

Planning *for* Brisbane's future

# Design-led City

## Low-to-medium density residential

### Design Guide



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*

## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land and their unique relationship with their ancestral country. We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of Brisbane, and recognize their strength and wisdom.

### Disclaimer

This brochure is not a statutory document. It has been prepared to help improve the quality, design and sustainability of residential development.

The examples/illustrations used are sourced from the Brisbane City Council municipal area for the purpose of illustration only.

### References and Resources

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018

*Brisbane City Plan 2014* and  
*Multiple Dwelling Code*, Brisbane City Council

*Crime Prevention through Environmental Design: Guidelines for Queensland Parts A and B* (2007)  
Queensland Government

*Livable Housing Design Guidelines*,  
Livable Housing Australia

National construction code, Australian Government

*New World City Design Guide – Buildings that breathe*, Brisbane City Council

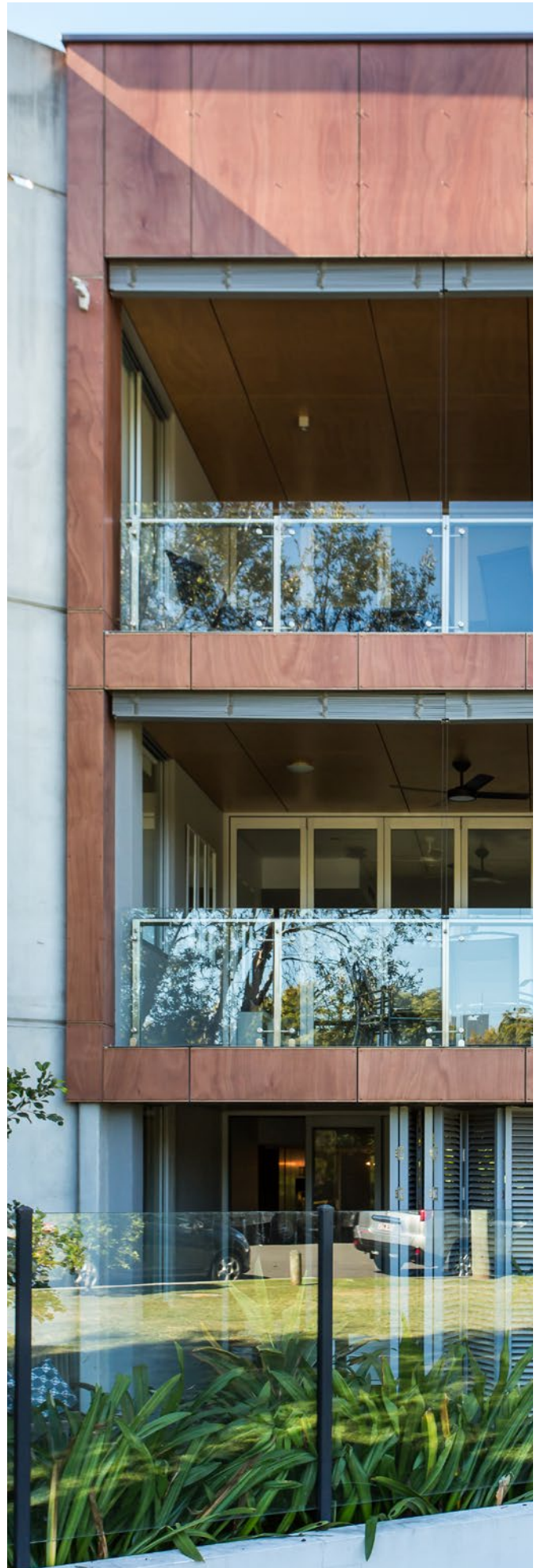
*Plan your Brisbane Citywide engagement summary report*, Brisbane City Council

*Planning Act 2016*, Queensland development code

*Qdesign – Queensland Urban Design Principles* (2018)

*ShapingSEQ 2017 and Planning Act 2016*, Queensland Government

*Your Home: Australia's Guide to environmentally sustainable housing*, Australian Government



# Foreword

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Brisbane is a great place to live, work, and relax – it's a safe, vibrant, green and prosperous city, valued for its friendly and optimistic character and enjoyable lifestyle.

