STATE PLANNING COMMISSION

COMMUNITY GUIDE TO DESIGN IN OUR NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

MAY 2019

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Government of South Australia
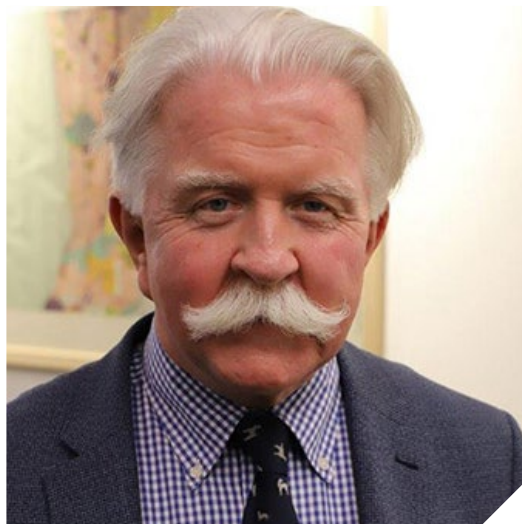Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure

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FOREWORD: PLAYING THE LONG GAME

Every new development has the potential to improve our quality of life, stimulate the economy and enhance the environment.

Each year local and state planning authorities across the state see thousands of new proposals, which have the power to do just that by elevating design quality.

We face an historically significant change in the pattern of settlement in metropolitan Adelaide, where, for the first time in three generations, we're seeing a renewal of our inner-city suburbs and the city's core. This change is a key opportunity for us to articulate what we mean by design quality.

Good design and design quality is a lofty aspiration.

Good design is about many things, not one—and must be understood from the outset.

It is about function and the usefulness of a proposal; the sense of renewal; and endurance. It is also about affordability, aesthetics and beauty. It should also be about creativity and innovation, as well as both existing and future identity and a whole lot of other things.

South Australians are proud and hold dear the character and history of their neighbourhoods; and as the State Planning Commission, we know there are concerns with the quality of some infill development.

Articulating what gives our buildings and places a particular character or personality has bedevilled designers, planners, theorists and elected officials over many decades.

The Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 places a particular emphasis on design quality. So, what difference will this make?

Planning is not about short-term gain, it is about playing the long game. This means setting out for everyone the frameworks, policies and references through which we can provide guidance and certainty, reflecting community aspirations.

Some of this can be reflected in areas in which we can easily control. The public realm is an obvious place to start—it all lasts for a very long time. Eighty per cent of the public realm is made up of streets, making them incredibly important.

The State Planning Commission has prepared this Guide in collaboration with the Office for Design and Architecture South Australia and a panel of design, planning and project delivery experts to explore this important topic.

We have tried to express our aspirations in the principles contained in this Guide which are now embedded in the new planning system.

This Guide calls upon the community at large, state and local governments, as well as planning and design professionals, to join us in playing a greater role in elevating design quality across our built environments.

Michael Lennon
Chair, State Planning Commission

North Terrace Cultural Boulevard. Credit: Sam Noonan.

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE ABOUT?

This Guide explains the role of design in South Australia's new planning and development system.

Design quality is an important contributor to the retention and development of the character of South Australian places and spaces.

Therefore, this Guide sets out how the new planning and development system will support flourishing places and neighbourhoods so that they are sustainable, enjoyable and safe for everyone.

South Australians will be asked to tell us what they think when the new Planning and Design Code is released on statutory consultation. This will be in mid-2019 for regional council areas and late 2019 for metropolitan council areas.

INTRODUCTION

The principle of high-quality design is embedded throughout our new planning system, from the *Planning Development and Infrastructure Act 2016,* State Planning Policies, the Planning and Design Code through to Design Standards and Design Review.

Embedding design quality in the new planning system allows us to respond to the demographic, social and environmental factors that are driving the need for new and diverse types of housing, businesses and services in existing and new suburbs.

Design quality is more than the 'look and feel' of buildings and places. As important as that is, it is primarily about the way our streets, neighbourhoods, precincts, suburbs and towns work holistically. It is also about sustainability, accessibility, safety, connectedness and health.

