

NSW Public Spaces Charter

Ten principles for public space in NSW



NSW Department of Planning,
Industry and Environment

October 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 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: Noreuil Park, Albury. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Artwork (left) by Nikita Ridgeway.

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Ministerial foreword

As the first NSW Minister for Public Spaces, it's clear to me that public space is everyone's business. This is why it's a priority of the NSW Government to increase access to quality, green public spaces, and why we have developed the NSW Public Spaces Charter.

The charter provides ten principles for quality public space that have been designed to maximise the social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits that public space delivers.

The charter has been more than a year in the making and is based on deep and broad engagement. It's truly a community-led tool, designed in collaboration with practitioners and reflecting what communities love about public spaces and what they tell us should be improved.

In November 2021 the NSW Government released survey results showing almost half of respondents were using public spaces and parks more than ever before.

Indeed, our love for public spaces has never been more in focus. It's no secret that the pandemic has emphasised the inherent need we have for safe and welcoming public space. At the height of COVID-19, many of us experienced newfound joy and delight in public spaces that we may have previously taken for granted. This showed how much we need them on a physical, emotional and psychological level.

The Government is responding to the community with this new charter. We're setting the bar to help change how people think about, view, and engage with great public spaces.

This unifying set of principles, based on solid evidence and research, will underpin the creation and improvement of high-quality public spaces across NSW.

All our public spaces should reflect the values, needs and aspirations of the communities they serve, including those who are vulnerable and hard-to-reach. Ensuring public spaces are

equitable and inclusive will lead to the creation of a more just State. Making public spaces that enable social interaction in beautiful places is an amazing vision that I believe everyone can share.

I encourage every organisation that creates, cares for, and uses public spaces in NSW to sign up to the charter. Let's work together to bring forth a new legacy for public space. Let's use these principles to transform how we think about and deliver quality public spaces that help all NSW communities love the places they live.



The Hon. Rob Stokes, MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Minister for Transport and Roads



Statement of Country

*Barangaroo Reserve.
Photographer: Alison Page
and Nikolas Lachajczak*

Country is a holistic worldview that incorporates humans, non-humans, more-than-humans and all the complex networks and systems that connect them. Country is known to be alive and sentient, and continually communicating. Country is not constrained by boundaries, lines on a map, or edges of a site. Instead, Country soars high into the atmosphere, plunges far into the ocean, and deep into the earth's crust. Country has diverse and distinct ways of expressing and being understood depending on the people, place, and context. Country is associated with Aboriginal people's cultural groups, it is where their ancestors still walk, and the places to which they belong. But it is much more than this. Country is known in physical, spiritual, and cultural ways. Tangibly it might include the flora, fauna, geology, elements, and waters. Intangibly Country includes expressions about place, spirit, narratives, identity, cultural practice, Law, lore, languages, and customs. Country holds all these individual aspects together harmoniously, storing knowledges like an eternal library.

While it may not have been built in the way it is currently understood, Aboriginal people have always designed and managed the environment, in collaboration with Country. The built environment is part of Country and needs to be cared for and designed as such. Likewise, relating to Country through public spaces enables those

spaces to embody the spirit of place as story, culture and life are celebrated there. Because Country communicates and holds all knowledges, Country can guide what it needs to be healthy, and how it must be designed and managed, including in public spaces. Being in and activating public spaces as an extension of Country is part of caring for Country. Allowing Country to be lead designer or planner ensures the inclusion of all who access spaces, not just humans, as Country is inherently inclusive. Knowledge Holders of Country are descended from Country and know it best. Working together with them is key to understanding how to connect with and care for Country. Everyone is responsible for caring for Country as we all live, learn, work, and play on Country.

With thanks to the Elders, Knowledge Holders, kin, and family who have generously shared their knowledges and means of connecting to Country. With thanks to Country for providing these words and understandings.

Dr Danièle Hromek

Dr Hromek is a Budawang woman of the Yuin nation. She works as a cultural designer and researcher considering how to Indigenise the built environment by creating spaces to substantially affect Indigenous rights and culture within an institution.



*Western
Sydney Parklands.
Courtesy of Greater
Sydney Parklands*

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Introduction

Public space is where public life happens.