As Brisbane continues to grow, well-designed new developments will be vital to retaining our Brisbane lifestyle. Carefully planning for a growing city will ensure we, and future generations, can enjoy Brisbane's beautiful climate and connect with family and friends in places that make our city great.

With expected population growth and demographic and lifestyle changes, we will see diverse housing options delivered in Brisbane to support residents. One in three Brisbane households already choose to live in a townhouse or apartment.

This residential design guide seeks to protect Brisbane's unique lifestyle, ensuring our exciting future looks familiar by retaining the things we love about our city, making better use of space and offering more choice for how we live and relax.

This design guide demonstrates Council's commitment to supporting design quality in our built environment under the overarching framework outlined in *Design-led City – A Design Strategy for Brisbane*. This non-statutory guide supports and encourages the quality design of townhouses and apartments up to five storeys.





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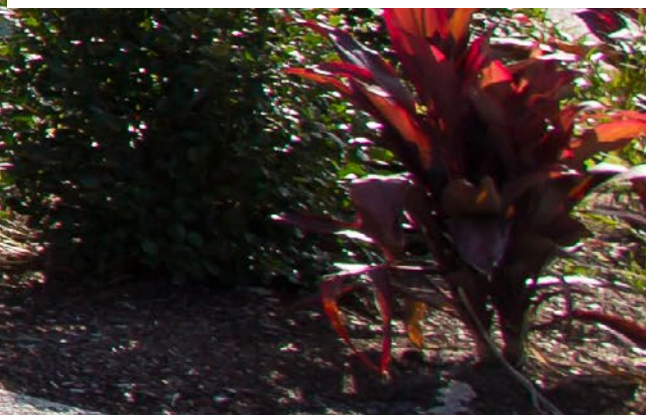
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## Brisbane – a design-led city

Brisbane will be a world-class, design-led city that drives and facilitates excellence in outcomes as we grow.

Council is focused on supporting quality design in Brisbane's built environment. Well-designed built environments have many benefits in terms of liveability, prosperity, environment and health. Applying the process outlined in this document, to achieve the desired outcomes, is a step towards establishing design excellence for our city. Design excellence does not mean providing expensive finishes to buildings. It means creating functional and well-designed buildings that contribute to a sense of place. Council strongly encourages the adoption of a design-led process that is inclusive of the community, involves Council early in the process, and demonstrates how the existing context of the neighbourhood, street and site have influenced the final design.



More than one in three responses to the *Plan your Brisbane* survey identified that 'improving the quality and design of new developments' was a top priority for making Brisbane better\*

\*Source: Phase 1 survey, *Plan your Brisbane* Citywide engagement summary report



Brisbane is expected to continue to grow by 1300 people per month\*

\*Source: *ShapingSEQ* 2017



Did you know? One in three homes in Brisbane is a unit or townhouse\*

\*Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018

## Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide a best practice reference to inform the design of low-to-medium density residential development, such as townhouses and apartment buildings up to five storeys in Brisbane's suburbs.

Design is both an action and an outcome. Design of the built environment incorporates appearance, functionality and the relationships between built elements and their surroundings. Design also extends to the processes that influence the planning and development of our built environment. Creating great places requires excellence for both the design process and the design outcome. It requires a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach and a site-specific response to the context.

The design process requires consideration of factors external to the site such as the neighbourhood and street scale, as well as the features of the site and the building.

The outcomes that quality design should achieve include:

- green and leafy neighbourhoods
- subtropical design
- liveability and function
- visual appeal and identity.

The design process and outcomes are illustrated in an easy-to-use format and there are checklists included in the back of this document.



## This guide

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Brisbane is a growing city with around 1300 additional people a month living here (*ShapingSEQ, 2017*). Our established neighbourhoods will continue to change and adapt to ensure homes are available to cater for all types of lifestyles in our city – including families, couples, single-persons, groups and multi-generational households. Townhouses and mid-rise apartments (up to five storeys) will continue to be built in suitable locations throughout Brisbane. It is important that homes are designed to a quality that contributes to creating great places and spaces for Brisbane to be proud of, and for the community to enjoy now and into the future.

This guide is for anyone interested in the design and development of low-to-medium density residential dwellings.

This guide outlines the design outcomes and approach that architects, planners and developers should consider when designing homes to reflect community expectations.

