

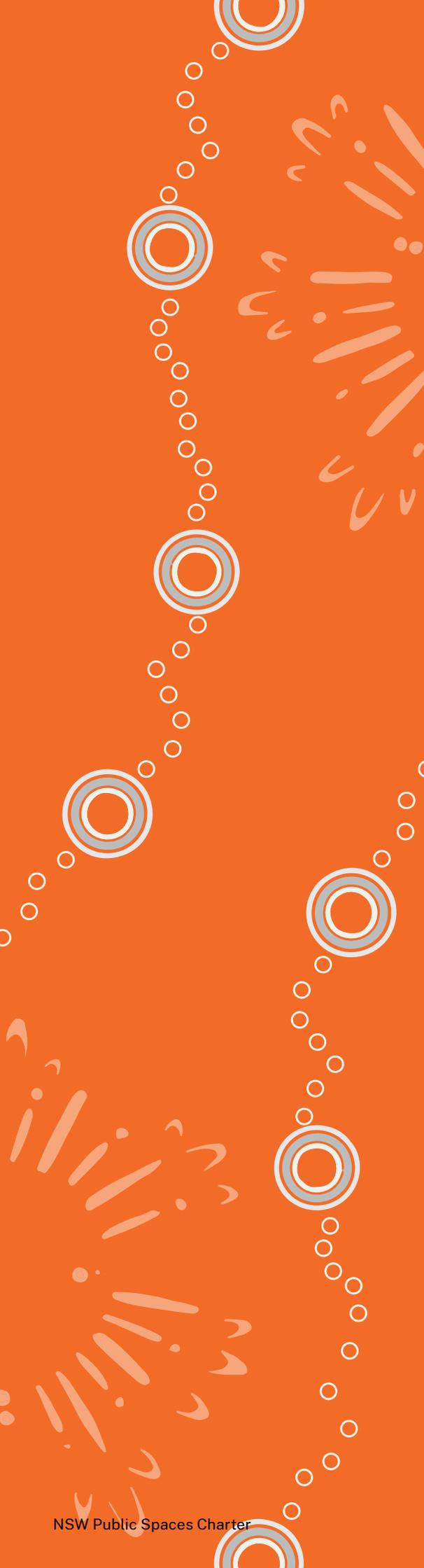


NSW Public Spaces Charter

Draft Practitioner's Guide

June 2022





Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society. NSW is Aboriginal land, so throughout this document Aboriginal peoples are referred to specifically, rather than First Nations or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal peoples take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. The NSW Public Spaces Charter is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal peoples that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

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NSW Public Spaces Charter

Image on front cover: Wagga Beach, Wagga Wagga.
Courtesy of Wagga Wagga City Council.

Artwork (left) by Nikita Ridgeway.

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Introduction

This Practitioner's Guide supports users to embed the 10 principles of the [NSW Public Spaces Charter](#) in their work. It provides advice, examples and resources for the planning, design, delivery, management and evaluation of public spaces.

The Practitioner's Guide is a companion to the charter and supports efforts to ensure everyone in NSW has access to high quality public spaces that allow them to enjoy and participate in public life.

This is Version 1.0 of the Practitioner's Guide and it will evolve to reflect feedback from signatories, contemporary practice and emerging research. To provide feedback on the guide, please complete the survey [here](#). We also welcome feedback and suggestions on the guide through PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au.

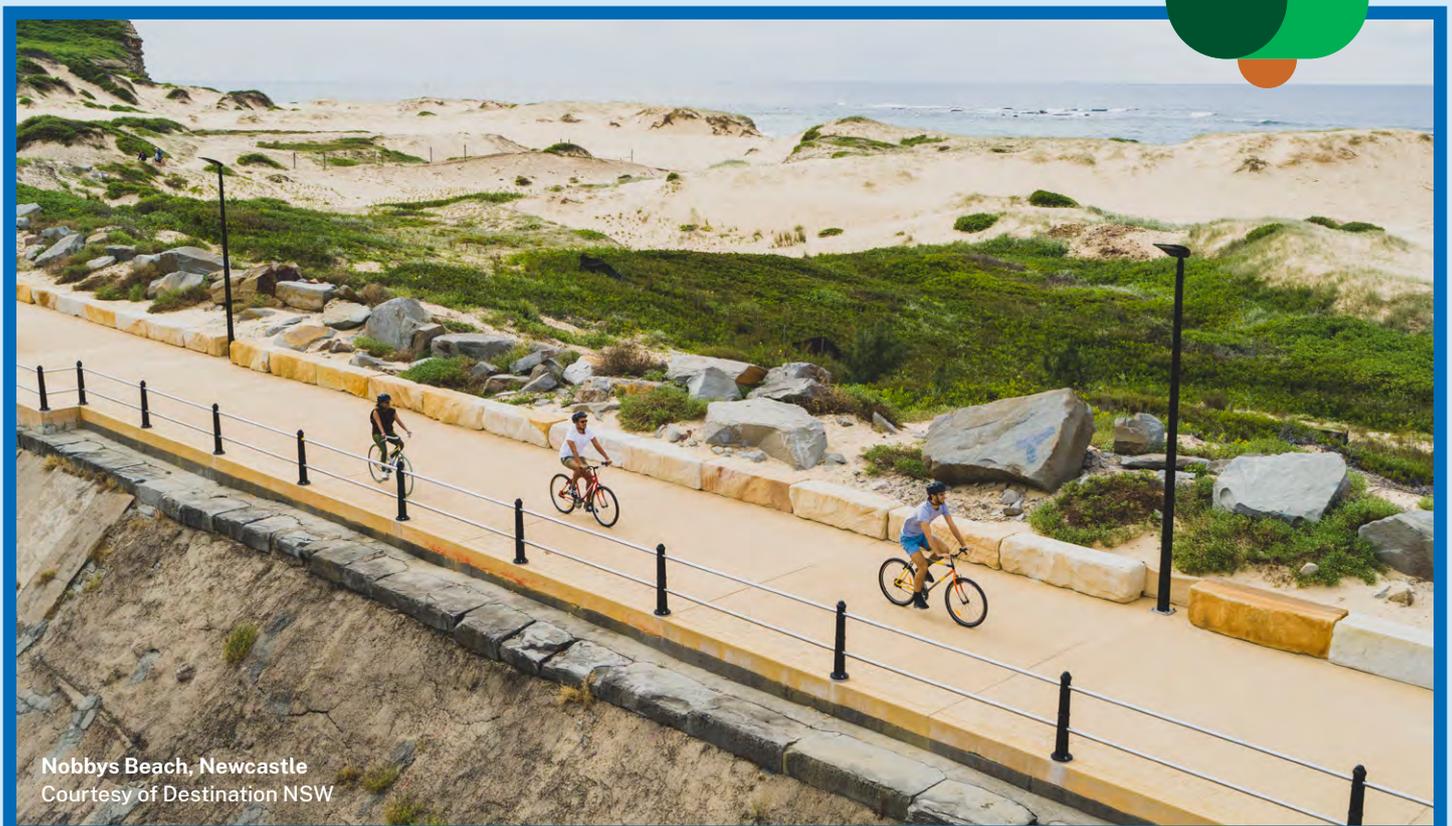
The charter and Practitioner's Guide do not replace other non-statutory guidance or policies developed by government or more broadly through industry ratings system or global initiatives.

Become a signatory to the NSW Public Spaces Charter

Becoming a signatory will help your organisation to provide or advocate for better public spaces. You can access the charter's community of practice, advice on how to implement the charter, promotional opportunities and data sharing.

To become a signatory to the charter, register your interest by emailing PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au

The [Great Public Spaces Toolkit](#) supports the charter and Practitioner's Guide with free resources to bring the charter's principles to life, including a growing set of in-depth case studies, evaluation tools and guides.



Nobbys Beach, Newcastle
Courtesy of Destination NSW

Using the Practitioner's Guide

The Practitioner's Guide provides advice on how to plan, design, manage and active public spaces to support each principle to help you apply the principles as they relate to your work and priorities. When applying any of the principles we encourage you to consider the charter's core values:



Connection to Country

All public space in NSW is on Country, which is at the core of every Aboriginal person's identity and sense of belonging. It is the place from which Aboriginal languages and cultures are derived, which determine families, kinship and communities. Aboriginal peoples are the Traditional Custodians of all public space in New South Wales. Acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal peoples and cultural knowledge when public space is planned, managed and delivered can promote and strengthen connection to Country and create healing for both Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal peoples too.

Courtesy of Adam Hollingworth



Equity and inclusion

Public space is a community asset that should support a society in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their potential. Inclusion in public spaces and in the processes to plan, design, manage and activate them is central to creating equitable public spaces and ensuring all people can access the benefits they provide.



Community engagement

Engaging the community as active participants in decision-making processes when planning, designing, managing and activating public space will help ensure that it reflects their values, needs and aspirations. Participatory processes, collaboration and co-design in public space projects help build trust, which then increases people's use of and attachment to the space. Ensuring that vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities are engaged in these processes leads to more welcoming and inclusive public space.

Key steps to implement the principles:

- Get prepared: understand what changes are needed
- Include initial engagement with the community and stakeholders at the start of the policy and planning process
- Conduct a trial period in the proposed area
- Evaluate the trial and update policy and planning instruments as needed
- Formalise changes through the most appropriate planning pathway
- Operationalise changes, including activation, compliance and regular communication with the community
- Monitor and evaluate the changes and set a review period.

The charter and Practitioner’s Guide have been developed to be incorporated into a broad range of mechanisms intended to plan, design, manage or activate public space.

Practitioner Type	Example Mechanisms
 The community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and inform discussions on quality public space • Involved in design, planning and policy development
 Public space managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans of management • Organisational policies & strategies • Event or programming strategies • Contractor or consultant briefs • Event strategies and programs
 Strategic and statutory planners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning proposals • Local planning instruments • Precinct plans • Strategic plans for local government areas, districts or regions
 Public policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and advice to elected officials that informs government decisions and priorities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community strategic plans – Planning policy – Economic policy – Environmental policy – Cultural policy – Social policy
 Local businesses and chambers of commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plans • Support and inform discussions on quality public space • Event strategies and programs
 Industry bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member communications • Education and accreditation programs • Support and inform discussions on quality public space
 Development professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultancy reports • Development of design brief, design documentation and design performance guideline
 Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plans • Development applications • Social impact assessments • Service agreements and contracts

Defining public space

What is ‘public space’?