High-quality design is a driving force in making a place liveable and contributes to our wellbeing and prosperity.

Design quality within the new planning system will encourage creative solutions to complex social, economic and environmental challenges, including those arising from our changing settlement patterns.

As South Australia continues to change, it is critical that we balance the needs and expectations of existing communities with that of our growing and changing population.

Our new planning system also needs to play a role in protecting our environment and promoting economic development.

*East End, Adelaide. Credit: South Australian Tourism Commission.*

DESIGN QUALITY IN THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

The *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (the PDI Act) is being progressively introduced to replace the *Development Act 1993* to enable a more efficient and responsive planning system.

The PDI Act identifies **high-quality design** as one of the seven Principles of Good Planning, which together guide the development of the new planning system.

The **high-quality design principle** states that:

- development should be designed to reflect local setting and context in order to have a distinctive identity that responds to the existing character of its locality, and to strike a balance between built form, infrastructure and public realm

- built form should be durable, adaptive (including in relation to the reuse of buildings or parts of buildings) and compatible with relevant public realm

- public realm should be designed to be used, accessible, and appropriately landscaped and vegetated

- built form and the public realm should be inclusive and accessible to people with differing needs and capabilities (including through the serious consideration of universal design practices)

- cities and towns should be planned and designed to be well-connected in ways that facilitate the safe, secure and effective movement of people within and through them.
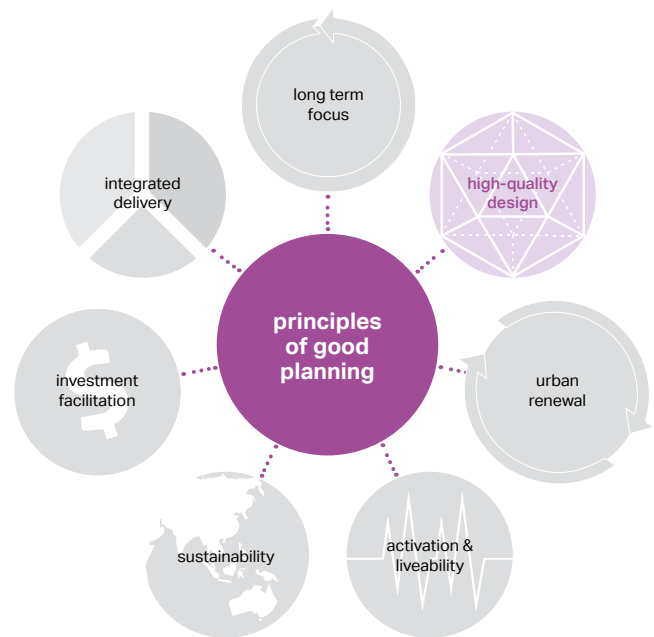
High-quality design is one of the seven Principles of Good Planning.

As the legislation sets the entire planning framework, the high-quality design principle will be achieved in subordinate instruments, processes and practices.

These include:

1. State Planning Policies
2. Regional Plans
3. Planning and Design Code
4. Design Standards
5. Design Review.

The following section describes how the instruments and tools above will support high quality design outcomes in our new planning system.

CASE STUDY:
Rundle Mall

Activation at ground level promotes a positive public realm interface, improves passive surveillance and visual interest.

Ground-level is where city vibrancy flourishes and public life exists. People coming and going from buildings, moving and interacting in the street, utilising alfresco dining areas and connecting with transport all happen at ground-level.

This image illustrates a ground-level public realm that is vibrant and active. It is accessible and useable to people of all abilities, offers shade and shelter, and is highly sensory, meaning there is a greater frequency and rhythm of doors, windows, and building details that spark visual interest for pedestrians as they move around.

CASE STUDY:
Infill: site access and landscaping

The interface between the built form and public realm can positively contribute to the walkability and overall quality of our streets and neighbourhoods.

This image illustrates a walkable infill neighbourhood. It has a continuous footpath, uninterrupted by vehicular crossovers, which is separated from the street by a planted verge.