It guides and shapes our experience of the places where we live, work and visit, filling them with vibrancy and energy as we connect, interact and share with others. It begins the moment you leave your front door and connects us to both work and leisure, and public and personal life. It includes the streets we walk or cycle in, the town squares we socialise in, libraries we learn in, community halls we gather in and parks, playgrounds and sport fields where we relax or play. It provides a wealth of social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that are critical to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of communities.

People are at the heart of public space. The way they use it transforms it into a meaningful place with layers of shared experiences, collective memories and a mixture of identities. When people feel attached to public space, they are more likely to adopt, use and care for the space themselves and have a more powerful sense of belonging to their community.

*Greek Festival of Sydney, Darling Harbour.
Courtesy of Placemaking NSW*

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:



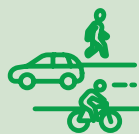
PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

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

The quality of public space is just as important as its accessibility, as quality makes people feel safe, welcome and included. The quality of a public space is reflected not only in its physical form—how it's designed, maintained and integrated with its environment—but also through the activities it supports and the meaning it holds. It can be evaluated 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?



The purpose of the charter

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has developed the NSW Public Spaces Charter to support everyone in NSW to have access to high-quality public space that allows them to enjoy and participate in public life. The charter identifies 10 principles for quality public space that distil and reflect evidence-based research, best practice and consultation with Aboriginal peoples, community members and representatives from state and local government, industry, the business and cultural sectors and a diverse range of public space experts.

The charter's principles are premised on the understanding that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to public space. Every public space has its own unique history, heritage, context and is supporting the different needs and uses of a specific community. There are significant and important differences in landscape, climate, amenity, population density and social and cultural demographics across Greater Sydney and regional and rural New South Wales. All these factors influence where and how people use public space and what the priorities are for their community. There are no set rules as to where and how the charter applies – it could apply to the management of a national or regional scale parkland, just as it could to the design of a new pocket park.



*Wagga Beach,
Wagga Wagga.
Courtesy of Wagga
Wagga City Council*

The 10 principles

The charter identifies 10 principles for quality public space, to support all those who advocate on behalf of, provide advice on, make decisions about, or plan, design, manage and activate public spaces in NSW.



The values

The charter is also built on the following core values that resonate strongly across all the principles. These values should always be considered when applying the principles.

Courtesy of Destination NSW



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.

*Kids on Q, Campbelltown.
Courtesy of Campbelltown City Council*

Who should use the charter

The charter can be used by any organisation or practitioner involved in the planning, design, delivery, management or evaluation of public space. Becoming a signatory to the NSW Public Spaces Charter will help your organisation to provide or advocate for better public spaces. It will also allow your organisation to access the charter's community of practice, one-on-one support from the department, promotional opportunities and data sharing. Examples of how the charter can be used are outlined below.



The community can use the 10 principles to understand the value and benefits of quality public space. The charter will help the community to participate in the conversation about how public spaces should be planned, designed, managed and activated.



Local businesses and chambers of commerce can use the 10 principles to better understand how they can leverage public spaces for their business and advocate for public spaces in their area.



Public space managers can use the 10 principles to inform plans of management and the policies and programming that respond to the needs of their users.



Development professionals such as architects, heritage specialists and arborists can use the 10 principles to inform the design and delivery of a public space.



Strategic and statutory planners can apply the 10 principles as they develop planning proposals, local planning instruments and plans for precincts, local government areas, districts or regions.



Industry bodies can use the 10 principles to inform and support members involved in the planning, design, delivery, management or evaluation of public space.



Public policy makers can incorporate the 10 principles within policy and advice that informs NSW Government and council investment priorities.



Developers can draw from the 10 principles to plan for and provide quality public spaces within their developments.



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

Using the charter

We have developed the charter to support all those who advocate on behalf of, provide advice on, make decisions about, or plan, design, manage and activate public spaces in NSW.

It is intended to align with other government and non-government strategies and policies for creating great places, where people can easily access a diversity of public spaces to enjoy the outdoors, interact with others or just relax.

The charter can also be used by the community to understand what quality public space is and to inform their participation when they are engaged in decisions about how public space is planned, designed, managed and activated.

Practitioner's guide

An accompanying practitioner's guide supports the charter. We have developed this to help practitioners understand the charter and how they can embed it into their work. The guide also explains the 10 charter principles and how practitioners should apply these when planning, designing, managing and activating public space.

