

# NSW Public Spaces Charter

## Engagement Report



NSW Department of Planning,  
Industry and Environment

June 2021



# Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

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

Published by the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

[dpie.nsw.gov.au](http://dpie.nsw.gov.au)

## **NSW Public Spaces Charter Engagement Report**

Front cover image: Edward River, Deniliquin.  
Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Artwork (left) by Nikita Ridgeway.

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*Public Art Walk, Goulburn  
Courtesy of Goulburn Mulwaree Council*

# About this report

This report summarises the feedback the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment received in 2020 on the *draft NSW Public Spaces Charter*.

The report consists of:

- an outline of how we engaged with:
  - NSW Government agencies
  - local government
  - industry
  - business and community stakeholders
  - First Nations communities and experts for feedback on the draft charter
- a summary of the key themes that emerged from the engagement and how the department will respond to these
- next steps for the development of the charter.

*Unity Place, Burwood*  
*Courtesy of Burwood Council*



# The draft NSW Public Spaces Charter

The charter was developed to support the Premier's Priority for Greener Public Spaces, which aims to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023. The charter will ensure an ongoing commitment to quality public space in NSW.

The *draft NSW Public Spaces Charter* identifies 10 principles for quality public space, developed through evidence-based research and discussions with a diverse range of public space experts and users. We have closely aligned the charter with the principles of the United Nations Charter of Public Space. The principles will support all those who are involved in public spaces in NSW as advocates, advisors, decision-makers, planners, designers and managers, as well as those activating public spaces.

NSW Government agencies, local government, industry and other groups caring for and using public space across NSW will be encouraged to sign up to the charter and to apply the principles in their strategies and planning.

The department has developed this report to be read alongside the draft charter. It acknowledges the results and key themes from the engagement rather than revisiting the content of the draft charter. To download the draft charter, visit the department's website at [www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-space-charter](http://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-space-charter)



The NSW Public Spaces Charter principles are:

- 1 | Open and welcoming**  
*Public space belongs to everyone.*
- 2 | Community-focused**  
*Public spaces are where communities forge the ties that bind them.*
- 3 | Culture and creativity**  
*Public space is where we share our stories and values.*
- 4 | Local character and identity**  
*Public spaces make us proud of where we live.*
- 5 | Green and resilient**  
*Public space can help us adapt and thrive in a changing climate.*
- 6 | Healthy and active**  
*Public space supports healthy lifestyles and refreshes our spirits.*
- 7 | Local business and economies**  
*Public space supports more dynamic and exciting local economies.*
- 8 | Safe and secure**  
*Everyone should feel safe using public space at all times of the day.*
- 9 | Designed for people**  
*Public space that's flexible can meet the needs of our diverse population.*
- 10 | Well managed**  
*Public space is more inviting when it's well cared for.*



# Engagement approach

## Broad engagement

The department publicly exhibited the draft charter for six weeks between Tuesday 20 October and Tuesday 1 December 2020. The purpose of the engagement was to:

- inform the public about the definition of public space
- help embed public spaces as valued key infrastructure for communities by raising awareness of their importance
- build enthusiasm and support for the charter by raising awareness and a positive profile
- gather wide-spread feedback from the community and stakeholders on the draft principles
- identify what support NSW Government, agencies, councils and industry would need to become signatories to the charter.

During this time, we invited the community to provide feedback by:

- taking a short survey
- making a written submission
- sharing their public space ideas for the 10 principles on an ideas wall.

A community panel of 14 NSW residents was established to review and provide feedback on the draft charter. The panel's membership reflected the geographic, demographic and cultural diversity of NSW.

The department also facilitated six workshops with different stakeholder groups about how they might use the charter and what support they would need to do so. Workshops were held with representatives from:

- NSW Government agencies
- local government
- industry
- local business
- cultural planners and institutions
- regional arts development organisations

In addition, we held two public webinars to introduce the charter, promote discussion about the value and importance of public space and encourage people to provide feedback.

The department made translated copies of the charter available in Mandarin Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese. We also ran a targeted advertising campaign to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and encourage them to provide feedback.