This guide is intended to be a reference document:

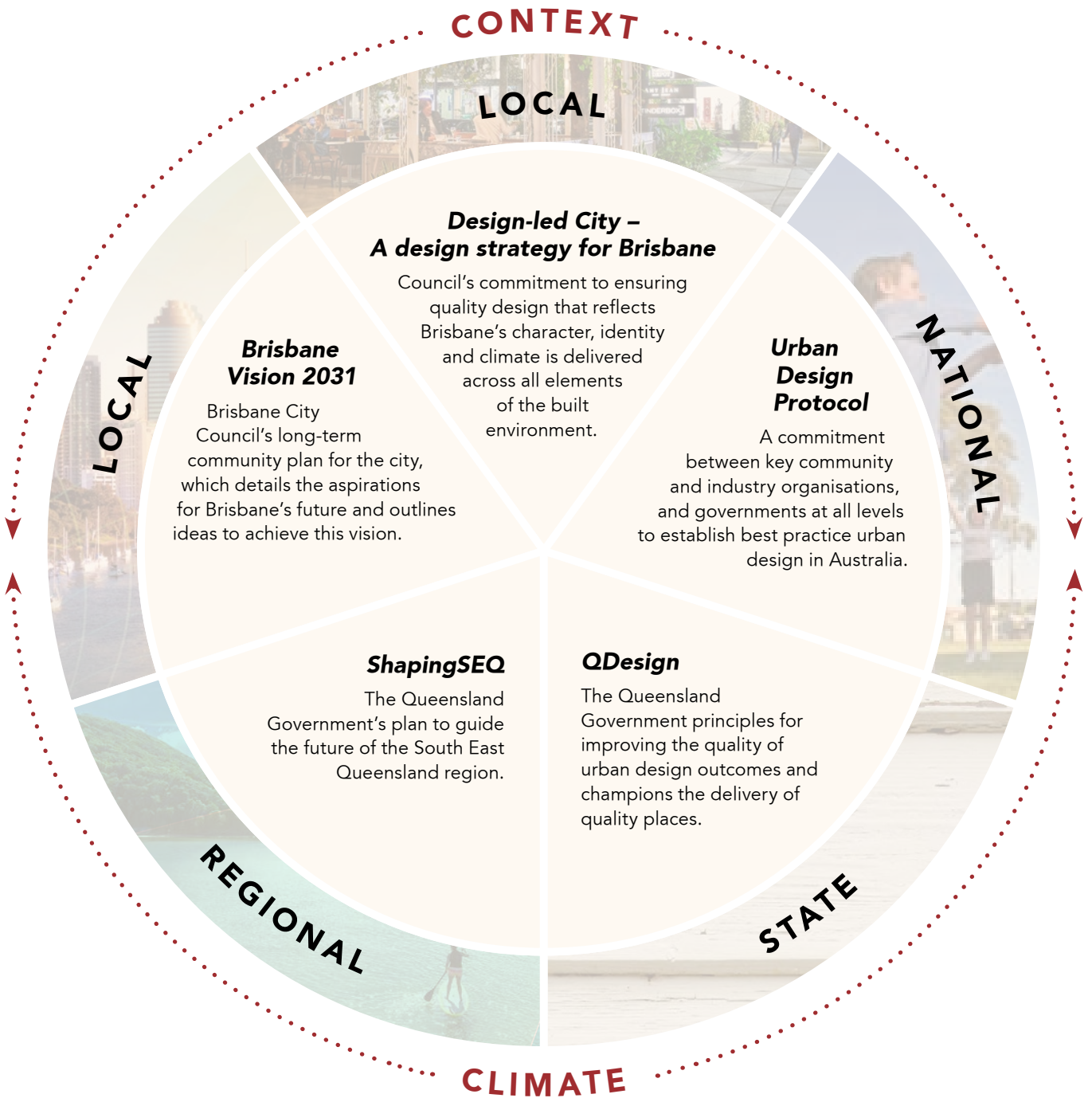
- to guide best-practice design outcomes
- to support the preparation of plans, drawings and design statements that may accompany development applications
- to help the community, including potential buyers, to identify quality housing design
- to encourage innovation and diversity of housing in Brisbane neighbourhoods.