For each of the 10 principles, the guide:

- explains the principles
- describes what the principle will look like in action
- provides practitioner tips to support how the principle can be followed as public space is planned, designed, managed and activated

- provides relevant examples
- links to relevant, supporting policies or plans.

Great Public Spaces Toolkit

The charter and practitioner's guide are also supported by the [Great Public Spaces Toolkit](#), which provides in-depth case studies and free resources to support local government, state agencies, industry and the community. The toolkit includes the Great Public Spaces Guide and the Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life, which can be used by anyone who wants to better understand the strengths and areas for improvement in a public space.

Become a signatory

While we have developed the charter for use by anybody involved in the planning, design, delivery or management of public space, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment encourages organisations and practitioners to become signatories to it. In becoming a signatory to the NSW Public Spaces Charter, an organisation or individual is showing a commitment to embed the 10 principles when they plan for, design, manage or activate public spaces.

Signatories to the charter will be supported with advice from the NSW Public Spaces Charter project team on how to develop an action plan to implement the Charter in their organisation or practice. They will also have access to a community of practice, delivered quarterly. The community of practice will be focused on building the capacity of signatories to apply the charter, by connecting them to public space experts and providing opportunities for information and data sharing and for promoting their own public space projects or practice.

To register your organisation's interest in becoming a signatory to the charter, email PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au

While the department does not intend to subject the charter to regular review, we may update it as required to reflect contemporary practice and emerging research.



*Unity Place, Burwood.
Courtesy of Burwood Council*

10 PRINCIPLES



*Stirling Brown,
Mavis Feirer, Queenie
Walker, Janelle Brown
and Robyn Bancroft in
Market Square, Grafton
Photographer: Alison Page
and Nikolas Lachajczak*

Open and welcoming



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



Prince Alfred Square, Parramatta. Courtesy of Destination NSW

Public space should be inclusive of all people, regardless of their gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, cultural background, socioeconomic status, ability and/or personal values, so social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits are shared equitably.

For public space to be inclusive, it must be culturally, physically and socially accessible, and perceived by the community to be so. They should be places where everyone feels safe, welcome and able to participate in public life. They should offer a diversity of uses and well-designed experiences that are free of charge regardless of income, ability or where they live. Amenities such as seating, shade and shelter, end-of-trip facilities, accessible toilets and inclusive play spaces that anyone can use and enjoy should be provided.

The physical design of a space, how people get there and move through and between public spaces, is critical. Public space should be designed and maintained to ensure the highest possible level of accessibility, so that people of all ages and with differing cognitive, sensory, physical, or developmental abilities can use them with dignity and ease. They should have

clear entrances and exits, open sightlines, visible wayfinding and clear navigation. They should be well integrated with surrounding land uses and public transport options, and easy to walk or cycle to.

Individual public spaces can have distinct purposes and functions, and may not be able to cater to every need. Planning public spaces to be linked and equitably distributed can create a more connected network of spaces that work together, and support each other.

Creating open and welcoming public spaces requires early and ongoing engagement with communities regarding how they are planned, designed, managed and activated. Including diverse groups of people, including Aboriginal peoples, young people, people with disability, people experiencing homelessness and culturally and linguistically diverse people in shaping public spaces can help create more accessible, inclusive and welcoming public spaces for everyone. It is especially important to have strategies in place to engage community members and groups who have historically felt excluded from these processes.

Community focused



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

Public spaces are the meeting and gathering places where we socialise with friends and loved ones and experience social connections that are fundamental to individual and community health and wellbeing.

Public space is important because it can bring us side-by-side with people whom we don't know, to share space and experiences with others who are different from us. This can create mutual understanding, empathy and trust, which over time strengthens the social capital of communities. Social capital is what makes communities cohesive and resilient, providing them with the relationships and networks of support that they need to withstand and adapt to broader economic and social shifts.

A key outcome when planning, designing, managing and activating a public space should be how it facilitates formal and informal social interaction and fosters social connectedness amongst diverse people, cultural communities, age groups, religious groups, families and friends.

Public spaces must also be places that promote equity, inclusion, social justice and democracy. They should allow free expression, collective action, public debate and opportunities for people of all backgrounds to participate in civic life.

Public space that is community-led, with a strong foundation of inclusive and equitable engagement, collaboration and co-design is more likely to meet the desires, expectations, traditions and needs of its community. Involving the community, including diverse, under-represented and hard-to-reach groups, in decisions about how public space is planned, designed, managed and activated builds trust and ultimately a sense of belonging and attachment to place.