The NSW Public Spaces Charter definition draws from the United Nations Charter of Public Space (adopted May 2013):

Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive.

They include:

- Public open spaces – parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and bushland that is open for public access.
- Public facilities – public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities.
- Streets – streets, avenues and boulevards; squares and plazas; pavements; passages and lanes; and bicycle paths.

What is Country?

The charter acknowledges that all public space in NSW is on Country. It is guided by the understanding provided by Dr Danièle Hromek, Budawang/Yuin in the [Connecting with Country draft framework \(2020\)](#):

‘Country’ (capital C) has a specific and significant meaning for Aboriginal peoples. In the Aboriginal sense of the word, Country relates to the nation or cultural group and land that we belong to, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. However, Country means much more than land, it is our place of origin in cultural, spiritual and literal terms. It includes not only land but also skies and waters. Country incorporates both the tangible and the intangible, for instance, all the knowledges and cultural practices associated with land. People are part of Country, and our identity is derived in a large way in relation to Country.

What is ‘quality’ public space?

Quality public space is reflected in its physical form, the activities it supports and the meaning it holds. We can evaluate the quality of public space by asking:

- Am I able to get there?
- Am I able to play and participate?
- Am I able to stay?
- Am I able to connect?

Use the [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life \(2021\)](#) to analyse the quality of public spaces and areas for improvement.

What is activation?

The [NSW Guide to Activation: Public Spaces](#), notes that activation is about people and the social life of public space. Activation refers to the level of human activity in public spaces, and can be measured by the:

- number of people present (also known as ‘footfall’ or ‘visitation’)
- time spent by the people present (also known as ‘dwell time’)
- diversity of people present.

Permanent activation

Public spaces have a baseline level of activity that occurs naturally across various times of the day, week, and year. This can be greatly affected by their location and surrounding destinations, as well as the amenity and infrastructure.

Temporary activation

Public spaces may also offer more temporary activation to attract people. Ideally, these incentives to use public spaces give people opportunities to connect, acknowledge culture, and be included.





Open and welcoming

Everyone can access public space and feel welcome, respected and included.



Key points

- Public spaces should welcome all people, regardless of their gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, cultural background, socioeconomic status and/or ability.
- Public spaces should be designed and maintained to be accessible so that everyone can use them with ease and dignity.
- Creating open and welcoming public spaces requires early and ongoing community engagement that is inclusive, equitable and seeks out diverse voices.

The principle in action



Public space managers and **local chambers of commerce** conduct lived experience audits, asking different sections of the community to describe and show their experience in public spaces and identify accessibility barriers and opportunities.



Developers and **statutory planners** commission accessibility audits and ensure development applications include best practice accessibility solutions.



Urban designers and **landscape architects** use design excellence approaches, lighting, paving, materials and colour choices so that public space design is welcoming for neurodiverse people.



Planning open and welcoming public spaces

- Understand and respond to the existing characteristics and qualities of the area, alongside the community's needs, values and aspirations.
- Seek out the expertise and experience of local stakeholders including Aboriginal communities, councils, the community, organisations, businesses, workers and visitors.
- Design engagement plans that enable participation from people who represent the demographics of the broader community.
- Provide more inclusive wayfinding, such as signage in different languages or smart city solutions to access information.
- Review and incorporate existing strategic plans such as local strategic planning statements, community strategic plans, engagement policies and inclusion or accessibility plans, Aboriginal strategic cultural plans, Aboriginal interpretation strategies and reconciliation actions plans.
- Plan new and improved public spaces to connect with the broader public space network.
- Provide walkable public space connections to the places people live, work, exercise and relax to support all forms of micro-mobility, such as walking and cycling, and integrated land use and transport planning.
- Plan for public space uses and hours of activity that encourage a diverse range of the community to easily access, stay and connect during the day and night.

Upgrading showgrounds

New inclusivity and accessibility standards have been introduced since many historic public spaces were built. Upgrades to NSW showgrounds in 2020 and 2021 – funded through COVID-19 stimulus funding – addressed these issues. Examples include:

- a women's change room at Junee Showground
- upgraded change rooms and amenities and new walking and cycling paths at Boorowa Showground
- upgraded accessible toilets and showers at Bungendore Showground
- access ramps and handrailing at Cobargo Showground
- air-conditioning at Walgett Showground.



Parramasala Festival, Parramatta
Courtesy of Destination NSW



Tallawoladah and Tumbalong Precincts – Place-based Reconciliation Action Plan

Place Management NSW, as the custodian for Tallawoladah (The Rocks) and Tumbalong (Darling Harbour), collaborated with stakeholders to create a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that starts with Country and is applied to the place and its custodians. The RAP has 4 focus areas:

- Gumal – Relationships
- Waranara, wallanga – Respect
- Walunadarang – Opportunities
- Yewing, yanga – Governance

Each focus area identifies actions that will embed understanding and celebration of Aboriginal cultures, values and traditions for the mutual and lasting benefits of all Australians.

Designing open and welcoming public spaces

- Determine the location, amount and design of public spaces in collaboration with planning and design professionals, technical specialists and the community.
- Support the design of welcoming spaces through continued engagement, especially with harder to reach communities and people with diverse needs.
- Build partnerships with community organisations who work with hard to reach groups to improve outreach and engagement.
- Early in the design process, incorporate solutions that help people feel safe at all hours by considering power, lighting, the natural environment, urban greening, innovative maintenance solutions and interface with building facades.
- Value and respect the knowledge and guidance of Aboriginal people when designing public spaces.

Paperbark Playground, Parramatta

Paperbark Playground in Parramatta Park is an award-winning playspace that includes swings, an ‘explorer dome’ with nets, ropes and ladders, and soft fall surfacing. The playspace also offers a sand and water play area and musical area.

The playspace optimises the shade of existing trees alongside shade structures. Its comfortable seating options means people can stay and play for longer.

Paperbark Playground’s design interprets and respects the site’s rich Aboriginal cultural heritage as well as its colonial history and archaeology. An innovative ‘no-dig’ design solution protected the underlying Aboriginal heritage and the playful integration of historical references include convict ‘love tokens’ and illustrated panels.

CLICK

Refer to the resources section for design guidelines to support accessible design for everyone, regardless of gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, cultural background, socioeconomic status and/or ability.

Managing and activating open and welcoming public spaces

- Encourage people to visit public spaces and build a sense of welcome, pride and belonging through well managed activations and large to small scale local events.
- Program inclusive and welcoming events where residents and visitors can interact.
- Design event strategies that include funding, investment and marketing to bring the community to public spaces and encourage future visits and interaction outside planned events.
- Implement maintenance plans for green infrastructure (including watering and weeding), so green and resilient public spaces stay attractive and comfortable.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for design guidelines to support equitable access to public open space within walking distance of homes.

Examples of success

- Engaging with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and communities to identify cultural or heritage sites.
- Appropriately managing Indigenous cultural intellectual property and acknowledging Aboriginal community input in projects.
- Preparing engagement reports that demonstrate how input from a range of community groups, including people with disability, young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal communities, influenced the location, design, delivery, management, proposed uses and programming of public spaces.
- Developing strategies for ongoing engagement, governance and management.
- Supporting people to have access to district public open space within 2km / 25 minutes' walk of their home.
- Supporting people to have access to local public open space within 200m / 2-3 minutes' walk of their home in high-density areas, and 400m / 5 minutes' walk from their home in medium- to low-density areas.



Paperbark Playspace, Parramatta
Courtesy of the Department of Planning and Environment



Community focused



Public space brings people together and builds strong, connected and resilient communities.

Key points

- Public spaces are places for formal and informal social interaction and social connection. They are democratic places that promote social equity and inclusion.
- Quality public spaces support community activities and opportunities for people of all backgrounds to participate in civic life.
- Everyone in the community, including diverse, under-represented and hard-to-reach groups, should be involved in the planning, design, activation and management of public spaces.

The principle in action



Community members participate in community engagement activities and share their needs and aspirations.



Public space managers and **public policy makers** develop community engagement strategies that include regular and ongoing contact with community representatives and local residents, including Aboriginal communities and Knowledge Holders.



Strategic planners develop plans with community reference groups and panels.



Developers ensure public spaces respond to the demographic characteristics of the area.

Planning community focused public spaces

- Plan for public spaces that offer a diverse range of uses that meet community need.
- Consider what public spaces and activities the community can already access and how to support and enhance that network.
- Engage with the community before or while scoping technical studies, to understand unmet demand.
- Respond to the local environment, landscape and topography, and identify opportunities to enhance green and blue infrastructure.
- Use public spaces to celebrate local character in existing or newly developed areas by involving the community to develop a place-based approach where community history, stories and connections are celebrated or created.
- Incorporate the local, place-specific cultural identity of the Country where public spaces are located by working with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and communities.
- Observe how people gather and use existing public spaces in the area to understand movement patterns, use habits and what uses may be missing.
- Plan public spaces that give people a reason to visit.
- Plan for the co-location of different land uses or shared space arrangements to support interactions between people and the services and businesses they wish to access.
- Develop community engagement and development plans to ensure an inclusive and strategic approach to planning public spaces for the whole community, including hard-to-reach groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse people and people with disability.
- Investigate opportunities to use mechanisms such as planning or joint-use agreements to help provide new and improved public spaces in urban areas.

Joint-use and multi-use agreements

The shared use of facilities can support the provision of public spaces. This can range from the opening of school ovals for community sport outside school hours to the conversion of a car park into public space in off-peak hours.

For example, Bella Vista Public School shares sporting facilities with The Hills Shire Council, including a full-size football field and double-court sports hall. The facilities are open to the public outside school hours thanks to an agreement between the NSW Department of Education and Council.

In Young, a major upgrade at Young High School will create a new 2.5 storey joint-use library and community facility, funded under a partnership between Hilltops Council and the NSW Department of Education.

The facility on Young High School grounds will integrate with Carrington Park. Some spaces will be reserved for school use during school hours, and other spaces reserved for sole community use. After school hours, most of the spaces will be available for community use.