The removal of driveways from the primary street also provides space for more on-street parking, inhabitable rooms at ground level, which contribute to activation and passive surveillance of the street, and productive front gardens capable of supporting tree growth. This is important to combat rising urban temperatures, create more walkable and liveable places, and support a reduction in energy consumption.

DESIGN QUALITY IN THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM CONTINUED

WHAT DO THE STATE PLANNING POLICIES SAY?

The State Planning Policies set out a framework for land use in South Australia to improve the liveability, sustainability and prosperity of the state.

They represent the highest level of policy in our new planning system, and address the economic, environmental and social planning priorities for South Australia, which are given effect through Regional Plans and the Planning and Design Code.

On 31 January 2019 the first set of State Planning Policies were proclaimed by the Governor of South Australia. Design quality is represented in **State Planning Policy 2: Design Quality**.

This State Planning Policy provides greater emphasis on universal design, recognition of local character and the positive interface between modern built forms and more traditional forms. It also aims to enhance our streets and open spaces.

Importantly, the State Planning Policies describe the six core principles of good design, as set out by the Office of Design and Architecture South Australia.

STATE PLANNING POLICY 2: DESIGN QUALITY

OBJECTIVE

The Principles of Good Design are embedded within the planning system to elevate the design quality of South Australia's built and natural environment and public realm.

POLICIES

1. Ensure plans encourage development that incorporates the Principles of Good Design.

2. Promote best practice in access and inclusion planning in the design of buildings and places by applying the principles of Universal Design, Access for All, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, Environmentally Sustainable Design and Water Sensitive Urban Design.

3. Ensure the development of safe, welcoming, comfortable and efficient buildings and places to reduce economic and social disparity.

4. Ensure design advice is considered early in the planning process for complex developments and utilises consistent and credible processes (such as a Design Review) to ensure better outcome.

5. Promote a culture of good design to foster creative thinking, innovation and effective design processes within the planning industry, allied fields and general public.

6. Provide high quality, functional and accessible public green spaces and streetscapes, particularly in areas with increasing infill development, housing diversity, population growth, medium to high residential densities and urban renewal.

7. Prioritise performance based design quality outcomes in Adelaide City, heritage and character areas, places where medium-rise buildings interface with lower-rise development, mixed-use renewal precincts; transit corridors, and iconic locations that attract high levels of pedestrian activity and/or tourism.

8. Enable quality design solutions in the planning and design code for low-medium density development.

WHAT DO REGIONAL PLANS SAY?

Regional Plans provide a long-term vision for a region and set specific targets tailored towards its unique aspects.

Regional Plans can include structure plans, master plans or concept plans and provide detail on how a region may grow.

An example of a Regional Plan includes *The 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide,* which describes our plan for how Greater Adelaide should grow to become more liveable, competitive and sustainable. It aims to guide the long-term growth of the city and its surrounds over the next 30 years.

New Regional Plans will be developed for the whole of South Australia over the next few years.

Regional and sub-regional planning for cities, townships and precincts represents an opportunity for communities to be involved in shaping the design and development of their home region.

WHAT WILL THE PLANNING AND DESIGN CODE (THE CODE) SAY?

The Code is the cornerstone of the new planning system. It will be the single source of planning policy for assessing development applications for the state.

The Code will replace the 72 Development Plans currently in effect and consolidate more than 1,500 zones to approximately 60 zones.

In line with the objectives of the *Planning Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* and the State Planning Policies, the content of the Code will be used to support high-quality design outcomes.

This means that all new development applications lodged under the new planning system will be reviewed for design quality.

For simple developments that have predictable outcomes, the Code will contain planning policy to ensure that local setting, context and desired future character is reflected.