## Aboriginal engagement

In parallel to the broad program of engagement, Aboriginal engagement specialists Cox Inall Ridgeway (CIR) planned and delivered a targeted consultation with Aboriginal communities and leaders on behalf of the department.

The consultation involved a mix of online and face-to-face Aboriginal-led discussions about the charter with First Nations Elders, Land Council representatives, local government representatives, Aboriginal community organisations and professionals from the public and private sector. A culturally specific survey was also prepared and distributed by CIR to allow the community to provide feedback.

*A boy at a community engagement event in Campbelltown  
Courtesy of Campbelltown Council*



# Engagement results



## Over the course of the engagement period



**25** completed the online survey.



**40** submissions were received from individuals and organisations



**79** public space practitioners, experts, managers and community members were engaged at the **7** charter workshops and follow-up discussions.



**30,981** reach/views were gained and **237** instances of engagement occurred from **22** organic social media posts on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter



**48** comments and **80** votes were provided on the digital ideas wall.



**60,000** reach/views gained on WeChat and **250** engagements.



**5,102** web hits on the digital hub.



**413** people attended the **2** webinars on public space.

## During the Aboriginal engagement program



**20** Aboriginal experts participated in **10** consultations, delivered across Greater Sydney, Newcastle and regional NSW.



**24** people completed the online survey (with **23** identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander).



**1** Aboriginal organisation made a written submission.

# Engagement themes



*Warami Mittigar - Aboriginal Cultural Walk, Parramatta  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*

Overall, the department received positive feedback on the draft charter and the principles-led approach to planning, designing, managing and activating quality public space. The feedback demonstrated a strong support for the 10 principles and many organisations expressed an interest in signing up to and using the charter when it's released.

The comments mostly sought more clarification about the principles and the process for becoming a signatory, as well as providing guidance that could strengthen the charter.

We will review all comments and suggestions as we develop the charter further and finalise it.

Key themes that emerged across the two streams of engagement have been summarised on the following pages along with information about how we will respond.



KEY  
THEME

#1

## Recognition of Country and Aboriginal culture

### What we heard

The charter needs to provide a stronger recognition of Country and of the significance of public spaces to Aboriginal people and communities.

The critical relationship between Aboriginal people and Country should not only be addressed in the charter's Acknowledgement of Country but embedded throughout the entire document.

### We will consider

- providing a stronger statement at the start of the charter about Country and acknowledging Aboriginal people's custodianship of, and unique relationship to, public space
- featuring Country and Aboriginal culture and knowledge more prominently throughout the charter
- explaining Country and Aboriginal culture's alignment with key departmental documents, including the Connecting with Country Draft Framework and the Our Place on Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy
- providing more guidance and examples to signatories about how they can embed connecting to Country and Aboriginal culture and knowledge when implementing the charter and its principles
- ensuring that our response to these issues is guided by Aboriginal experts and voices.





KEY  
THEME  
**#2**

## Relationship with other key policies and the planning system

### What we heard

The charter's relationship to other key policies and strategies of NSW Government – particularly those that deliver public space outcomes – needs to be made clearer.

Stakeholders also need more information to understand how the charter sits within the planning system and if this would create additional approvals and resourcing impacts.

### We will consider

- mapping and clarifying how the charter fits within the hierarchy of other departmental public space policies and programs, including:
  - Better Placed
  - Greener Places Design Guide
  - Parks for People
  - NSW Public Spaces Legacy Program
  - 50-Year Vision for Sydney's Open Space and Parklands.
- providing information about the charter's relationship to other key NSW Government policies such as Movement and Place and the Smart Places Strategy.
- explaining the charter's relationship to planning policies and legislation such as:
  - the forthcoming Design and Place State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP)
  - ministerial directions
  - local environmental plans (LEPs)
  - development control plans (DCPs).



KEY  
THEME  
**#3**

## Signing up to the charter

### What we heard

The department needs to clearly explain the process for signing up to charter, as well as the requirements for signatories and their obligations.