Western Sydney Parklands

Courtesy of Greater Sydney Parklands



Designing community focused public spaces

- Design public spaces that can support formal and informal social interaction.
- Use urban greening to create comfortable and welcoming spaces for a variety of uses.
- Develop design solutions that allow public spaces to be used for public events without compromising community enjoyment.
- Design public spaces, particularly streets and plazas, to balance the movement of people and goods with the amenity and quality of places.
- Refer to the resources section for design guidelines to support public spaces that attract and foster community spirit by balancing movement and place.

Managing and activating community focused public spaces

- Facilitate community-led use and events in open spaces, streets and public facilities that give people rich and varied opportunities to participate in their community.
- Build a culture of partnership and participation to provide varied and dynamic programming that responds to community need and builds a sense of belonging.
- Continue to engage the community and update plans to support an inclusive and strategic approach to activating public spaces in a way that meets diverse community needs.
- Use temporary activities – such as cultural activations, pop-up cafés or shops – to maintain community use of public spaces and reimagine, trial and test new visions for areas transitioning between uses (for example from industrial to mixed use) or undergoing significant development or service works.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for webinars and case studies for temporary activations and demonstration pilot projects that can support the case for more permanent improvements to public spaces.

Sydney Olympic Park Authority Community Development Plan

Sydney Olympic Park is managed by Sydney Olympic Park Authority. The authority defines the park's community as people with a deeper connection to the place, including the growing community of 25,000 people who live, work, study or conduct business in or nearby, or regular visitors.

The authority's Community Development Plan guides the evolution of an active, sustainable, inclusive and connected community. It considers activations, programs and events that contribute to the local economy; sustainable, safe and inclusive spaces; better access to the park's services, amenities and facilities; and meaningful partnerships.

Examples of success

- Locating new public spaces to meet community need.
- Planning with the aim for there to be no net loss of public space.
- Providing a broad range of uses and experiences (ideally 10 or more for larger spaces).
- Supporting a hierarchy of neighbourhood, local and district-scale public spaces to work together to cater for a range of community and cultural needs.
- Including all cultures, lifestyles, backgrounds and abilities when planning the location, layout and size of public spaces.
- Activating public spaces for a variety of passive/active and formal/ informal uses.
- Clearly defining zones for activities to minimise conflict.
- Investigating co-location and shared space arrangements early in infrastructure planning.
- Designing green infrastructure to consider the different uses of public spaces, while providing a baseline of comfort and amenity to all users.



Kooyoo Street, Griffith

Kooyoo Street, which runs between the 2 main streets in Griffith's CBD, was temporarily closed in 2021 to create a cultural and strategic town centre. Griffith City Council reports that 5,000 people enjoyed the space and surveys revealed a 78% satisfaction rate.

Funded under the NSW Government's Streets as Shared Spaces program, this initiative involved community groups who activated the street with live music, kids' workshops, a market, art workshops and more. Council provided a rent-free food kiosk operated by 3 local businesses across 3 weekends, supported by a Western Riverina wine country kiosk selling wines and gins. Local rural artists created night time art projections on the buildings.



Street Scapes Griffith
Courtesy of Griffith City Council;
Photographer: Ginette Guidolin



Culture and creativity



Public space provides a platform for culture and creative expression that makes places more colourful, animated and thought-provoking.

Key points

- People want to live, work and spend time in places that offer rich and exciting culture and creativity.
- Public spaces connect people to Country and Aboriginal culture while giving Aboriginal people space for cultural practices.
- Cultural and creative programs, activities and events in public spaces reflect the community's identity, diversity and hopes for the future.
- Artists and creative organisations are engaged as key partners for place-based cultural and creative projects in public spaces.

The principle in action



Public space managers, local businesses and **chambers of commerce** program events that celebrate different cultures and creative communities.



Strategic planners and **public policy makers** collect and maintain cultural infrastructure data to inform strategies that integrate public spaces and cultural facilities and promote local creative production.



Development professionals and developers design town squares and other public spaces to include flexible infrastructure that supports a range of events, festivals and community gatherings, appropriate to location and size.



Planning culture and creativity in public spaces

- Provide free and accessible public facilities without a profit motive to support learning and activity, attract visitors and contribute to a sense of place and community history and identity.
- Plan for parks, gardens, bushland, waterways, town squares, streets and laneways to host a diversity of temporary and permanent cultural and creative interventions, activities, events or projects to help more people experience and participate in cultural activities.
- Consult with the community on how public spaces can build an understanding of an area's heritage, culture and creative identity.
- Identify opportunities to co-locate museums, galleries or other cultural facilities with public spaces.
- Identify opportunities for the community to use public spaces to memorialise or remember past stories and acknowledge shared histories.
- Review planning policy for opportunities to exempt low-impact cultural and artistic uses such as community celebrations and artworks.
- Seek advice from the community and creative organisations about any affordable and innovative approaches to arts and culture that could be incorporated into public spaces.
- Understand statutory obligations for identifying, recording and conserving Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Integrate cultural infrastructure planning with land use and precinct planning.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for plans and strategies that identify opportunities to integrate culture and creativity into public spaces.



The Eyes of the Land and the Sea by Alison Page and Nik Lachajczak at Kamay, Botany Bay.
Courtesy of Alison Page and Nik Lachajczak.



Designing culture and creativity in public spaces

- Incorporate understandings of Country and culture in the design of new public spaces by engaging with Aboriginal people about current and future plans for a space.
- Design public spaces that can support cultural practices and promote new cultural practices.
- Ensure appropriate recognition of Aboriginal cultural intellectual property in the design and planning of public spaces.
- Refer to the resources section for resources to support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to collaborate respectfully in the design and development of public spaces.
- Plan early for public spaces that support diverse permanent and temporary cultural uses such as public art, creative markets, pop-up film screenings, live music or performance, or outdoor exhibitions at different scales and times. Design streets and laneways to include space for cultural activation and programming.
- Design open spaces that are flexible, multi-functional and able to accommodate temporary event infrastructure and creative and safe lighting.
- Investigate opportunities for public spaces to include permanent cultural infrastructure where appropriate, such as embedded stages or concourses.
- Design flexible public spaces that can be adapted for regular events through flat access, and access to water and 3-phase power.
- Provide infrastructure that allows streets to be temporarily closed to host major cultural events.

Kamay/Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell

Kamay/Botany Bay National Park at the mouth of Botany Bay, Sydney is the site of first contact between Aboriginal people and the crew of the Endeavour. A 2008 master plan for the meeting place of first contact represents a place where cultures meet and where conflict and reconciliation, celebration and sorry business can be acknowledged.

An updated 2019 master plan envisions the area as “a place of significance to all Australians that contributes to their sense of identity as Australians” and proposes new visitor infrastructure and facilities, community education and interpretation programs and new ways to learn about the site’s significance.

Importantly, the master plan aims to increase recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage to balance storytelling that incorporates both Aboriginal and European history.

- Design culturally safe spaces that positively and proactively acknowledge, accept and provide for the inclusion of a diverse range of participants.
- Refer to the resources section for guidance on best practice principles to plan, commission and maintain public art.

Managing and activating culture and creativity in public spaces

- Provide and facilitate arts and cultural activities in public spaces that all people can access, regardless of their abilities, age, gender, cultural and linguistic diversity or geographic location.
- Develop activation management plans to address the barriers to people with disability to improve access to and participation in artistic and cultural activities.
- Engage the community to understand how people from diverse cultural backgrounds feel welcome and respected.
- Work with the community to build culturally safety practice into place management strategies so that public spaces are welcoming to people of different cultural backgrounds.
- Identify opportunities for under-represented groups to access arts and culture, such as inclusive language, signage and cultural symbols, or multilingual resources or Aboriginal place names.
- Bring culture and creativity to life through culture and heritage walks and trails or temporary and permanent exhibitions and public art.
- Employ public space programming and activation that reflects and celebrates the demographics of the community.

CLICK 

Refer to the resource section for activation strategies, research and statistics to underpin place-based and inclusive cultural programming.

Warami Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural Walk

The Darug (or Dharug) people are Parramatta's first people and Traditional Custodians. Warami Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural Walk at Parramatta Park allows people to spend time on Country with a Traditional Custodian, learning about connections to land, plant uses, tools, hunting and Aboriginal Parramatta. The walk takes in the park and Parramatta River, and was developed in partnership between City of Parramatta Council and the local Darug people.



Lunar New Year, Hurstville

The Lunar New Year event in Hurstville, organised by Georges River Council, takes over Forest Road, Hurstville each year. Welcoming up to 50,000 people, the event includes parades, performances and food stalls, transforming Forest Road from a place for vehicles to a space to celebrate culture.

Examples of success

- Introducing public art, cultural and creative programs that reflect the identity and creativity of the community.
- Conserving, highlighting and celebrating significant Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural and environmental features – tangible and intangible – in public spaces.
- Incorporating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural infrastructure planning and delivery into land use and infrastructure planning.



Local character & identity



Public space reflects who we are and our diverse stories and histories.

Key points

- Public spaces connect people with Country by acknowledging Aboriginal languages, place names and histories and providing space for Aboriginal cultures to be practiced and shared.
- Understand how the existing heritage contributes to the character and identity of public space.
- The community's knowledge of a place's local character and identity can inform the planning, design and activation of public space through meaningful and inclusive community engagement.

The principle in action



Community members participate in engagement processes to share local knowledge and skills, and provide ideas on how these could be reflected in the place design and programming. They are actively engaged in place-making programs to help bring them to life.



Public space managers deliver place-making programs and activities that highlight the different histories, cultures and stories of a community.



Development professionals are guided by the Burra Charter to conserve local heritage, and work with local communities to understand what character and identity mean for them.

Developers engage with local artists, community organisations and public facility managers to integrate public art and creativity in public spaces.

Planning for local character and identity in public spaces

- Research the local character of a place – how a place looks or feels and how the land, environment, people, buildings, history, culture and tradition interact to create character.
- Undertake heritage, environment and social impact assessments, and a needs assessment of blue and green infrastructure, to understand the assets to be protected and enhanced.
- Consult with the community early to understand local character and identity and seek out diverse voices and stories to create more inclusive and unique places.
- Practice place-based planning that draws from research, analysis and consultation to better understand places and respond to their potential.
- Engage Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and communities early to embed designing with Country principles into a project.
- Implement the NSW dual-naming policy for geographical features and cultural sites to give prominence to Aboriginal place names, unlock stories and provide a sense of belonging and identity.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for guidance on how design can enhance and support local character.