For more complex developments that have less predictable outcomes, the Code may offer alternative pathways that allow greater consideration of design quality. For example, in certain areas, the Code may refer applicants to a Design Review Panel that can provide expert design advice. The Design Review process helps identify alternative design approaches where potential improvements can be identified.
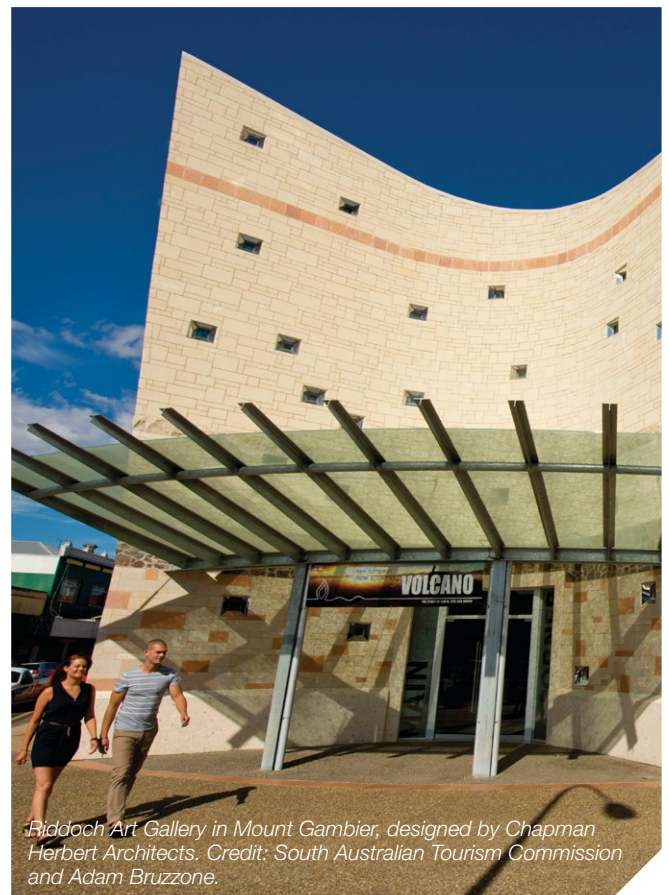
Riddoch Art Gallery in Mount Gambier, designed by Chapman Herbert Architects. Credit: South Australian Tourism Commission and Adam Bruzzone.

Well-designed streets and high-quality public realm can positively contribute to healthier lifestyles, inclusion and community connectedness.

It is possible to prioritise pedestrian movement on some urban streets. Pedestrian-priority spaces are important in creating walkable, accessible, and enjoyable neighbourhoods. They provide more space for people of all abilities to move at their own pace, as well as opportunities for social interaction and healthy active lifestyles.

This image shows a main street where the vehicle traffic lane is raised to footpath level, creating a seamless ground level, with the same surface material used throughout. This results in a shared space where traffic speed limits must be reduced to improve pedestrian safety, which deters through-traffic and improves overall amenity. Wider footpaths, the addition of street trees and street furniture further contribute to the sense of pedestrian priority.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN

The State Planning Policies require the State Government to promote best practice in the design of buildings, places and the public realm by applying the Principles of Good Design.

The Principles of Good Design promote the role that high-quality design can play in making our places and spaces better for the community, the environment and the economy.

The Principles underpin the Design Review process that is undertaken by the Office for Design and Architecture South Australia, which supports the role of the Government Architect in elevating good design across the state.

They also help facilitate the holistic design of new development, which goes beyond appearance. They are publicly accessible so development applicants can use them when preparing their own proposal.

In the new planning system, these Principles will underpin Code policy and future Design Review processes.

The following section explains the role of each Principle in the planning and development system.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN CONTINUED

Context

Good design is contextual because it responds to the surrounding environment, and contributes to the existing quality and future character of a place.

Good design that responds to its context:

- enhances and complements street appearance through landscaping, lighting, vegetation, paths and open space

- contributes to desired character and enhances surrounding features, particularly at a street level

- manages overlooking and overshadowing from taller to lower buildings

- effectively transitions from low-rise to higher rise where appropriate

- respects the culture of Australia's First Peoples, local history and heritage.

Inclusive

Good design is inclusive because it creates places for everyone to use and enjoy, by optimising social opportunity and access. It supports healthy neighbourhoods that benefit the whole community.