# Context of the guide

This non-statutory guide does not prescribe development requirements. It is a practical reference document that supports better design outcomes. It complements the existing Australian, Queensland and local policies that regulate construction and design in the built environment.





# Residential design trends over time

Townhouses and apartments have been an important part of our city's neighbourhoods for the last 100 years. Attached and semi-attached housing in Brisbane has evolved over time due to economic, social and lifestyle changes.

1930



## 1920s-1950s

The inter-war period, including the Great Depression, saw a demand for rental properties and smaller shared housing as people moved to find work. Californian Bungalow styles were popular, as were Art Deco and Spanish Mission style apartment buildings.

1970



## 1960s-1980s

Brick apartment complexes with undercroft car parking became a popular form of housing in inner-city suburbs post-World War II. They feature a long building form and generous boundary setbacks.

1990



## 1980s-2000s

Semi-detached townhouses and rowhouses became popular in many suburbs of Brisbane and featured design elements such as lightweight materials and pitched roofing, complementary to existing detached housing. Similar styles are still being delivered today.

2000



## 2000s to present

Contemporary design has seen a range of new materials including render, contemporary brick, sheet cladding, laser-cut screening and glass. A range of housing types are being delivered in attached and semi-attached forms.



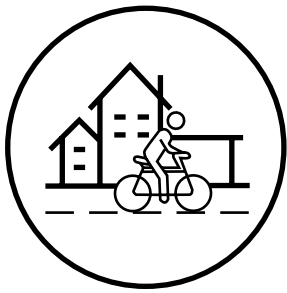


# Design process

The design process should consider the context of the development, from the neighbourhood to the building. This involves considering the factors external to the site that should influence the development's design as well as the specific site features.

Not all design considerations can be applied to every site or scale. Design and construction processes vary depending on the scope and complexity of the project. Breaking your decision-making into stages provides clarity in the design process. The following design considerations, although not exhaustive, will form the basis of an informed approach to design.





## The neighbourhood and the street

Neighbourhoods have their own unique mix of characteristics, such as the collection of building styles, parks, roads, shops, landmarks and active travel links. Quality design considers its impact on the surrounding natural and built environments by responding to the context of the location (neighbourhood).

Streets provide the local setting for daily life and activity. The collective appearance of buildings, landscaping, street trees, fencing, footpaths and driveways contribute to the streetscape. The design of new development should consider the street and how the development positively contributes to the existing or potential character of the street.

### Design considerations

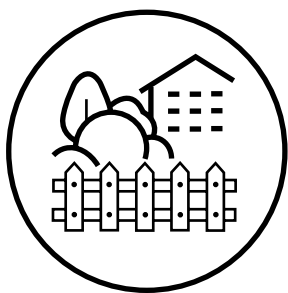
- What are the existing and planned characteristics of the neighbourhood and does the development reflect the characteristics?
- What are the physical attributes of the neighbourhood? Is it hilly, flat, or are areas prone to flooding? How can the development address these physical features?
- Is it an older neighbourhood with a well-defined character? Is it a newer neighbourhood with a more contemporary setting? Is it a neighbourhood going through transition? How can this development contribute to the future identity and character of the neighbourhood?
- Where are the parks, shops and businesses, public transport, pedestrian/cycle routes and schools? How will future residents access these local services? How can active travel be encouraged?
- What type of street is the development on and who uses the street?
- Are the locations of the footpaths and cycle paths, street trees and driveways strengthening the continuity of the street?
- Are utilities (water, telecommunications and fire hydrants) shown on the drawings and are they sufficient to meet the demands of the development?
- What are the cultural and built characteristics of the street? Are there protected heritage assets or settings in the street that the built form should reflect?
- Are there any views or vistas to or from the site? How has the development been designed to capture and consider these?
- How does the roofline and roofscape treatment contribute to the visual interest from the street?