*Kerrabee Soundshell, Moama.
Courtesy of Murray River Council/Rebecca Pilgrim*





Culture and creativity

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

All public space is on Country, which is deeply embedded with knowledge and memories that are the starting point for considering the culture of a place. Aboriginal peoples have always used ceremony, rituals and storytelling to engage with the spirit of a place, activate memories and connect with Country.

It's important that Aboriginal peoples can access public spaces for cultural practices, which incorporate any practice that connects them to their culture, Country and Dreaming. Cultural practices may involve caring for Country activities and are not restricted to traditional practices.

By listening to Aboriginal peoples and sharing the stories of Country, we can all strengthen our understanding of, and connection to, place and to each other. In being sites for truth-telling about our history and the impacts of colonisation, public spaces can also become places of reconciliation and healing.

Culture and creativity are powerful tools for communities to create a positive narrative about who they are and what they want their futures to look like. Arts and culture brings people together, allowing them to share experiences that powerfully builds community. Places with a rich and exciting cultural and creative offering are more liveable and distinct, with people more likely to want to live, work and spend time there.

Public space can embed arts, music, literature, screen, performance and cultural experiences, public art and events directly into the heart of communities. Supporting local opportunities for cultural and creative expression in public spaces encourages more diverse and equitable participation for audiences and artists.

The rich cultural diversity of NSW brings an exciting energy into our public spaces, making them places of cultural interaction and exchange. Programming and events such as concerts, festivals, storytelling, and ceremonies can reflect local histories, cultures and traditions. They can foster social inclusion and intercultural dialogue among diverse communities.



*Manning Regional Art Gallery, Taree.
Courtesy of MidCoast Council*

Public spaces such as libraries, parks, laneways and plazas can provide flexible and informal space that supports ephemeral, temporary and permanent creative works to be more visible, valued, distinctive and accessible. The spaces around and in between public facilities such as libraries, museums, galleries and community centres are especially well-placed locations for planning creative and cultural projects and activities. Place-based approaches that involve local artists and creative organisations can build on the unique identity of a local area and community to activate public spaces.

Local character and identity



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

Public space contains layers of built and natural heritage that cut across time and provide communities with a specific sense of character, place and identity. This heritage can be tangible or intangible, embedded in built form and landscapes or living in stories, memories and oral histories.

Country is the foundation of a place's identity. Public space should acknowledge and reflect Aboriginal languages, place names, and histories. It should provide space for Aboriginal cultures to be practised and shared, as this helps people feel more connected to Country and place. Public spaces such as parks, libraries, community centres, plazas, and sports grounds have aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value that enriches our lives and make us feel deeply connected to our community and our landscape.