Good design that is inclusive:

- ensures buildings and the public realm are universally accessible and usable to people of all ages and abilities

- links developments with transport networks, prioritising people and walkability over private vehicles

- prioritises opportunities for social interaction and connections between people, services, employment and nature.

Durable

Good design is durable because it creates buildings and places that are fit-for-purpose, adaptable, long-lasting and sustainable.

Good design that is durable:

- ensures buildings and public spaces are adaptable to support the changing needs of people over time

- uses quality materials and finishes that are made to last

- ensures development can withstand local conditions, such as changes to micro-climate and proximity to the coast and bodies of water.

Value

Good design adds value by creating desirable places that promote community and local investment, as well as enhancing social and cultural value.

Good design that adds value:

- positively contributes to the sense of place and community pride

- supports local investment, through higher property values and rental returns

- contributes to streets and neighbourhoods that people enjoy and want to visit.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DESIGN CONTINUED

Performance

Good design performs well because it fulfils the intended purpose of the relevant development and meets the needs of all intended users.

Sustainable

Good design is sustainable because it is environmentally responsible and supports long-term economic productivity and the health of the community.

Good design that performs well:

- enhances actual and perceived safety, reduces crime and increases security

- reduces operating costs by lowering energy and water consumption, through appropriate insulation and access to sunlight and natural ventilation

- effectively balances the size, space, storage and access of new development

- supports active lifestyles, and physical and mental wellbeing

- reduces overall maintenance time and costs.

Good design that is sustainable:

- incorporates improved water and stormwater management

- maximises opportunities for appropriate waste management and recycling

- includes productive gardens and sufficient deep soil spaces for planting trees

- utilises renewable energy where possible.

CASE STUDY:
ODASA building

When our buildings vary in age, shape or style, they contribute to interesting streetscapes and unique local character.

Repurposing existing historic buildings can have environmental and economic benefits while celebrating the local history and disregarding the wasteful process of demolition. As shown in this photograph, the adaptive reuse of this inner-city building supports a contemporary mix of uses, in this case offices and gallery spaces, while preserving the historic aspects of what was previously a factory and warehouse, circa 1894.

DESIGN AND CHARACTER OF PLACES

New development has the potential to enhance the streetscape by considering elements such as planted verges, footpaths, driveways, front gardens and fence-lines.

Development should reflect local setting and context and respond to the desired future character of a neighbourhood, which may or may not reflect the existing character. In some neighbourhoods, change is to be encouraged and a new desired character to be established. The new Planning and Design Code (the Code) will outline how new development should be designed in these areas, with a view to increasing housing choice that respond to community needs and preferences.

Thinking beyond individual site boundaries to gain an understanding of the physical features of the surrounding buildings and the character of streetscape is key to analysing context.

Everyday considerations like parking, location of utilities and access for refuse collection may seem minor, yet when they are uncoordinated, can have a negative impact on the character and quality of our neighbourhoods.

The Code will include 'performance outcomes' which will describe 'what' we are trying to achieve and 'deemed-to-satisfy' options that describe how this can be achieved.

The following section outlines how design may better address matters impacting the character of our neighbourhoods in the new planning system.

Built form

Built form considers a building's overall shape or configuration, but also its placement in relation to other buildings and how it complements its surroundings. Built form should also contribute to the streetscape in terms of scale, proportion and materials.

Built form should focus on creating positive and distinctive attributes from the outset, balancing sustainability with local character.

Some design responses that can help achieve successful built form include:

- ensuring building types are compatible with neighbouring buildings

- using appropriate materials and finishes

- ensuring the appropriate location and widths of verandahs and setbacks

- integrating balconies

- orienting the main face of the building to the primary street.

Landscape and streetscape

The identity of our streets are continuously changing to accommodate new types of development, in particular those of higher-density.

These types of developments can build to the property boundary, leaving little space for landscaping and tree growth, which improves the quality, amenity and identity of the neighbourhood.