Reflect local characteristics



Street continuity



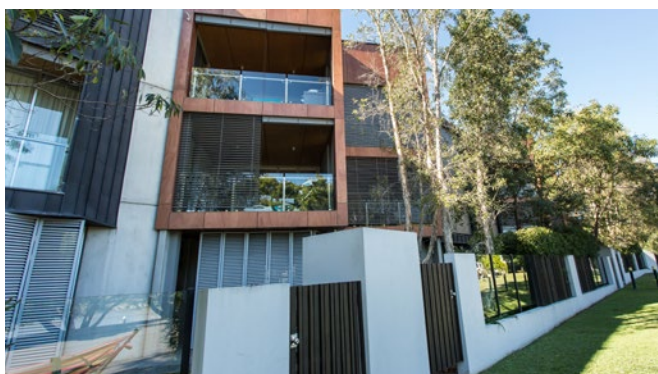
## The site and the building

No two sites are identical and consideration should be given to the bulk, scale and orientation of development. A site-specific designed development considers and responds to opportunities and constraints unique to each site. Development should be designed in response to the features of the site, while incorporating considerations for the street and neighbourhood.

The design of the building affects occupants, how they use their living spaces, and their ability to enjoy Brisbane's climate and relaxed lifestyle. The layout should be functional and designed with the end user in mind. The design of new development should consider how the building and landscaping can best suit current and future occupants and positively contribute to its surroundings.

### Design considerations

- Can the existing significant vegetation be maintained and incorporated into the development?
- Are the site levels and entrances located to facilitate safe and equitable access to the development?
- Does the site have access to all required services and utilities, such as telecommunications, electricity, water and sewer?
- Does the design suitably address overshadowing, noise and privacy impacts to and from surrounding sites?
- Do the buildings and landscaping respond to overland water flows and use water sensitive urban design approaches?
- Have places of heritage or cultural significance been identified and integrated into the design?
- Do materials, finishes, roof form and details reflect and enhance the identity of the street and neighbourhood?
- Has the building been designed to enable cross-ventilation, reduce reliance on artificial heating and cooling, and promote indoor-outdoor use in each dwelling?
- Is the internal layout designed with the end user and purpose in mind?
- Are the entrances clear, protected and visible from the street or common area, and do they help provide identity to the dwelling?
- Are the windows and outdoor spaces located to minimise overlooking and overshadowing on adjoining sites but maximise overlooking onto public streets and communal areas for safety?
- Does the building form transition complement existing or planned adjoining built form?
- Has the building been designed to allow for adaptive re-use in the long term?



Address overshadowing, noise and privacy impacts



Materials enhance neighbourhood identity



# Design outcomes

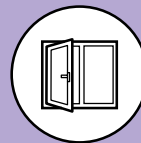
To achieve quality design across low-to-medium density residential development, consider and apply the following four design outcomes.



**Green and leafy neighbourhoods**



**Subtropical design**



**Liveability and function**



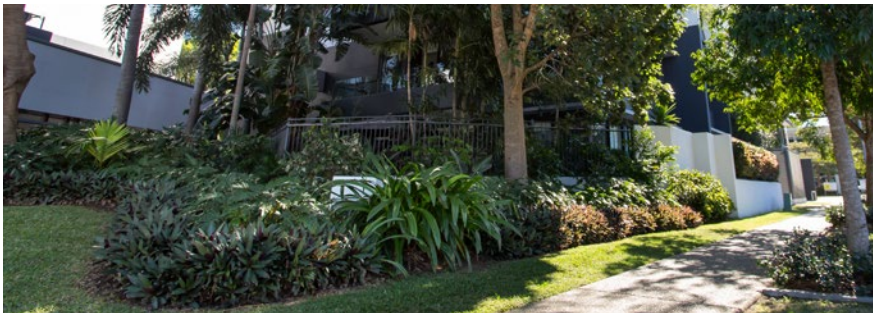
**Visual appeal and identity**

Each outcome should be considered and applied taking into account the unique context and scale of each individual development. Not every element will be relevant to every development and they should not be applied in a prescriptive or arbitrary manner.



## Green and leafy neighbourhoods

Residents value Brisbane's green and leafy neighbourhoods. Greenery provides cooling and shade, water capture, cleaner air and privacy, and contributes to relaxation and recreation opportunities. It is important that new development adequately contributes to our green and leafy neighbourhoods through a combination of shade trees, shrubs and greenery attached to buildings.