Designing for local character and identity in public spaces

- Undertake a site analysis to understand the site itself and how it sits within the broader context. Consider built form including scale, materials, use, character and the site's development over time. Look for patterns and clues that reveal a place's identity and help highlight this identity through design.
- Understand the attributes, meaning and context of a place by considering street layout, and area's landscape, land division patterns and building variation.
- Explore character early in the planning and design process to incorporate local history and stories.
- Design public spaces to take advantage of viewpoints, landscapes, waterways and vistas to significant built forms such as buildings and bridges. Incorporate and celebrate place-specific native and other vegetation, and green infrastructure.
- Provide sufficient space around significant elements, such as significant natural, built or heritage elements, to frame them and to help them be seen and appreciated.
- Work with local communities to understand what they value about their neighbourhood's character and identity, and celebrate these valued items through place design.



CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for guidance on designing great places in regional NSW that encompass local character.

Phoenix Park, Rhodes

Phoenix Park in Rhodes is designed with an interpretive Aboriginal overlay designed by Jason Wing, a well-known local artist who strongly identifies with his Aboriginal (Biripi) and Chinese heritage.

Jason worked with the landscape architects to evoke the sightlines that may have been part of the daily life of the Wangal people as they surveyed their hunting and fishing grounds.

The fishing theme is repeated in the “fish bone” concrete forms that provide seating and play opportunities and in the large rope structure that represents a fish trap.

Managing and activating local character and identity in public spaces

- Identify different ways to incorporate local character into public spaces through programming and events, promoting heritage and culture, engaging local communities and including the local community in governance structures.
- Engage diverse and under-represented groups and partner with artists and community organisations during placemaking to highlight distinct stories, histories and cultures.
- Design heritage management policies that use heritage conservation as a catalyst for better social, cultural, economic and environmental outcomes.
- Understand the heritage significance of a place and how different features can be successfully managed to support place identity.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for best practice activation strategies that celebrate local character.

Equality Green, Prince Alfred Park

In 2017, 30,000 Sydneysiders gathered in Prince Alfred Park to rally and hear the results of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey. To commemorate this event and celebrate local history, the City of Sydney renamed an area of the park 'Equality Green' and installed a 90-metre rainbow footpath.

These small but significant changes to the park represent a celebration of the local area and commemoration of an important historical event, while adding life and colour.



Equality Green, Prince Alfred Park
Courtesy of Destination NSW



Chinatown, Sydney
Courtesy of Destination NSW

- Use cultural events and heritage events, markets and celebrations of local food, industry and public art to form place identity and attract visitors.
- Design public art programs that reflect diverse cultures, stories and histories.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for protocols for working with Aboriginal artists that apply to the maintenance, enhancing and transmission of cultural knowledge.

City of Sydney Chinatown Public Art Plan

The Chinatown Public Art Plan for new permanent and temporary public art works in the Chinatown precinct of Sydney CBD aims to revitalise the area through art projects that address the social and cultural aspects of the area and tell the stories of the contributions of Asian-Australian communities to Sydney.

For example, the upgrade to a section of Thomas Street is an artist-led pedestrian-friendly public space, with native Australian trees, lighting, seating and a major public art work by renowned Australian Chinese artist Lindy Lee, called The Garden and Cloud and Stone.

The work creates a ‘garden’ of different elements that are celebrated within ancient Chinese philosophy. In 2020, it won an Award of Excellence from the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects.

Examples of success

- Creating beautiful and memorable public spaces that fulfil functional requirements, encourage social interaction and exhibit a strong local character and sense of safety.
- Including uses in community facilities and public buildings that reflect the aspirations and needs of the community, identified through consultation.
- Embodying visual quality, local character and sense of place in community facilities and public buildings.
- Using lighting, furnishing and design that is sensitive to the character of the neighbourhood.
- Designing public spaces that reflect the historical natural landscape and environment of the area.



Green and resilient

Public space connects us to nature, enhances biodiversity and builds climate resilience into communities.



Key points

- Public spaces support biodiversity, local wildlife and habitats and connect ecological systems and networks of green space, waterways, bushland, riparian landscapes and wildlife corridors.
- Aboriginal knowledge and land management practices support the health and wellbeing of Country.
- Great public spaces integrate with quality green infrastructure, including tree canopy cover.

The principle in action



Community members get involved in local environmental programs, such as Bushcare groups.



Public space managers develop sustainability targets and maintenance plans to protect green infrastructure and provide a healthy environment to flourish.



Strategic planners include green infrastructure targets in place-based planning strategies and rezonings.



Urban designers and landscape architects strengthen biodiversity corridors and urban forests through targeted tree planting appropriate to the location and climate.

Planning green and resilient public spaces

- Plan public spaces to be cool, green and resilient with sufficient tree canopy and green spaces, healthy waterways and native vegetation.
- Undertake a green infrastructure needs assessment for new public spaces to determine the baseline of green infrastructure in a space and opportunities for enhancement.
- Incorporate green and resilient public spaces in resilience planning for cities and towns in urban, regional and rural areas.
- Integrate green infrastructure into public spaces – particularly in urban forest and open space strategies – to provide relief from urban heat, improve air quality, provide natural shade and enhance resilience to climate change.
- Ask the local community how new and upgraded public spaces could provide support during crises, for example, as places of refuge and aid during flooding and bushfires.
- Identify opportunities for sustainable water and energy features, such as landscaped areas that can safely and efficiently store stormwater run-off or passive cooling systems.

Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

The draft Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (2021) aims to help meet the future needs of the area's growing community while protecting threatened plants and animals. It sets out processes to establish and manage new conservation lands, through:

- new or expanded reserves
- biodiversity stewardship agreements (BSAs) on private or public land
- ecological restoration to rehabilitate degraded or cleared land on reserves and BSAs.

Balo Street, Moree

Moree Plains Shire Council describes Balo Street, Moree's main street, as 'dry and sunburnt'.

Through the NSW Government's Your High Street program, Council is cooling Balo Street by planting more trees and adding shade structures, misters, traffic-calming devices and lighting.

Council aims to create a 'sustainable, artesian oasis' where people can socialise, and businesses can operate in a more pleasant environment during hotter months.



Cultural burn
Photographer: Alison Page and Nikolas Lachajczak

Designing green and resilient public spaces

- Integrate green infrastructure with urban development and grey infrastructure through tree planting, green roofs and walls, and green ground cover.
- Prioritise the use of vegetation that is native to the local area. Exotic species may be used where native vegetation cannot achieve desirable outcomes such as maximising sun in winter or natural shade in summer.
- Create an interconnected network of open space, urban tree canopy and green infrastructure across NSW and contribute to green grids.
- Retain and protect the existing urban tree canopy and ensure there is no net loss of canopy across a site.
- Aim to increase urban tree canopy cover by prioritising deep soil and planting canopy trees.
- Implement site-specific targets and metrics early in the planning and design process to encourage green infrastructure.
- Contribute to relevant urban canopy and greening targets.
- Develop water-sensitive urban design strategies to:
 - reduce pollutant loads
 - provide alternative water sources such as treated wastewater
 - alleviate flood risk
 - preserve, restore and create marine habitat
 - connect residents and visitors to waterways and the local water cycle
 - retain water in the landscape to provide resilience against urban heat.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for guidance on how to design green and resilient public spaces.



Managing and activating green and resilient public spaces

- Incorporate technologies and innovations in public space that contribute to net zero emissions.
- Engage expertise on planting an urban tree canopy that thrives year round.
- Adopt new approaches to water use and re-use, waste and recycling and the circular economy to reduce emissions from buildings and facilities in public space.
- Engage with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders on how place management, iteratively developed over generations, can guide resilience in public spaces (for example, cultural fire management).
- Implement plans to regularly maintain trees and vegetation to promote optimum survival, healthy growth and resilience to extreme weather.

The Ponds, Blacktown

The Ponds is a sustainable development by Landcom and Australand that includes 3,200 residential lots and more than 88 ha of parkland along Second Ponds Creek in Sydney's north-west.

A clear design principle was 'engaging with water' and collaboration between the principal engineer and the landscape architect saw a focus on both engineering performance and aesthetics, functionality of the parklands, economic outcomes and social benefits.

Examples of success

- Enabling connection with Country by responding to Aboriginal cultural practices that guide the conservation of ecological systems and urban waterways.
- Prioritising green infrastructure in the planning for public spaces and the resilience of local communities.
- Costing green infrastructure benefits early in the planning and investment of public spaces.
- Naturalising watercourses at the heart of public spaces.
- Considering opportunities to 'green' grey infrastructure.
- Designing and planting landscaping that is low in water use and locally sourced.
- Meeting green infrastructure targets for public spaces, resulting in cooler and more comfortable spaces.



Healthy and active

Public space allows everyone to participate in activities that strengthen our health and wellbeing.



Key points

- Public spaces provide play and active recreation opportunities, green and natural environments, access to local healthy foods and safe routes to walk and cycle.
- Quality public spaces that are well-designed and connected, safe, accessible and inclusive will support and encourage walking, cycling and physical activity.
- Great public space networks balance comfortable, tranquil spaces to relax with space for higher-intensity sport and recreation activities.

Examples of the principle in action



Strategic planners plan for an equitable distribution of multipurpose sports and active recreation infrastructure.



Public policy makers retain robust data to inform and regularly update sport and active recreation infrastructure strategies.



Developers incorporate walking and cycling infrastructure and facilities into developments.



The Rocks, Sydney
Courtesy of Placemaking NSW

Planning healthy and active public spaces

- Create networks of parks, sports fields, gardens and reserves connected to walking and cycling routes and green corridors that bring people together to exercise, socialise and relax.
- Analyse opportunities for sport and active recreation facilities to provide social and health benefits, economic benefits from major events, and jobs and investment associated with sport and recreation.
- Consider the existing and projected population density and distribution, as well as the demographic of the community, in recreation infrastructure planning.
- Provide well distributed recreation infrastructure so the entire community can easily engage in exercise and play.
- Locate recreation facilities near community facilities to create destinations where people can exercise and access other services.