The charter could also tell a stronger story about the benefits of signing up to the charter. Signatories should be recognised and celebrated.

### We will consider

- providing more information and guidance about:
  - the process for an organisation to sign up to the charter and to demonstrate their status as a signatory
  - any ongoing requirements that a signatory would need to fulfil
  - the role that the department will play to support and promote signatories to the charter
- providing more information that demonstrates the connection between the charter and the economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits of quality public space
- investigating how we will evaluate the charter and what data could support this.



I think that when using green spaces, the 'how to get there' is important.



**Community panel member**



KEY  
THEME  
**#4**

## Support and guidance

### What we heard

Once they have signed up, stakeholders would require guidance and resources to help them implement the charter and build the principles into their work.

The department needs to provide more guidance in the charter about how it should be used and how the principles should be applied in a public space.

### We will consider

- developing a digital hub that will provide:
  - information about the charter and the 10 principles
  - case studies that demonstrate how the charter principles can be applied and which are relevant across different public space settings and to different stakeholder groups
  - links to guidance and resources that demonstrate best practice and help signatories use and implement the charter
- building a community of practice for the charter and delivering programs and activities that:
  - provide information about the charter and its principles
  - builds the capacity of signatories to use the charter
  - offers a platform for connecting signatories and encouraging information-sharing and collaboration.



KEY  
THEME  
**#5**

## Local government's role

### What we heard

The charter needs to more strongly reflect the role that local government plays in planning, designing, managing and activating public space and supporting their communities to be engaged in these processes.

### We will consider

- providing more information in the charter about the role local government plays in planning, designing, managing and activating public space, as well as providing examples and case studies that reflect this
- developing tools and guiding materials specifically to support local government to sign up and use the charter
- explaining the relationship of the charter to local government's strategic planning processes and frameworks, such as local strategic planning statements, Local Environmental Plans and Development Control Plans.



As a teenager I think it's important to have a safe space to go to and to stay while you are waiting for a lift.



**Community panel member**



KEY  
THEME  
**#6**

## Geographic scope and relevance

### What we heard

The charter needs to reflect the diverse public space settings and contexts of NSW. It should include more regional and rural examples and references as their public space context and priorities can be very different to those of urban and metropolitan areas.

The charter could be more relevant to stakeholders working in urban renewal and brownfield sites, by acknowledging the challenges and the opportunities in these locations.

### We will consider

- including more examples, case studies and guidance that:
  - relates to the regional and rural public space context
  - demonstrates how the charter principles can apply across a broad range of settings.



KEY  
THEME  
**#7**

## Community engagement and collaboration

### What we heard

Community engagement and community-led approaches to sharing responsibility for public space should be embedded across all the principles. This should be a priority for how the charter is implemented.

The department should give special consideration to ensuring that there is culturally appropriate and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal people all the stages of the public space life cycle - planning, design, management and activation.

### We will consider

- providing more information about the importance of community engagement and strengthening it as a priority across the document
- providing more guidance, tools and resources to:
  - demonstrate best-practice approaches to community engagement and community-led approaches
  - build the capacity of stakeholders to embed community engagement in how they plan, design, manage and activate public space
  - support and empower the community to use the charter as an advocacy tool
- providing more guidance, developed through consultation with Aboriginal experts, about how engagement with Aboriginal communities can be embedded across the charter.

“  
For me, my family and kids, public spaces allow us to get together and create a healthy lifestyle. Getting healthy and active is really important to us.”  
**Community panel member**



KEY  
THEME  
**#8**

## Equity and inclusion

### What we heard

The charter could make a stronger statement about equity and inclusion and acknowledge the importance of these concepts applying across all of the charter principles.

Aboriginal people told us that the charter should specifically acknowledge the barriers that young Aboriginal people and homeless Aboriginal people face. The document could include more images of Aboriginal people and culture.

### We will consider

- providing definitions of and more information about equity and inclusion
- reviewing how we can strengthen equity and inclusion as priorities across all the charter principles
- acknowledging the barriers that vulnerable groups experience in accessing public space, and the intersectional impact of these barriers
- acknowledging the link between equity and inclusion to the accessibility of spaces
- considering how the charter can align with other key guidance from the Australian Human Rights Commission and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, which promote equal rights, equal opportunity and equal access to public spaces
- considering how the design, layout and images can be more inclusive of Aboriginal people and culture.