Generous landscaping areas at the front of the property



Street trees that shade pedestrians



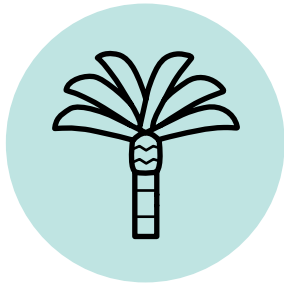
Greenery above ground level

"The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built."

Frank Lloyd Wright (American architect)

### Quality residential developments contribute to Brisbane's green and leafy character by incorporating:

- generous landscaping areas at the front of the property, including trees that create a shade canopy
- plentiful outdoor spaces with shade trees
- landscaping that flows through the site in unison with the built form
- green walls, green roofs and other greenery above ground level
- verge planting
- street trees that shade pedestrian and cycle paths.



## Subtropical design

Brisbane’s subtropical climate requires an appropriate design response. Our climate features warm, humid and wet summers and generally mild, dry winters. One of Brisbane’s greatest draw cards is the frequency of warm sunny days throughout the year. Residential development should embrace our climate by designing for natural breezes, shaded outdoor spaces and protection from harsh sun and rain.



Shading and weather protection



Natural light and ventilation



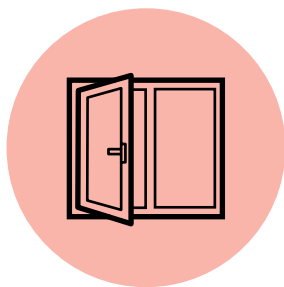
High ceilings for living areas

“Designing for the climate provides opportunities for re-invention and expression.”

Brit Andresen (Australian architect and emeritus professor at the University of Queensland)

### Quality residential developments respond to Brisbane’s subtropical climate by incorporating:

- shading devices and weather protection that respond to each elevation, including generous eaves and screening to east and west façades exposed to summer sun
- natural light and ventilation into communal areas such as hallways, lobbies and stairwells
- high ceilings in living areas to support natural air flow
- sun and breeze corridors between buildings
- appropriate materials and construction techniques for comfort and energy efficiency, as documented in the Australian Government *Your Home* design manual.



## Liveability and function

Quality designed housing meets the needs of residents and allows households to enjoy Brisbane's unique lifestyle. Central to this is supporting indoor-outdoor living, active travel, community interaction opportunities and housing that supports all abilities and ages.



Sheltered building entrances accessible from the street



Well-proportioned private outdoor areas



Durable materials



Connection to pedestrian and cycle paths

"I never design a building before I've seen the site and met the people who will be using it."

Frank Lloyd Wright  
(American architect)

### Quality residential developments are liveable and functional by incorporating:

- connections to open space, pedestrian and cycle paths, local centres and public transport
- easily accessible, secure and undercover bicycle storage areas
- universal design features to support people of all abilities, such as those referenced in the *Liveable Housing Design Guidelines*
- centrally located communal outdoor areas with shade structures that can accommodate a variety of uses
- well-proportioned private outdoor areas that seamlessly connect to indoor living spaces
- shared services such as car share spaces, a bench seat at the letter box or exercise and play equipment that encourage community interactions
- building entrances that provide shelter from weather elements and are easily accessible from the street
- driveways and parking areas are designed as low-speed communal spaces that consider the needs of pedestrians and children
- durable materials that age well in Brisbane's climate
- adaptable layouts to allow for flexibility and to meet changing household needs.



## Visual appeal and identity

Well designed housing positively contributes and interacts with its natural surroundings and the unique identity of the neighbourhood it is embedded in.



Façades that create visual depth and interest



Building form and detailing that reflects neighbourhood



Building entrances are easy to identify and address the street



Building form variation that enhances the street

*"Life is not about maximising everything, it's about giving something back – like light, space, form, serenity, joy."*

Glenn Murcutt (Australian architect)

### Quality residential developments are visually appealing and contribute to the identity of the area by incorporating:

- building form variation, roofscape treatments and detailing that reflects and respects the neighbourhood
- façade materials, colours and detailing that creates visual depth and interest
- building entries that are easy to identify and address the street
- building components that are well-organised and contribute to a visually appealing and coherent architectural form
- balconies and generous windows that overlook and support a visual relationship between dwellings and the street
- car parking and driveway areas that are screened behind the building line, complement the building presentation and are recessive
- refuse and recycling storage areas, pump stations and substations and other utilities do not detract from the streetscape (ie. screened from view, in basements where allowed).