Greening our City – Rosemeadow demonstration project

In Western Sydney, temperatures can be up to 10°C higher than in the eastern suburbs. To help address the impacts of extreme heat, the Greening our City program aims to expand urban tree canopy to 40% across Greater Sydney with a target to plant 1 million new trees by 2022, and 5 million trees by 2030.

Rosemeadow in south west Sydney has a tree canopy cover of just 5.63% and is the program's first demonstration project. The project explored ways to achieve the 40% canopy target through tree planting on public land including streets and open spaces that have a dual purpose as stormwater overland flow infrastructure. The project has planted 1,950 trees in schools, open spaces and along Copperfield Drive.



Rosemeadow demonstration project
Courtesy of DPE

Designing healthy and active public spaces

- Create green grids that connect town centres, public transport hubs and major residential areas to create a healthier environment, better walking and cycling access to recreational public space and opportunities for active and passive recreation.
- Design public spaces for multiple uses, such as a basketball court that can provide space for local markets once a week.
- Design for adaptable spaces that can support evolving sport formats.
- Use universal design so that everyone in the community is able to access sports and recreation settings, regardless of their ability, age or cultural background.
- Design public spaces that support the health of local ecological systems.
- Provide culturally sensitive and multi-purpose recreation infrastructure.
- Integrate tree canopy in design to support cooler environments that foster active use and reduce the risks of diseases such as skin cancer.

Managing and activating healthy and active public spaces

- Provide and maintain footpaths, restrooms and picnic areas to encourage more people to visit and use public spaces.
- If appropriate, develop shared or joint-use mechanisms to better use public spaces.
- Review strategic management plans to identify opportunities to enhance public spaces with green infrastructure and build long-term resilience.
- Design buildings and surrounding public spaces to integrate green infrastructure such as tree planting, green walls and roofs.
- Use smart technology to provide accessible and cost effective solutions for managing site access and bookings for recreation facilities.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for:

- **advice on setting recreation benchmarks and responding to different urban contexts.**
- **guidance on supporting the health and wellbeing of Country in the design of projects.**



Examples of success

- Supporting a variety of active and passive recreation through the configuration, size, dimensions and topography of public space.
- Clearly defining zones for different activities.
- Informing recreation planning through needs-based assessment.
- Engaging with local and regional sporting clubs during the planning process.
- Including practice courts, fields and facilities in planning.
- Providing facilities that can activate and support local community initiatives.



Local business & economies

Public space supports a dynamic economic life and vibrant urban and town centres.



Key points

- Public space networks support lively high streets, outdoor dining and cafés, and popular tourist destinations.
- Great public spaces are designed using layers of activities to attract different people and help form connections to places.
- Privately-owned commercial spaces like building edges and podiums can complement and activate public spaces and create economic activity.
- Activating streets with creative placemaking day and night creates more vibrant and dynamic retail and hospitality precincts and attracts higher foot traffic.

The principle in action



Public space managers, local businesses and **chambers of commerce** partner on programs that activate high streets day and night.



Public policy makers assess which complementary local business, like markets, are appropriate to activate public space.



Developers design ground-floor facades that connect, activate and complement surrounding public spaces.



Planning public spaces for local business & economies

- Incorporate broader economic planning into public space planning by considering day and night activity; the right services, facilities and spaces; how public spaces can support business growth; and a suitable mix of community services.
- Consider place-appropriate activation opportunities for outdoor dining areas, public plazas, market spaces and boulevards.
- Plan for well designed, safe and accessible public space to improve liveability and amenity of places and support, vibrant local cultural sectors that attract and retain surrounding local business, workers and investment.
- Develop policy that supports the use of public space from morning to evening and on weekends through free and accessible activities for the community.
- Provide easy access for people to move through and within the space from surrounding commercial areas.
- Assess appropriate commercial opportunities for public spaces guided by relevant plans of management, local strategic planning statements, community strategic plans, etc.
- Conduct place-based assessments to gain a better understanding of how a specific public space might support local economies without compromising the free and accessible use of that public space.
- Not all commercial opportunities are appropriate in every public space context and applicable legislation. We recommend speaking to the relevant place manager and reviewing documentation such as plans of management, local strategic planning statements and community strategic plans to understand what would be appropriate in your public space. Also consider undertaking a place-based assessment to gain a better understanding of what would or would not work well in a specific place.



Designing public spaces for local business & economies

- Plan early for elements such as appropriately connected weather protection using the right selection and application of materials.
- Manage and design movement and place for people-centric high streets that will bring vitality to local neighbourhoods and support local jobs and services and provide walkable connections to a variety of shopping, dining, entertainment, health and personal services.
- Where appropriate, support outdoor dining through the provision of level, appropriately-scaled spaces. Ensure a balance with non-licensed areas so that public space feels public and is easy to navigate for all.
- Work with levels and topography to ensure clear access between businesses and public spaces. Avoid blockages of public space when introducing ramps, handrails and similar provisions.
- Design streets and squares that have good solar access, shade and lighting to support activation from adjacent businesses.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for ideas and examples of how to support great high streets, including temporary demonstration and pilot projects that test ideas for more permanent improvements.



Managing and activating public spaces for local business & economies

- Develop sustainable programming and activation that reflects and supports local community and businesses without impacting free and accessible enjoyment of the space.
- Activate public spaces at an appropriate scale to provide unique, place-based experiences that attract visitors.
- Consult with the community and visitors about the experiences they would like to see and incorporate these into event programming.
- Use events that reflect local character to encourage people to visit a new place and engender a sense of pride and belonging.
- Capture the economic and tourism impacts generated by events and activities in public space to inform capital and operational expenditure.

Examples of success

- Maximising street frontage to public open space so adjoining buildings positively interface with the space.
- Considering the location of public spaces early in the design process to maximise integration and shared use.
- Offering diverse and complementary commercial, retail, entertainment and community uses that attract people and enliven public spaces.



Safe & secure

Everyone feels safe to access and use public space at all times of the day.



Key points

- People feel safer in public spaces that are inclusive and well-used at all times of the day.
- Crime prevention strategies also support safer public spaces.
- Consulting on the experiences of women and other vulnerable groups can help to plan, design, manage and activate safer public spaces.

The principle in action



Public space managers work with diverse groups, including women, Aboriginal people, LGBTIQ+ people, culturally and linguistically diverse people and people with disability on public space safety audits.



Local businesses and chambers of commerce collaborate with councils and police to identify crime prevention through environmental design improvements for public spaces.



Industry bodies increase understanding and proficiency in crime prevention through environmental design.

Planning safe and secure public spaces

- Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces, particularly for women and children, older people and people with disability.
- Plan for inclusive spaces where a mix of people – both intergenerational and intercultural – feel safe and comfortable.
- Involve Aboriginal people at all stages of planning, development and management to help ensure culturally safe places.
- Plan for safe streets and spaces by considering how these places will remain clean, active, inviting, cared for and safe and welcoming for everyone.
- Identify barriers and opportunities that could influence perception of public safety such as poor lighting, limited shop fronts or residential outlooks.



Women's Safety Charter

The Women's Safety Charter – designed through a collaboration with 80 organisations across business, state agencies, peak groups and not-for-profits – promotes a safer city for women of all ages, abilities, identities, and social and cultural backgrounds. There are 3 foundational principles:

- Culture of Gender Equity – a culture where women are equal and well considered when designing places and services.
- Commitment to listen, share and reflect – communication, knowledge and evidence are key to influencing effective enduring change.
- Commitment to collective action and continuous improvement – active participation through collaboration, united action and reflective practice.

Phillip Lane, Parramatta

Phillip Lane in Parramatta is essentially a service lane. A \$100,000 Streets as Shared Spaces grant allowed City of Parramatta to test and pilot Phillip Lane as a space for people to enjoy art, lighting, greenery and new pop-up activities. The pilot project allowed events and outdoor dining to support local business during the dual impacts of COVID-19 and major construction in the area. Council is now using the project to incentivise cooperation amongst local business to create a public space people cherish and were successful in securing a further \$1M under the Your High Street program for permanent public space improvements to Phillip Street and a continuation of the successful Streets as Shared Spaces trial in Phillip Lane.

Designing safe and secure public space

- Ensure you have activated ground-floor uses adjacent to public space.
- Ensure good sight lines and passive observation to and through public space. This includes ensuring that planting and other elements do not obstruct views.
- Design lighting to be both welcoming and safe.
- Implement Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles – such as lighting, clear sight lines, active spaces or physical barriers – to reduce opportunities for crime.

Designing for safety

The Safer by Design program – a cooperative initiative involving the NSW Police, councils, state agencies and the private sector – ensures development applications are routinely assessed for crime risk, to reduce preventable risk before development is approved.

CLICK

Refer to the resources section for guidance on how lighting, street frontage ratios, delineation and buffers between conflicting uses can increase safety in public spaces.

CLICK

Refer to the resources section for guidance on designing safe public spaces for everyone, particularly women and girls and gender diverse people.

Managing and activating safe and secure public spaces

- Support activities and different uses occurring across the day or night to help people feel safe and secure in public spaces.
- Undertake regular safety audits, including after upgrades, to understand:
 - public perceptions of safety
 - how people feel about the public space
 - if any external elements are heightening actual or perceived risks
 - strategies that could address concerns.
- Undertake regular and robust facilities maintenance to ensure safety elements remain in working order and to remove any risks in facilities like play areas, public toilets or BBQs.
- Monitor the interaction between pedestrians, cyclists, cars and other mobility vehicles and implement safety elements as required.

Free to Be, Mapping Women's Safety in Cities

In 2016, the Monash University YXX Lab collaborated with Plan International Australia on a safety program, Free to Be, to identify and illuminate why women and young girls often feel unsafe in Australian urban spaces.

Users could drop pins on the interactive, geo-locative map of Melbourne and suburbs and comment on how safe and welcome spaces in the city made them feel.

Since launching Free to Be in Melbourne, the project has been implemented in five cities around the world – Sydney, Lima, Kampala, Delhi and Madrid.

Plan International Australia has used data from Free to Be to campaign for policy and practice change and challenging attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls, to make cities safer for everyone.

Examples of success

- Designing precinct structure and street layouts to provide attractive and safe walking and cycle links.
- Using the layout of streets and public space layouts to provide visual links between public spaces to encourage passive surveillance.
- Incorporating community feedback on how to improve feelings of safety in public spaces.
- Providing and maintaining CPTED principles.