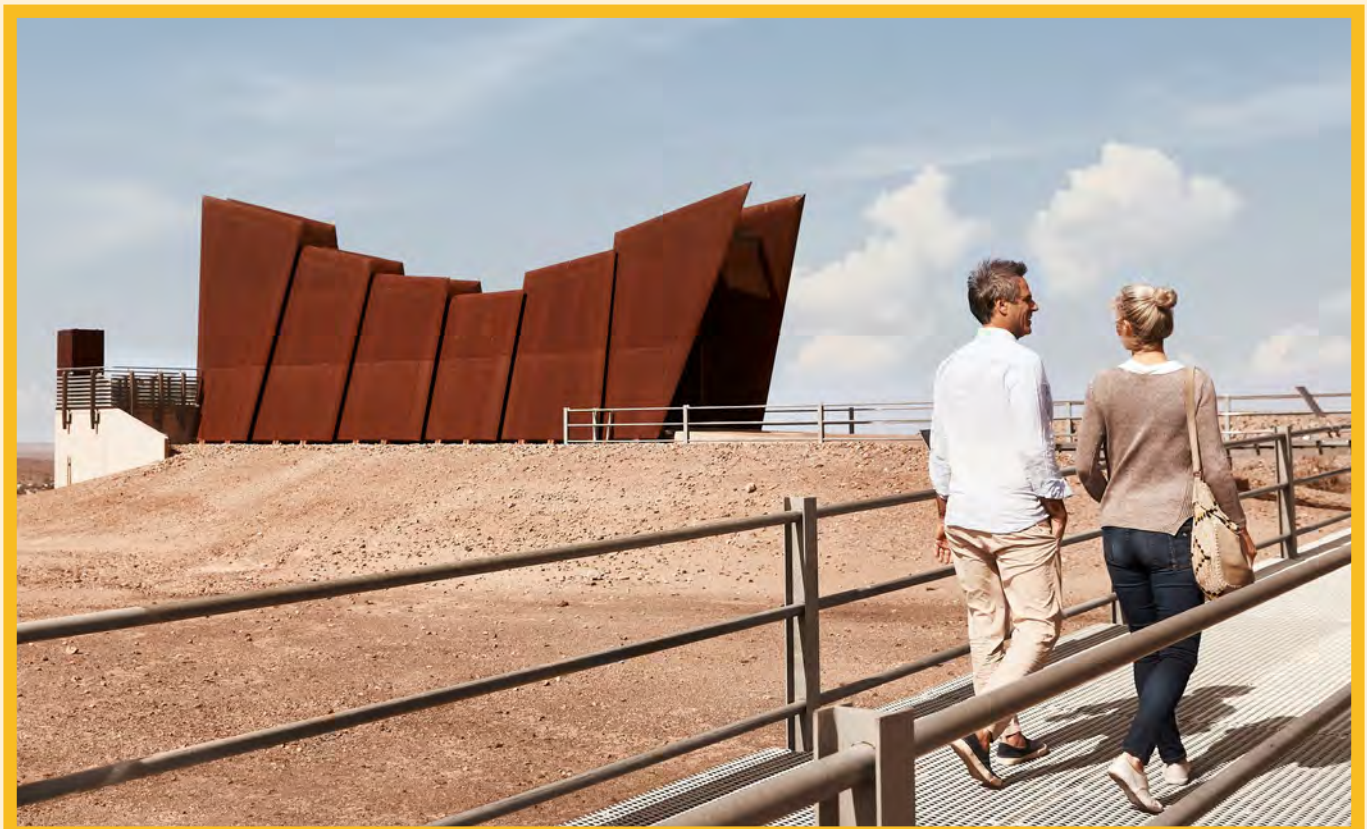
The character and quality of heritage in public spaces should be carefully managed and maintained, to promote local identity and to pass it on to the future generations. New public spaces should be sympathetic to the history and heritage

of the site and to the communities who live and have lived there, especially in urban renewal and brownfield developments. Adaptive re-use of heritage buildings such as town halls, fire stations and hospitals can provide new and exciting public spaces and uses that build on the history and connection that communities have to these places.

Supporting local artists and creatives to work collaboratively with communities can deliver public art and creative placemaking programs that respond to place and celebrate local stories, cultures and histories.

Communities are the best experts for recognising and valuing the local character and identity of a place and should be engaged early in the process of planning, designing and activating public space. Engaging communities meaningfully and effectively will ensure that diverse voices, cultures and histories can be reflected in the character of public space and everyone feels a more powerful sense of pride and belonging.

*Line of Lode Miners Memorial, Broken Hill
Courtesy of Destination NSW*





Green and resilient

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



Great River Walk, Penrith. Courtesy of Destination NSW

Public space supports the natural flows and cycles of the environment, by connecting ecological systems and networks of green space, waterways, bushland, riparian landscapes and wildlife corridors. Wildlife relies on public space for food and refuge, and their use and needs should be considered and protected. Native trees and vegetation should be prioritised in public space as these provide animals with their natural habitats, and are more suited to Australian climate and soil conditions.

By respecting, valuing and being guided by Aboriginal knowledge and land management practices in how we care for public space, we can help to support the health and wellbeing of Country. The planning, design, management and activation of public space can also support them to be sites for education about caring for Country's health and wellbeing and their role in supporting biodiversity and broader ecosystems.

Public space should be integrated with green infrastructure to ensure that urban and regional communities have equitable access to the social, environmental and economic benefits of quality green space. Green infrastructure is the network of green spaces, natural systems and semi-natural systems that supports sustainable communities.

It includes waterways, bushland, tree canopy and green ground cover, parks, and green open spaces that are strategically planned, designed and managed to support a good quality of life in the urban environment.

Public space that has quality green infrastructure, including tree canopy cover, can increase the long-term removal and storage of carbon, provide relief from urban heat and heatwaves, improve air and water quality, increase natural shade and the walkability of neighbourhoods, reduce noise pollution and the likelihood of flooding and sewage overflow.