# Process and outcomes checklist

The following is a checklist to identify how the design considerations have been addressed through proposed design. This may be documented in a context report that demonstrates how the proposed development seeks to achieve excellence in design.



# Checklist – process

Now that you have worked through the design process and considered the design outcomes, and how they relate to a given site, you can record your findings to create a context report. Combined with the below checklists, this will assist to deliver better-quality design across the city.



## Neighbourhood and street

Has a neighbourhood and streetscape analysis been undertaken?

A neighbourhood and streetscape plan should show the location and relationship of the following, in relation to the development site:

- parks
- shops and businesses
- public transport
- pedestrian/cycle routes
- schools and other community facilities
- built form
- topography
- character of the area
- heritage buildings and places
- anticipated growth areas (reflected in *Brisbane City Plan 2014*)
- type of street
- pedestrian/cycle paths
- street trees
- driveways
- utilities and services
- heritage assets
- built form (including materials and key building features)
- views/vistas.



## Site and building

Has a site and built form analysis been undertaken?

A site and built form analysis plan should show the location and relationship of the following, in relation to the development site:

- existing vegetation
- services and utility locations
- heritage assets
- gradient/topography/site levels
- sun path
- prevailing winds
- shadow diagrams of existing and proposed buildings
- noise-sensitive areas
- overland water flow paths
- height and bulk
- roof form
- materials
- utilities and services
- proposed development in the street setting
- internal layouts and communal spaces
- access points
- landscaping approach.



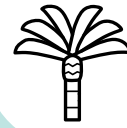
# Checklist – outcomes



## Green and leafy neighbourhood

How does the proposed design contribute to Brisbane's green and leafy character?

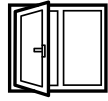
- Generous landscaping areas at the front of the property, including trees that create a shade canopy
- Plentiful outdoor spaces with shade trees
- Landscaping that flows through the site in unison with the built form
- Green walls, green roofs and other greenery above ground level
- Verge planting
- Street trees that shade pedestrian and cycle paths



## Subtropical design

How does the proposed design contribute to Subtropical living?

- Shading devices and weather protection that respond to each elevation, including generous eaves and screening to east and west façades exposed to summer sun
- Natural light and ventilation into communal areas such as hallways, lobbies and stairwells
- High ceilings in living areas to support natural air flow
- Sun and breeze corridors between buildings
- Appropriate materials and construction techniques for comfort and energy efficiency, as documented in the Australian Government *Your Home* design manual



## Liveability and function

How does the proposed design contribute to the liveability and function of the home?

- Connections to open space, pedestrian and cycle paths, local centres and public transport
- Easily accessible, secure and undercover bicycle storage areas
- Universal design features to support people of all abilities, such as those referenced in the *Liveable Housing Design Guidelines*
- Centrally located communal outdoor areas with shade structures that can accommodate a variety of uses
- Well-proportioned private outdoor areas that seamlessly connect to indoor living spaces
- Shared services such as car share spaces, a bench seat at the letter boxes or exercise and play equipment that encourage community interactions
- Building entrances that provide shelter from weather elements and are easily accessible from the street
- Driveways and parking areas are designed as low-speed communal spaces that consider the needs of pedestrians and children
- Durable materials that age well in Brisbane's climate
- Adaptable layouts to allow for flexibility and to meet changing household needs



## Visual appeal and identity

How does the proposed design contribute to visual appeal and identity?

- Building form variation, roofscape treatments and detailing that reflects and respects the neighbourhood
- Façade materials, colours and detailing that creates visual depth and interest
- Building entries that are easy to identify and address the street
- Building components that are well-organised and contribute to a visually appealing and coherent architectural form
- Balconies and generous windows that overlook and support a visual relationship between dwellings and the street
- Car parking and driveway areas that are screened behind the building line, complement the building presentation and are recessive
- Refuse and recycling storage areas, pump stations and substations do not detract from the streetscape (ie. screened from view, in basements where allowed)

## More information

For more information please contact Council.



Visit [brisbane.qld.gov.au](http://brisbane.qld.gov.au) and search 'Low-to-medium density residential Design Guide'.



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