George Street, Sydney
Credit: Department of Planning and Environment





Designed for place

Public space is flexible and responds to its environment to meet the needs of its community.



Key points

- Public spaces are unique with their own context, community and environment.
- Great public spaces respond to place and are multi-purpose and flexible to support a range of uses, activities and experiences.
- Co-locating public space with uses like education, health, cultural facilities can create a sense of place and community.
- Planning, designing and activating ground planes of buildings to connect with public spaces encourages vibrant public life and makes it easier and safer for people to move around.
- Aboriginal Knowledge Holders can bring their knowledge of Country to the design of public space.

Examples of the principle in action



Public space managers and public policy makers develop Caring for Country strategies that engage with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders.



Urban designers, architects and landscape architects use design excellence and the principles of the NSW Government Architect's Better Placed document to understand and implement place-based approaches to public space design.



Developers incorporate smart place principles and infrastructure.

Planning for place in public spaces

- Undertake public space and green infrastructure needs assessment at precinct scale to understand the context and needs of the place and the people who live there or visit it.
- Consider the facilities that will be needed to support interaction between people and with nature and place – for example, public toilets, shelter, and laneways.
- Consider how major facilities such as cultural, transport, community or health facilities can benefit both primary and secondary users of that place and deliver and integrate more public spaces.
- Use a smart places approach to planning public spaces to make them more accessible, inclusive, safe and sustainable.
- Use smart places solutions to capture and make data appropriately available to inform planning processes and decisions.

Wilcannia Health Service

The development of the Wilcannia Health Service did more than create a much-needed health asset – it was designed in a way that created a public space in partnership with the Barkindji Traditional Custodians to address and connect with the river – the Barka – acknowledging the river’s spiritual and cultural significance for the community.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for guidance on determining appropriate public space size and scale based on the need that the place is addressing.

Designing for place in public spaces

- Integrate a holistic understanding of the context, physical attributes, environment and people within a location into design processes.
- Use a place-based design approach, considering what makes a place unique, and how it changes over time.
- Use a universal design approach that is inclusive of all abilities, ages and cultural backgrounds.
- Accommodate the different ways people travel, such as through major transport infrastructure, down main streets or through a university or school.
- Provide attractive, functional and safe interfaces between people, traffic, buildings and landscaped areas.
- Create smart places that protect and enhance people’s experience of a place and its functional efficiency.
- Use place-based smart infrastructure that integrates with and complements the surrounding environment, protects the beauty of a space and reflects a place’s local character and function.
- Consult with local Aboriginal Knowledge Holders on how to appropriately incorporate Aboriginal stories in place design, virtual experiences or artwork to share awareness of the cultural significance and history of a place.
- Work with local people to identify smart solutions to help the place achieve its ambitions, realise opportunities and overcome challenges.
- Integrate native green infrastructure by choosing place-appropriate vegetation species that align with the historical landscape, environmental conditions and future needs of the location.
- Test and trial solutions to find approaches that can be scaled across other places with similar needs.

City Square, Coffs Harbour

Coffs Harbour’s City Square has transformed into a day and night hub to help stimulate economic growth and meet evolving local social and cultural demands.

Coffs Harbour City Council repaved the square, installed event facilities and contemporary lighting and adapted the space to be safe and attractive for markets, night-time dining and entertainment. Council also invested in traffic safety improvements and enhanced security measures.

CLICK 

Refer to the resources section for a link to the NSW Smart Public Spaces Guide and information on smart infrastructure.

Managing and activating for place in public spaces

- Seek advice and involve the community in management and activation of public spaces.
- Investigate how new technologies, including 5G access or evolving mobility options can diversify the way public spaces can be used and the activities they can support.
- Consider how technology can support the easy use of public spaces, such as booking spaces for recreation or viewing opening hours for onsite facilities.

People's Loop, Parramatta Park

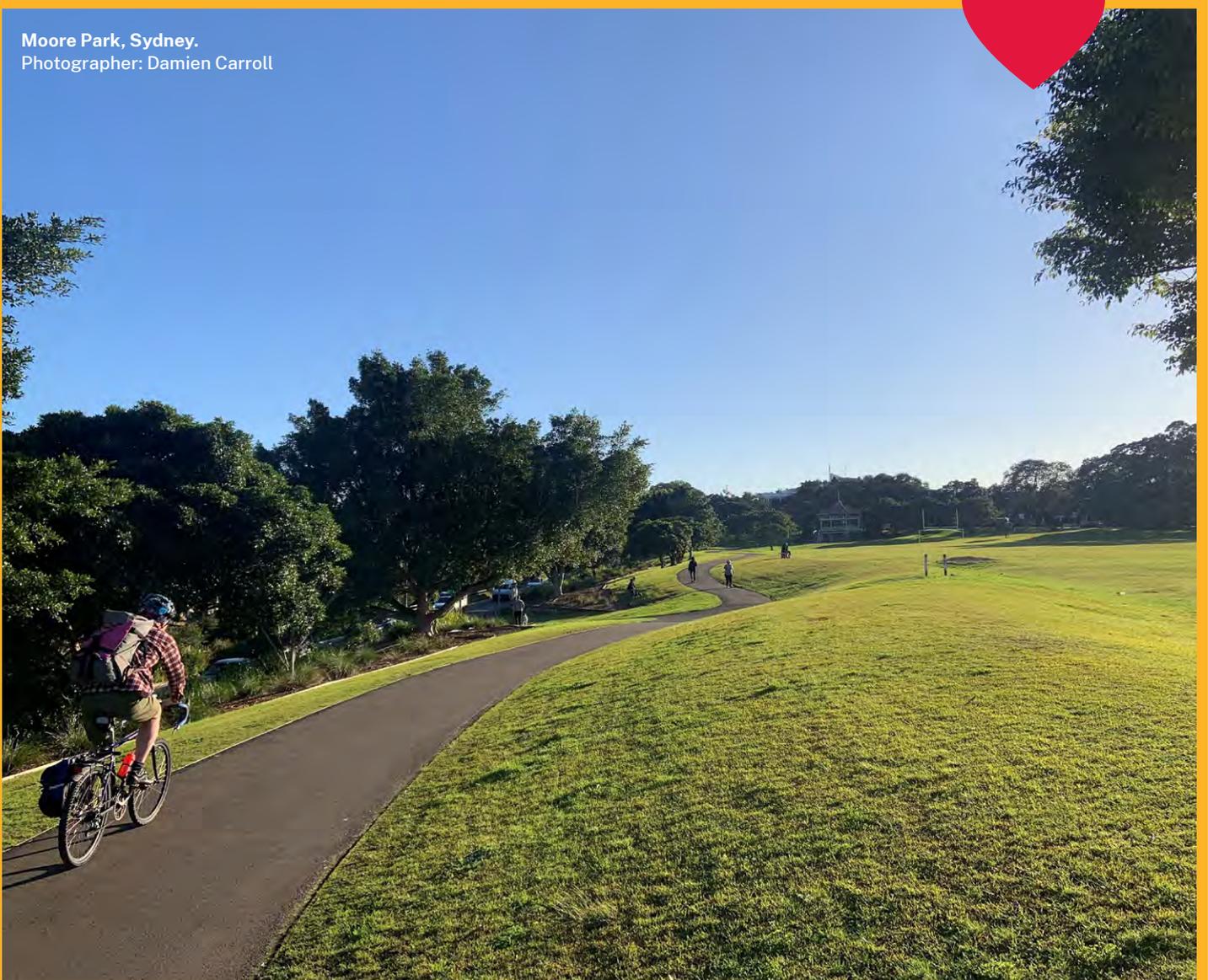
Walking and cycling has been transformed in Parramatta Park after cars were removed from most of the park's internal loop road. This built on temporary measures that were trialled as part of the People's Loop in mid-2020.

Innovative engagement techniques obtain real-time public feedback to understand how people expect to use the park and how to build on the community's sense of ownership.

Examples of success

- Using public space and green infrastructure needs assessments to inform land use planning.
- Designing facilities and infrastructure to provide and integrate with quality public spaces.
- Co-locating complementary facilities and uses.
- Optimising streets to balance the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, and provide an enjoyable, comfortable and accessible pedestrian experience.

Moore Park, Sydney.
Photographer: Damien Carroll





Well-managed



Well-managed and maintained public space functions better and invites people to use and care for it.

Key points

- Public space management and governance agreements define roles and responsibilities and support collaboration and sustainable funding models.
- Public space managers use smart infrastructure to reduce long-term operating and maintenance costs.
- Meaningful community engagement deepens attachment to place and can foster partnerships and stewardship models for managing public spaces.
- Public spaces are managed to support users and equitable enjoyment of the space.
- When responsibility for managing public spaces is shared with the community, people feel more willing to maintain, program, beautify and advocate for those spaces.

Examples of the principle in action



Community members get involved in public space care and management programs organised by council or local community groups.



Public space managers develop plans of management that reflect the community's vision for public spaces and how that will be achieved through management and activation.



Planners and designers include smart infrastructure in the design of public spaces to make management more efficient and cost effective.



Developers prioritise investment in high quality public space to minimise operational costs.

Planning for well-managed public spaces

- Consider how public spaces might be used, adapted or changed in the future, whether it is a temporary space or an ongoing development.
- Use the 10 charter principles to shape decisions about how the site or asset will be managed.
- Incorporate Aboriginal land management or caring for Country principles early by engaging with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, who can contribute to sustainable management.
- Consider the resources required for long-term maintenance early in the planning process.
- Build the 10 charter principles into grant programs – for example, make alignment with the charter a condition in funding agreements.

Western Sydney Parklands

Western Sydney Parklands was conceived in 1968 – by 2008, the Western Sydney Parklands Trust was established to own, protect and activate the lands.