Some design responses that can help achieve successful urban greening:

- providing deep soil zones to support tree growth and maturity

- using trees of an appropriate scale to suit the context

- optimising planting areas adjacent to the public realm

- considering front and side boundary setbacks.

Street rhythm

Street rhythm is created by the facades and other aspects of buildings which can be regular, flowing or progressive. Housing characteristics and styles are changing and over time, can affect street character.

For example, a street with uniform landscaping and house types could be described as 'regular'; whereas a mixed-use development that includes a mix of buildings and land use could be described as 'progressive'.

This case study at 262 South Terrace, Adelaide, demonstrates how a state heritage place can be adapted for modern reuse and integrated into a wider development.

A case managed development that went through DPTI's pre-lodgement service and ODASA's design review process, the development, designed by JPE Design Studio, involved the construction at the rear of the site of a 15 storey residential building including 60 apartments and parking for 94 cars and 79 bicycles, while the heritage building at the front of the site (formerly the historic home of the Deaf Society) was retained and adapted for reuse as professional office space.
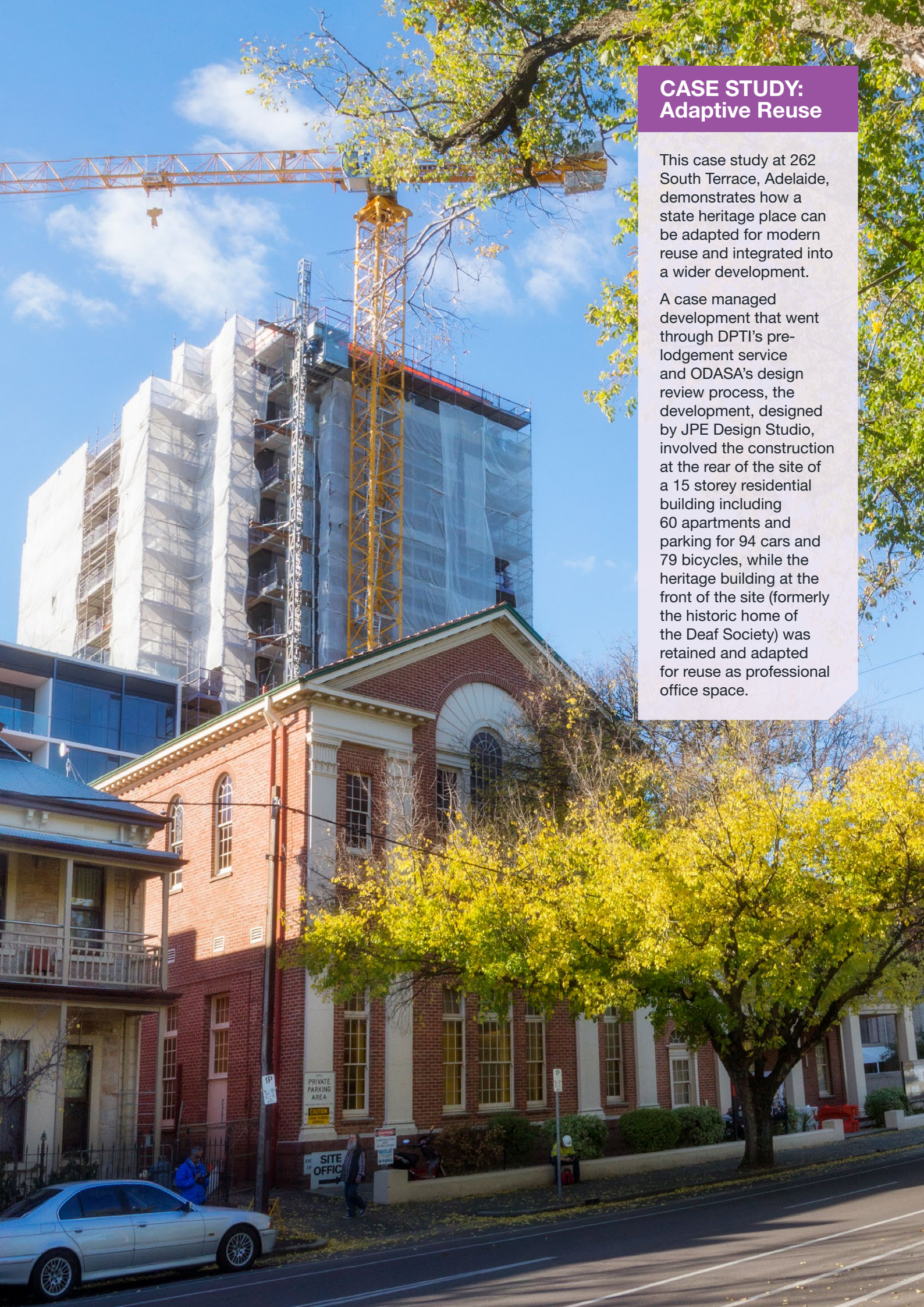
DESIGN AND CHARACTER OF PLACES CONTINUED