KEY  
THEME  
**#9**

## Biodiversity and green infrastructure

### What we heard

The charter needs to acknowledge more strongly that public spaces don't only support human-focused activity – they play an important role in supporting healthy and sustainable environments.

The charter needs to acknowledge biodiversity and give it more priority throughout. It needs to give more information and guidance about the value and benefits of green infrastructure.

### We will consider

- giving biodiversity and ecological sustainability greater emphasis in the charter
- providing more information about the role that public space can play in supporting local habitats and ecosystems
- reviewing the charter to ensure that it aligns with the priorities and programs that support the Greening our City Premier's Priority
- providing more information about and strengthening the evidence base for the benefits and value of green infrastructure.



The green and resilient aspect is the first thing that comes to mind when public spaces are mentioned. There is evidence that being out in nature benefits our mental health.



**Community panel member**



## What happens next

The department's Place, Design and Public Spaces Group will consider all the issues and suggestions raised through the engagement process as it finalises the charter. We will undertake more engagement across the department and with other key stakeholders to explore the themes raised and how the charter can best respond to these. This will include deeper engagement with Aboriginal staff to ensure that we respond appropriately to the issues raised through the Aboriginal engagement process.

Stakeholder feedback will inform the finalisation of the charter, the guidance and tools that support it, and strategies for its implementation.

The charter is scheduled for release in late 2021. For more information and to sign up for updates please visit [www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-space-charter](http://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces/festival-of-place/public-space-charter).

*Chinatown Night Markets, Sydney  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*



# Organisations that provided feedback



Thank you to the following organisations that provided feedback on the draft NSW Public Spaces Charter. We also received responses from individuals (not listed here) – and we thank them, too. Additional Aboriginal organisations and community members were engaged during the public exhibition by Aboriginal engagement specialists, Cox Inall Ridgeway.

## Local Government

Blacktown City Council  
Burwood Council  
Campbelltown City Council  
City of Parramatta Council  
City of Sydney Council  
Lake Macquarie City Council  
Penrith City Council  
Randwick City Council  
Tweed Shire Council  
Woollahra Council

## NSW Government agencies

Create NSW  
Crown Lands  
Department of Premier and Cabinet  
Destination NSW  
Housing and Property  
Greater Sydney Commission  
Greater Sydney Parklands  
Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation  
Land and Housing Corporation  
Landcom  
NSW Health  
Office of the Government Architect NSW  
Office of Local Government  
Office of NSW Small Business  
Office of Sport

Place Management NSW  
Schools Infrastructure  
State Library of NSW  
Sports Infrastructure  
Sydney Olympic Park Authority  
Sydney Water  
Transport for NSW

## Arts and cultural organisations

Arts North West  
Arts Northern Rivers  
Arts OutWest  
Australian Library and Information Association  
Blacktown Arts Centre  
Campbelltown Arts Centre  
Eastern Riverina Arts  
Murray Arts  
Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (Powerhouse)  
Outback Arts  
NSW Public Libraries Association  
Penrith Performing Arts and Visual Arts  
Regional Arts NSW  
South West Arts  
Southern Tablelands Arts  
Sydney Fringe  
Tweed Regional Gallery  
Western Riverina Arts

## Peak bodies and business chambers

Illawarra Business Chamber  
National Trust of Australia (New South Wales)  
Nature Conservation Council of NSW  
Newcastle Business Chamber  
NSW Business Chamber  
Sydney Business Chamber

## Industry

CPB Contractors  
Dexus  
Frasers Property Australia  
GPT Group  
Investa  
Lendlease  
oOh!media  
Stockland  
Walker Corp

## Community organisations

Disabled Surfers Association of Australia  
Friends of Fernhill and Mulgoa Valley  
Western Sydney Health Alliance

## Universities

University of NSW  
Western Sydney University





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