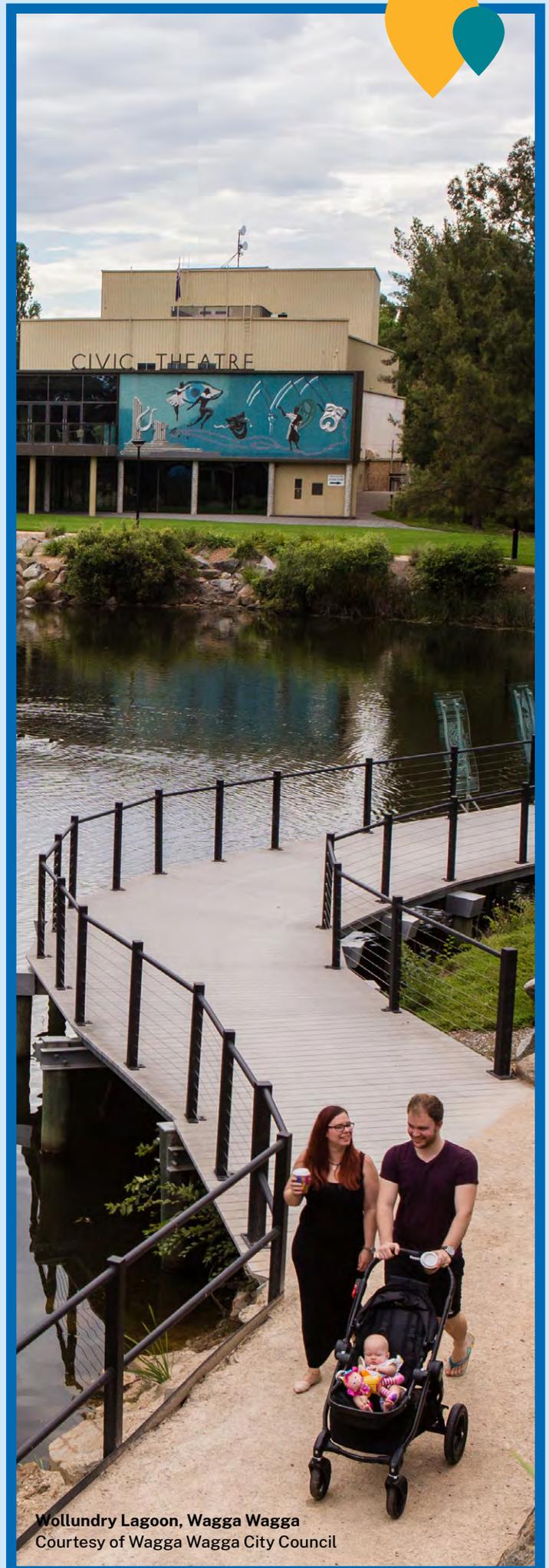
The parklands are part of the Country of the inland Darug or Dharug people, and sit within the boundaries of the Deerubbin and Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

A Plan of Management to 2030 for the parklands identifies 4 strategic directions:

- environmental protection and land stewardship
- creating recreational and community facilities
- community participation and engagement
- financial sustainability and economic development.

Designing for well-managed public spaces

- Design for durability and long term ease of maintenance, considering materials, furniture, fittings, fixtures and finishes.
- Work with council-approved materials and systems wherever possible to reduce and simplify maintenance.
- Engage with place managers during the design process to identify required infrastructure that can reduce future maintenance costs.
- Choose native green infrastructure that is suited to the location and environment to reduce maintenance needs such as watering and weeding.
- Incorporate innovations such as unobtrusive waste management networks; areas for stormwater run-off; smart technology to monitor how public space is used and accessed; or digital information for visitors and park users.



Wollundry Lagoon, Wagga Wagga
Courtesy of Wagga Wagga City Council

Managing and activating well-managed public spaces

- Incorporate a clear sense and vision for place into programs, plans of management and governance structures.
- Regularly consult with expert public space managers to ensure best practice management.
- Use governance systems that encourage ongoing community involvement and collaboration to build a sense of place and successful activation.
- Incorporate meaningful collaboration with government, community and business stakeholders to achieve a mutually shared vision and outcomes.
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with the community to provide community-led activations.
- Consider what governance models best suit the public space or precinct, for example:
 - government-owned and managed (often with community input through advisory committees or regular consultation).
 - trusts (for example, Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust).
 - private sector.
 - public-private partnerships and joint ventures.
 - chambers of commerce and precinct partnerships, alliances or groups.
 - non-government organisations, not-for-profits and community and volunteer groups.
 - business improvement districts.
- Inform and engage the community through regular newsletters or social media.
- Obtain ideas from a cross-section of the community including young people or vulnerable users.
- Partner with community support groups via varied engagement methods to access different points of view.
- To understand how people are using public spaces, invite people from communities with particular needs to visit and interact with the public space, and report back on their experience.
- Adopt plans of management that set out how community land will be managed and activated and how social, environmental and economic values will be protected.
- Develop green infrastructure maintenance plans to ensure trees, vegetation and waterways are appropriately cared for.
- Develop Caring for Country strategies that complement plans of management.
- Adopt plans to manage public space in line with circular economy principles.

Worimi Conservation Lands Board of Management

The Worimi Conservation Lands Board of Management [10-year plan](#) aims to improve awareness, understanding and protection of Worimi culture and sites, and guide conservation and sustainable recreation and tourism.

It focuses on the specific landscape attributes of the area, including dunes and beach vegetation and allowing for activities such as 4WD-driving and horse riding, sustainable camping, and beachfront access.

Caring for Country – Western Sydney Parklands

The Southern Parklands in Western Sydney Parklands is on Gandangara and Darug, or Dharug, Country. The Western Sydney Parklands Trust has worked with the Traditional Custodians, Local Aboriginal Land Council and other Aboriginal groups in this area since the development of the Southern Parklands Framework in 2018.

Ultimately, the Trust is working to elevate Aboriginal culture and custodianship so that the Aboriginal community is a co-leader, rather than a stakeholder, in Trust projects. Projects include Aboriginal-developed and led programs and employment such as ranger programs, seed collection and storytelling.

Examples of success

- Planning for public spaces to be sustainably funded, governed and maintained across the short, medium and long term.
- Introducing local planning instruments or plans of management to encourage integration between public spaces, community facilities and management infrastructure, as well as shared use.
- Considering the location of public spaces early in the planning process to maximise opportunities for integration and shared use.

Examples of success

During the planning stages, practitioners can use the following examples of success to understand whether a proposal addresses the charter's principles.

	Principle 1 – Open and welcoming	Principle 2 – Community focused	Principle 3 – Culture and creativity	Principle 4 – Local character and identity	Principle 5 – Green and resilient	Principle 6 – Healthy and active	Principle 7 – Local business and economies	Principle 8 – Safe and secure	Principle 9 – Designed for place	Principle 10 – Well-managed
Engaging with Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and communities to identify cultural or heritage sites.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Appropriately managing Indigenous cultural intellectual property and acknowledging Aboriginal community input in projects.	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
Preparing engagement reports that demonstrate how input from a range of community groups, including people with disability, young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal communities, influenced the location, design, delivery, management, proposed uses and programming of public spaces.	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓
Developing strategies for ongoing engagement, governance and management.	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓
Demonstrating a commitment to design excellence through introduction of design quality assurance processes such as review by an independent design panel and the procurement of design teams recognised for high quality design outcomes.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Preparation of a clear project brief with community and key stakeholder input, including a vision and objectives as well as key functional requirements.	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	
Supporting people to have access to district public open space within 2km / 25 minutes' walk of their home.	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	
Supporting people to have access to local public open space within 200m / 2-3 minutes' walk of their home in high-density areas, and 400m / 5 minutes' walk from their home in medium- to low-density areas.	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	
Locating new public spaces to meet community need.	✓	✓							✓	
Ensuring plans and proposals do not include any net loss of public space.		✓				✓				
Providing a broad range of uses and experiences (ideally 10 or more for larger spaces).	✓	✓				✓			✓	
Supporting a hierarchy of neighbourhood, local and district-scale public spaces to work together to cater for a range of community and cultural needs.	✓	✓				✓			✓	
Including all cultures, lifestyles, backgrounds and abilities when planning the location, layout and size of public spaces.	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	

	Principle 1 – Open and welcoming	Principle 2 – Community focused	Principle 3 – Culture and creativity	Principle 4 – Local character and identity	Principle 5 – Green and resilient	Principle 6 – Healthy and active	Principle 7 – Local business and economies	Principle 8 – Safe and secure	Principle 9 – Designed for place	Principle 10 – Well-managed
Activating public spaces for a variety of passive/active and formal/ informal uses.	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clearly defining zones for activities to minimise conflict.		✓						✓	✓	✓
Investigating co-location and shared space arrangements early in infrastructure planning.		✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
Designing green infrastructure to consider the different uses of public spaces, while providing a baseline of comfort and amenity to all users.		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Introducing public art, cultural and creative programs that reflect the identity and creativity of the community.	✓		✓	✓					✓	✓
Conserving, highlighting and celebrating significant Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural and environmental features – tangible and intangible – in public spaces.			✓	✓					✓	
Incorporating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural infrastructure planning and delivery into land use and infrastructure planning.		✓	✓	✓						
Creating beautiful and memorable public spaces that fulfil functional requirements, encourage social interaction and exhibit a strong local character and sense of safety.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Including uses in community facilities and public buildings that are lacking in the locality and reflect the aspirations and needs of the community, identified through consultation.		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Embodying visual quality, local character and sense of place in community facilities and public buildings.				✓					✓	
Using lighting, furnishing and design that is sensitive to the character of the neighbourhood.				✓					✓	
Designing public spaces that reflect the historical natural landscape and environment of the area.				✓	✓				✓	
Enabling connection with Country by responding to Aboriginal cultural practices that guide the conservation of ecological systems and urban waterways.			✓		✓				✓	✓
Prioritising green infrastructure in the planning for public spaces and the resilience of local communities.		✓			✓	✓			✓	
Costing green infrastructure benefits early in the planning and investment of public spaces.					✓					✓
Naturalising watercourses at the heart of public spaces.					✓	✓		✓		
Considering opportunities to 'green' grey infrastructure.	✓				✓					
Designing and planting landscaping that is low in water use and locally sourced.					✓	✓			✓	✓
Meeting green infrastructure targets for public spaces, resulting in cooler and more comfortable spaces.	✓				✓	✓			✓	