The need for housing diversity leads to disruption of street rhythm, which is an important factor in some areas with strong local character. Disruption is expected and should not be viewed as automatically negative; however design can help address disruption in a positive way.

Some design responses that can help retain street rhythm include:

- managing building heights that respect, but do not necessarily replicate, adjacent development heights

- reinforcing any desired future character through the appropriate scale of buildings and the spaces between them

- ensuring consistency across some elements e.g. tree placement

- limiting the height or extent of solid walls or street-facing fences

- ensuring the appropriate location and width of driveway crossovers

- ensuring the appropriate width of allotments

- ensuring appropriate window proportions and arrangement.

Street setbacks

Street setbacks establish the alignment of buildings along the street and significantly influence how buildings relate to each other and contribute to the character of a neighbourhood.

Smaller lot sizes resulting from infill development and subdivisions can leave less available space to accommodate setbacks that contribute positively to existing character.

Some design responses that can help retain appropriate street setbacks include:

- ensuring consistency with any existing established streetscape and frontages

- considering the desired character of a neighbourhood and anticipated activities and land uses

- integrating existing street plantings and providing opportunities for new plantings that are appropriate to the neighbourhood context.

Utilities and services

The increasing need for waste management services and higher-rise apartment utilities can negatively impact the appearance of a place if not well considered.

Some design responses that can help include:

- ensuring there are sufficient waste facilities that are discreetly located to minimise visibility from the public realm and adjoining properties

- ensuring there are storage areas of adequate size

- ensuring bins can be easily moved between storage and collection points.

Site access and car parking

Vehicle access to properties and car parking can negatively impact upon the amenity, function and overall character of a street, if not managed well.

This can be compounded as urban areas grow and increase in density, which means more properties require access to the same area, leaving less space for people, landscaping, front gardens, on-street parking and street trees.

Some design responses that can help include:

- locate vehicular crossovers on secondary streets or rear lanes where possible

- minimise the number and widths of vehicular crossovers

- minimise garages or carports facing primary streets

- include breaks between adjacent garages or carports to accommodate landscaping.

New housing that is sensitively integrated with its context can add value to existing character and encourage community pride.

New housing in established areas should be informed by a complete understanding of the site's context, including the unique character, physical features and surroundings. Development can be simultaneously fresh and new, while also being sympathetic to the area.

This image shows two houses. The one on the left is a newer addition and contributes to the character of the streetscape by providing consistent massing of the façades in terms of width and window spacing, similar roof pitch and front boundary setback, regularity in fence fenestration, landscaping and discrete service provision and storage.

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DESIGN EXPERTISE FOR DECISION-MAKERS

For development to be given the appropriate level of consideration during assessment, planning authorities benefit from access to design expertise.

Increasing access to design expertise within this process means integrating the skills of design disciplines, including architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, to support good decision-making.

As the scale, complexity and potential impact of a development proposal increases, so too does the role of specialised design expertise in the assessment process, which underpins the framework of the new planning system. At the lower end, design can be codified and specific design responses identified.

