For the consideration of diversity and amenity, good design will:

- Achieve a mix of dwelling types and sizes, providing housing choice for different demographics, living needs and household budgets. Well-designed developments respond to social context by providing housing and facilities that support social and demographic diversity. It also will provide practical and flexible features, including different types of communal spaces for a broad range of people and providing opportunities for social interaction.
- Positively influence internal and external amenity for users of the development and neighbours, contributing to positive living and working environments and well-being. It will combine appropriate room dimensions and shapes, access to sunlight for all habitable rooms, natural ventilation, outlook, visual and acoustic privacy, storage, indoor and outdoor space, efficient layouts and service areas and ease of access for all age groups and degrees of mobility. Good design is flexible and able to facilitate ageing in place.
- Mitigate negative impacts on surrounding buildings and places. It should also have well-designed external spaces that provide protection from unwanted sun, wind, rain, traffic and noise.



#### PRINCIPLE 9

## Community & public domain

For the consideration of community and public domain, good design will:

- Respond to local community needs as well as the wider social context, providing buildings and spaces that are inclusive, can be accessed by everyone and support a diverse range of people and facilitate social interaction.
- Encourage engagement with the community to collaborate in the design of the public domain including the physical, cultural, and social elements that create a sense of place and support its ongoing evolution.
- Encourage social engagement and physical activity in an inclusive manner, encouraging resilient communities and improved social outcomes.



#### PRINCIPLE 10

## Visual appearance

For the consideration of visual appearance, good design will:

- Inform all scales, from the articulation of building form through to materiality and detail, enabling sophisticated, integrated responses to the complexities of local built form and landscape character. This includes achieving a built form that has good proportions and a balanced composition of elements, reflecting the internal layout and structure. Good design uses a balanced variety of materials, colours and textures that considers the streetscape and broader precinct context.
- Assess design quality with the consideration that aesthetics should not be limited to style and appearance alone and that it should also account for design integrity, creativity, innovation, conceptual coherence and cultural relevance in a proposal.