	Principle 1 – Open and welcoming	Principle 2 – Community focused	Principle 3 – Culture and creativity	Principle 4 – Local character and identity	Principle 5 – Green and resilient	Principle 6 – Healthy and active	Principle 7 – Local business and economies	Principle 8 – Safe and secure	Principle 9 – Designed for place	Principle 10 – Well-managed
Supporting a variety of active and passive recreation through the configuration, size, dimensions and topography of public space.		✓				✓			✓	
Informing recreation planning through needs-based assessment.		✓				✓				
Engaging with local and regional sporting clubs during the planning process.						✓				
Including practice courts, fields and facilities in planning.						✓				
Providing facilities that can activate and support local community initiatives.		✓				✓				
Maximising street frontage to public open space so adjoining buildings positively interface with the space.	✓						✓		✓	
Considering the location of public spaces early in the design process to maximise integration and shared use.							✓		✓	✓
Offering diverse and complementary commercial, retail, entertainment and community uses that attract people and enliven public spaces.	✓						✓			
Designing precinct structure and street layouts to provide attractive and safe walking and cycle links.	✓	✓				✓		✓		
Using the layout of streets and public space layouts to provide visual links between public spaces to encourage passive surveillance.	✓							✓	✓	
Incorporating community feedback on how to improve feelings of safety in public spaces.		✓						✓		
Providing and maintaining CPTED principles.	✓							✓		✓
Using public space and green infrastructure needs assessments to inform land use planning.								✓		
Designing facilities and infrastructure to provide and integrate with quality public spaces.								✓		
Co-locating complementary facilities and uses.								✓		
Optimising streets to balance the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, and provide an enjoyable, comfortable and accessible pedestrian experience.							✓	✓		
Planning for public spaces to be sustainably funded, governed and maintained across the short, medium and long term.										✓
Introducing local planning instruments or plans of management to encourage integration between public spaces, community facilities and management infrastructure, as well as shared use.										✓

Monitoring and evaluation



Many mechanisms can help practitioners to understand whether they have achieved the charter's principles. Every project is different; rather than establishing set parameters to measure success, we suggest several processes that should be considered from the outset to help define success and monitor outcomes.

Monitoring

A range of mechanisms and methods will help you to achieve and monitor the charter's implementation. Examples include:

- allocation of responsibility for implementation of the charter to specific staff or business units
- active participation in the charter's community of signatories, through events or programs
- development of a simple and achievable NSW Public Spaces Charter Implementation Action Plan that identifies:
 - the current approach to public space within the organisation
 - the outcomes being sought by becoming a signatory to the charter
 - specific actions to achieve those outcomes
 - a methodology for integrating the charter principles into new and existing projects, programs or policies
 - a communications strategy or plan
 - key stakeholders that will be engaged throughout implementation
 - data sources and potential case studies that can demonstrate how the charter has been applied in context and that can be shared with the department or other signatories
- an evaluation methodology that considers how best to measure progress towards the outcomes identified in the Implementation Action Plan.

Evaluation

When developing your NSW Public Spaces Charter Implementation Action Plan, consider a 6-monthly evaluation process and identify specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) outcomes, as well as case studies that demonstrate how the charter's principles are embedded into the organisation.

In particular, evaluate how the charter's principles are incorporated into the organisation's:

- strategies
- policies
- projects
- programs
- funding agreements
- key performance indicators.

Resources

These resources can assist in implementing the principles of the charter to create great public spaces. As a first stop we recommend visiting the [NSW Public Spaces Charter](#) and the [Great Public Spaces Toolkit](#), which directly supports the charter. It includes examples and case studies of best-practice management and activation strategies for public spaces.

These documents were current at the time of publication.

Department of Planning and Environment

[Great Public Spaces Toolkit](#):

- [Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life](#): includes questions to analyse the quality of public spaces to better understand the strengths of public spaces and areas for improvement.
- [Great Public Spaces Guide](#): provides ideas and opportunities for great public facilities.
- [NSW Guide to Walkable Public Space](#): identifies 10 characteristics of walkable open spaces, streets and public facilities.
- [COVID Safe Public Space Guide: Case Studies](#): includes a selection of case studies from councils and place managers that demonstrate innovative COVID safe measures.
- [Places to Love Case Study: City of Sydney George Street Demonstration Project](#): presents a case study on Council's trial to help transform a street into one of the world's great boulevards.

[NSW Guide to Activation and the NSW Guide to Preparing an Activation Framework](#): provides information and tools to bring activity to public spaces, including how to coordinate delivery, management and evaluation.

[Local Character and Place Guideline](#): provides tools to help define existing character and set a desired future character that aligns with the strategic direction for an area.

[Smart Places Strategy](#): shapes future smart initiatives developed by the NSW Government and its partners.

[Tools to deliver smart places](#): guides the work of NSW Government agencies, councils, place and precinct owners and developers.

[Streets as Shared Spaces](#): includes webinars and case studies of projects to support the community and test ideas for more permanent improvements to local streets, paths and public spaces.

[Your High Street](#): provides case studies and webinars to support activated, vibrant high streets.

[50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands](#): imagines greener streets, higher quality parklands and more green connections that support healthy people and communities.

[Greener Neighbourhoods Guide](#): guides strategic planning for urban forests.

[Urban Tree Canopy Targets and Development Controls Report](#): details voluntary best practice targets and planning controls to enhance tree canopy.

[NSW Public Open Space Strategy](#) (in development): will create a 50-year vision for open space for all of NSW, that builds on the 50-year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands.

[NSW dual-naming policy](#): aims to give prominence to Aboriginal place names alongside European counterparts.

[NSW Smart Public Spaces Guide](#): introduces the role of technology in delivering better public space outcomes for communities.

Government Architect NSW

[Connecting with Country draft framework](#): calls for a commitment to value, respect and to be guided by Aboriginal people, who know that if we care for Country – it will care for us.

[Greener Places](#): aims for a healthier and sustainable urban environment.

[Better Placed](#): establishes objectives for inclusive, welcoming and equitable environments.

[Practitioner's Guide to Movement and Place](#): explains how practitioners involved in the planning, design, delivery and operation of transport networks and the spaces around them can apply the movement and place framework to projects and plans.

[Urban Design for Regional NSW](#): details steps for creating healthy places in regional NSW and the research, partnerships and thinking required to represent local character when designing public spaces.

[Sydney Green Grid](#): identifies a network of high quality green space that connects town centres, public transport hubs and major residential areas, and promotes sustainable development while maximising quality of life and wellbeing.

Transport for NSW

[Movement and Place Framework](#): guides the design of streets, roads and transport infrastructure to balance the movement of people and goods with quality places (developed with Government Architect NSW).

[Network Planning in Precincts Guide](#) – outlines the strategic design and planning of transport networks to support 15-minute neighbourhoods and 30-minute cities.

[Walking Space Guide: Towards Pedestrian Comfort and Safety](#) – provides a set of standards and tools to assist those responsible for walking spaces on streets to ensure there is enough space to achieve comfortable, inviting walking environments.

[Safe Systems Assessment Framework for Movement and Place](#) – provides guidance on best-practice for design and treatment application as well as case studies and design layouts.

[Beyond the Pavement](#) – provides urban design approach and procedures for road and maritime infrastructure planning, design and construction.

[Cycleway Design Toolbox](#) – provides guidance on desired outcomes for cycling and other forms of micro mobility.

Other agencies

[Open Space Design Guidelines](#): suggests innovative approaches to managing open space. (Landcom)

Public Art Toolkit (in development): aims to help NSW Government agencies apply best practice-principles to planning, commissioning, implementing and maintaining public art. (Create NSW)

[Aboriginal Arts and Culture Protocols](#): guide processes to work with Aboriginal artists. (Create NSW)

[Cultural Fire Management Policy](#): supports Aboriginal communities' aspirations to connect to and care for Country through cultural fire management on parks. (National Parks and Wildlife Service)

[Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+](#): establishes goals for the state's cultural infrastructure, including the need to integrate cultural infrastructure planning with land use and precinct planning. (Create NSW)

[Create NSW research and statistics](#): provides resources relating to arts and cultural planning. (Create NSW)

[Create NSW Public Art Toolkit](#) (forthcoming) provides resources relating to public art. (Create NSW)

[NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025](#): strengthens the state's accessibility framework and outlines work to improve outcomes for people with disability. (NSW Communities & Justice)

[Greater Sydney Region Plan](#): integrates land use, transport and infrastructure planning between the three tiers of government and across state agencies. (Greater Cities Commission)

[Regional Plans](#): The regional plans set a 20-year framework, vision and direction for strategic planning and land use to ensure regions have the housing, jobs, infrastructure, a healthy environment, access to green spaces and connected communities to continue to be vibrant places for people to live, work and visit.

[Women's Safety Charter](#): promotes a safer city for women of all ages, abilities, identities, and social and cultural backgrounds.

[Community use school facilities implementation procedures](#): provides advice on how schools can provide assets that can be used outside of school hours. (Department of Education)

[NSW Innovation Precincts: Lessons from International Experience](#): explores the factors that contribute to successful, globally significant innovation precincts as well as common risks and failures, with the objective of supporting successful precinct development in NSW. (NSW Treasury)

[People Places: A guide for planning public library buildings](#): guides the planning and design of a public library building. (State Library of NSW)

[Safer by Design](#): provides guidance on how to design safer places. (NSW Police)

[NSW Office of Sport tools and resources](#): provides resources to plan for sports facilities and programs. (NSW Office of Sport)

[Smart Infrastructure Policy](#): minimum requirements for smart technology to be embedded in all new and upgraded infrastructure.

Outside NSW Government

[The National Arts and Disability Strategy](#): provides a framework for jurisdictions to assess and improve existing activities, consider new opportunities and directions, and identify new partnerships and initiatives. (Cultural Ministers Council)

[The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance](#): sets a standard of practice for those who provide advice, make decisions about, or undertake works to places of cultural significance, including owners, managers and custodians. (Australia National Committee of International Council on Monuments and Sites)

[Sustainable Development Goal 11](#): aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. (United Nations)

[Inclusive Health Places](#): introduces tools for evaluating and creating public places that support health equity. (Gehl Institute)

[Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Guidelines](#): applies to all new and upgraded public domain spaces and infrastructure, provided by the City of Sydney, or third parties such as contractors or developers as part of voluntary planning agreements. (City of Sydney)

[Design for Everyone: A Guide to Sport and Recreation Settings](#): assists with the planning, design and development of inclusive sport and recreation facilities. (Sport Victoria)