How the new system utilises design expertise will vary, ranging from planners holding some design assessment skills, to calling upon a panel of design experts to review projects of significance.

THE ROLE OF THE ACCREDITED PROFESSIONALS SCHEME

The new *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* requires professionals who are making decisions on development proposals to be accredited under the new Accredited Professionals Scheme. Architects and other design professionals can become accredited to sit on decision-making assessment panels.

Design expertise can benefit assessment panels, particularly those faced with increasing numbers of infill and multi-storey developments.

The *Planning, Development and Infrastructure (Accredited Professionals) Regulations 2019* outlines the requirements for planners and allied professionals who are seeking accreditation. One of these requirements involves the completion of mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) units in 'performance-based planning and/or design'.

This requirement provides a significant opportunity to improve the design capability across the planning and development industry, and enable planners, designers and architects to assess development applications with a renewed design lens.

The design of public infrastructure can promote physical activity and social interaction.
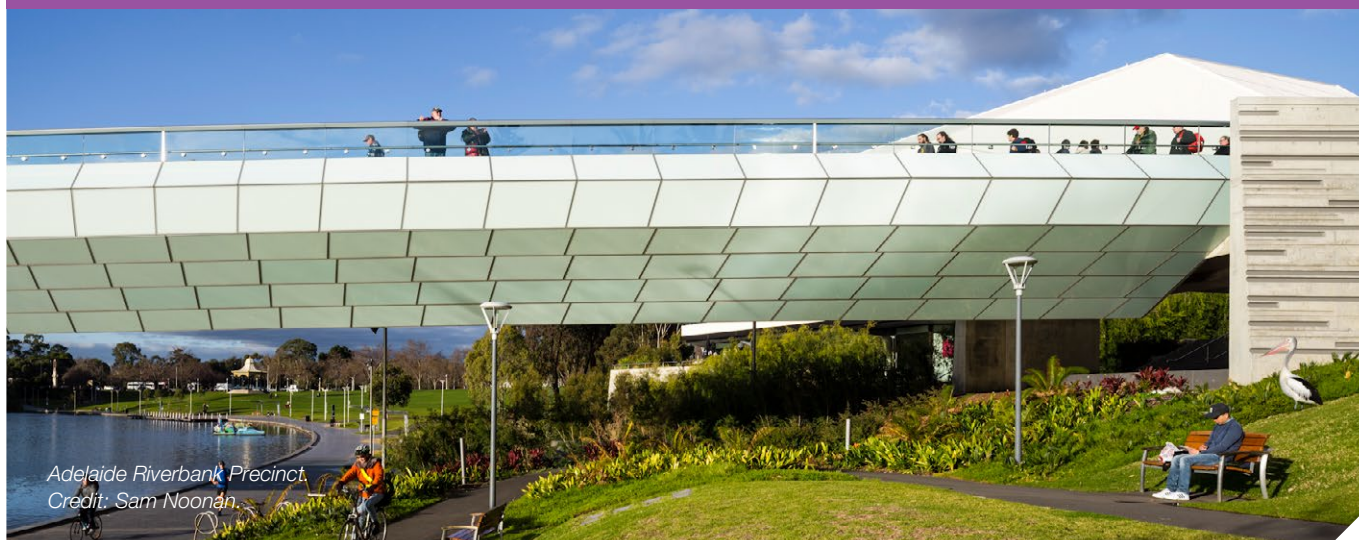
*Adelaide Riverbank Precinct.
Credit: Sam Noonan.*

Local character is the distinctive identity of a place resulting from many factors, including built form, history, people and their activities.

Renovations to heritage and character buildings have been occurring in South Australia for a number of years. They offer home owners an opportunity to reinvigorate the authentic character, charm and history of the building, expand its size and enhance the value in multiple ways.

As this photograph illustrates, alterations and additions should be done in a way that is sensitive to the form and character of the original building. Multiple design aspects require consideration, such as roof pitch and profile, materials, setbacks, landscaping and the retention of unique features such as chimneys, verandahs and joinery.

For further information visit
saplanningportal.sa.gov.au

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