Through careful planning and design, public spaces can build climate resilience into urban and regional communities. This includes using sustainable materials and integrating green walls and roofs into the built environment, providing green fire breaks between natural and built environments and flood mitigation zones in flood-prone areas. Planning and designing adaptable community facilities that are capable of changing use as refuge spaces and distribution points will ensure critical social infrastructure is available in the time of crisis and disaster.

Healthy and active



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

Public space plays a crucial role in building sustainable and healthy communities by supporting social interaction and connection and providing play and active recreation opportunities, green and natural environments, access to local healthy foods and safe routes to walk and cycle.

Public space that is well-designed, connected and inclusive can support everyone to build walking, exercise and physical activity into our everyday lives, helping prevent chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and depression. Increased availability and equitable distribution of accessible public open space can improve the opportunities for active and passive recreation, such as walking, running, cycling, team sports, picnicking and playing.

By providing access to cool, green spaces and connecting people to natural landscapes, such as nature trails, river and coastal walks and bushland, public space powerfully improves our mental health, reducing depression, anxiety and stress and improving memory and concentration. It should encourage and support social interaction and connection, which is important to our social wellbeing, and can help to reduce social isolation and loneliness. People should have access to a mix and balance of comfortable, tranquil spaces with places to sit and relax as well as space for higher-intensity activities such as sport and recreation, prioritising appropriate uses for different spaces.

Public space that is safe, well connected and high-quality encourages a culture of walking and cycling. Wider contiguous footpaths, tree canopy and shaded corridors, barriers between traffic and people, well-designed lighting, frequent crossings and lower traffic speeds

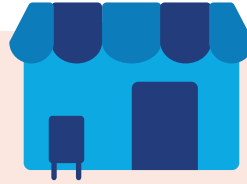
can all contribute to increased walkability. Using a movement and place lens to plan, design and manage streets can help to ensure these dual functions are supported. Street environments should be considered as places to attract people to visit and stay, not just as places to move through. They should contribute to the network of public space within a location, where people can live healthy, productive lives, meet each other, interact, and go about their daily activities.

The quality of public space is crucial in shaping the physical, cognitive and social development of children. Their needs, as well as that of their families, should always be considered. Supporting inclusion in the processes that shape public space will facilitate a broad range of healthy activities and behaviours and enable more people to have equitable access to the health benefits they provide.



*Sydney Olympic Park.
Courtesy of Sydney Olympic Park
Authority/Fiora Sacco*

Local business and economies



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

The public space network supports lively high streets, outdoor dining and cafés, and popular tourist destinations, as well as providing low-barrier commercial opportunities, such as markets, food vans and live performance.

The way that we value buildings and places is strongly linked to people's experience of these places and whether it includes spaces that meet their needs. Locations with high-quality, well-designed and well-managed public places attract residents, customers, employees and services, which in turn attracts business and investment. To deliver a high-quality experience, public space should have a strong vision and layers of activities to attract different groups of people and helps them form a connection to place.

Privately-owned spaces and commercial activity can complement and activate public space, but this should not compromise their primary function of delivering public benefit. Active facades, building edges and podiums can create economic activity and vitality that draws people into an area, while public space attracts diverse groups of people and connects them to retail and business. Town centres and retail precincts that are supported with quality public spaces where people can sit, rest and connect with each other are more likely to thrive.

Using streets as public spaces can create more vibrant and dynamic retail and hospitality precincts and attract higher foot traffic. Activating streets and laneways with creative



Blak Markets, La Perouse. Courtesy of Destination NSW

placemaking and programming can breathe life and energy into public space that turns neighbourhoods into destinations, spurs innovation and improves land and property value.

Activating public spaces such as parks, plazas, libraries, museums and community centres in a safe and welcoming way after dark is critical for a more diverse and vibrant night-time economy. Understanding the rhythm and patterns of how public space is used at different times of the day can inform a strategic and place-based approach to programming and activation that supports the local economy at all hours.

Safe and secure



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

Perceptions of personal safety influence how public spaces are accessed and used. Public space feels safer when it is well-used and inclusive, and people can see and interact with others. It should encourage a diverse mix of intergenerational and intercultural users, and recognise children as active users of the space. It should be activated with a mix of uses at all times of the day and people-oriented lighting at night, especially along pedestrian and cycle routes.

Incorporating crime-prevention strategies such as the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles when planning and designing public space can reduce crime and anti-social behaviours, making places and spaces feel safer, which in turn can enhance the physical, mental and social wellbeing of community members. It's important, however, that strategies and approaches to designing and managing safe public spaces don't strip them of their

distinctiveness and public amenity, or cause marginalised groups to be excluded.

Risk assessments and safety audits are valuable tools for understanding if there are safety issues in a public space and what measures could be put in place to address these. Consulting diverse groups of people, including women and vulnerable or marginalised groups, is important to understand their experience of accessing and using public space and their perception of its safety.

Feeling culturally, physically and spiritually safe when accessing public spaces is especially important for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Involving Aboriginal communities, at all stages of public spaces development and its continuing management, is key to creating and maintaining culturally safe places.

*Inner West Fest - Baludarri.
Courtesy of Inner West Council/Daniel Kukec*





Designed for place

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



Leagues Club Park, Gosford.

Courtesy of Hunter & Central Coast Development Corporation

The way that public space is designed can directly or indirectly affect the way that it is used, and who uses it. Public space should provide open space and facilities that are multi-purpose, connected and flexible enough to support a broad range of uses, activities and experiences throughout the day and night. It should respond to its environment and the diversity of its users, incorporating universal design principles so that everyone can enjoy it, regardless of age, ability and mobility.

Public space that is co-located with other uses, such as education, health, cultural facilities and other public spaces, can help create a sense of place and community. For example, co-locating libraries within community centres or open space near schools can diversify the use of these spaces and provide more equitable access. Planning for place across the whole lifecycle of a project, from concept, to design, delivery and implementation will lead to more successful public spaces.

Every public space is unique and has its own specific context, community and environment. It should be fit-for-purpose, designed with an understanding of how it will be used and who will use it. It should be capable of adapting to

changing uses and demands. It should encourage formal and informal interaction and provide people with different levels of engagement so that they don't have to interact with the space in the same way. It should have complementary uses whenever possible and be well-connected to surrounding areas and other public space to provide a richer experience for its users.

The connectivity of public space to the ground floor of buildings and the way they work together to support each other is important. Planning, designing and activating ground planes that support surrounding streets, laneways and open spaces encourages vibrant public life and provides a continuous network of pathways and experiences that makes it easier and safer for people to move around.

Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, organisations and communities should be engaged at an early stage of the design process for public space, to ensure that knowledge about Country is considered. This could include identifying stories or narratives connected to a place that can inform its design, or to understand if there are key movement paths or Songlines that can direct how people move in and through the public space.



Well-managed

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

All public spaces require some form of management so that they can continue to fulfil their various roles and provide a safe and welcoming environment. There are often multiple and diverse stakeholders whose involvement, activities and relationships can affect the quality of a public space and who have their own concerns and needs for how the space should be maintained. Public space management and governance agreements, strategies and frameworks that define roles and responsibilities, support collaboration and consider sustainable funding models can deliver better place quality outcomes.

Public space should be managed in a way that encourages and is considerate of users. Rules governing public space should only restrict activities and behaviours that are unsafe and shouldn't target user groups who have historically been excluded from public space, including young people, Aboriginal peoples and people experiencing homelessness.

Public spaces should be designed with consideration of their financial sustainability, and how long-term operating and maintenance costs can be minimised. Smart infrastructure, systems and technology can also improve the ways that public space is monitored and managed. Cleaning, maintenance and repairs of public space and its amenities should be carried out in line with their levels of use to maintain a welcoming environment.

Aboriginal people are experts in land management practices that ensure the health and wellbeing of Country. Valuing and respecting Aboriginal cultural knowledge and working with Aboriginal peoples should be a priority in managing public space. This will also ensure that culturally significant places are respected and protected, and there is access for cultural practice.

Flexible community-led design, inclusive processes and capacity-building can also

foster more efficient and dynamic models of stewardship to emerge. When power and responsibility for managing public space is shared with the community, people feel more invested and are more willing to maintain, program, beautify, and advocate for those spaces. Volunteer groups such as scouts and girl guides, local schools, sports and surf lifesaving clubs, bush care groups or citizen science networks can provide valuable community partnerships for managing public space.

*Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney's Aboriginal Education
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Courtesy of Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust*





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