

BETTER METHODS



EVALUATING

GOOD DESIGN

Implementing **Better Placed**
design objectives into projects

GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECT
NEW SOUTH WALES

About this document

This document is for everyone involved with the design of the built environment in NSW.

This includes government agencies who are planning new facilities and infrastructure, building owners and managers, developers, planners, engineers, urban designers, landscape architects, architects, building designers and communities who contribute to the design of their environments – whether as decision-makers, service providers, clients or end users.

Prepared by the Government Architect NSW (GANSW), this document presents a set of requirements you can use to evaluate design proposals and completed works, both large and small, throughout the life of a project.

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Good design is NSW Government policy

GANSW is the leading NSW Government agency responsible for design quality in the built environment.

GANSW provides strategic design leadership in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture, supporting the NSW Government in delivering quality, managing risk and fostering innovation to maximise public value in the built environment.

Better Methods

This document is part of **Better Methods**: a set of mechanisms developed by GANSW to support the practical delivery of a better built environment.

Better Methods has been developed in collaboration with NSW Government agencies, the private sector and academia. It includes:

- documents, such as design guidelines and advisory notes to support good practice
- programs, such as the State Design Review Panel pilot
- schemes, such as the Government Architect's Strategy and Design Excellence Prequalification Scheme
- examples, such as case studies, to profile best practice, lift expectations and inspire excellence
- methods, such as this one, developed to help implement good design process.

Better Methods will evolve over time with new and revised documents and processes and in response to feedback and new knowledge.

Better Placed

The evaluation requirements presented in this document expand upon the design objectives set out in **Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW** (GANSW 2017).

Better Placed presents seven design objectives for the NSW built environment, applicable at any scale, including cities and precincts, the public realm and individual buildings. **Better Placed** addresses a broad range of issues and challenges that should be considered when producing a well-designed built environment.

The **Better Placed** integrated design policy has been created to help everyone involved in built environment projects or the development assessment process. It advocates that we all have a role in this shared vision of ensuring our cities and towns are better places.

What is good design?

An amendment to the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act* in 2017 included a key phrase – “good design” – which elevates the role of design in the built environment. The objects of the Act (section 1.3) include:

“(g) to promote good design and the amenity of the built environment”.

Better Placed provides clarity on what the NSW Government means by good design. Good design is both a process and an outcome of that process – a way of making and result of that making.

Good design is not just how a place looks, but how it works and feels for people. Good design creates better places that in turn maximise public value and contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and the community. Achieving better places relies on the energy and contributions of many people from different walks of life and with different expertise.

Evaluating projects against the **Better Placed** design objectives will provide a holistic understanding of the components that make up good design.

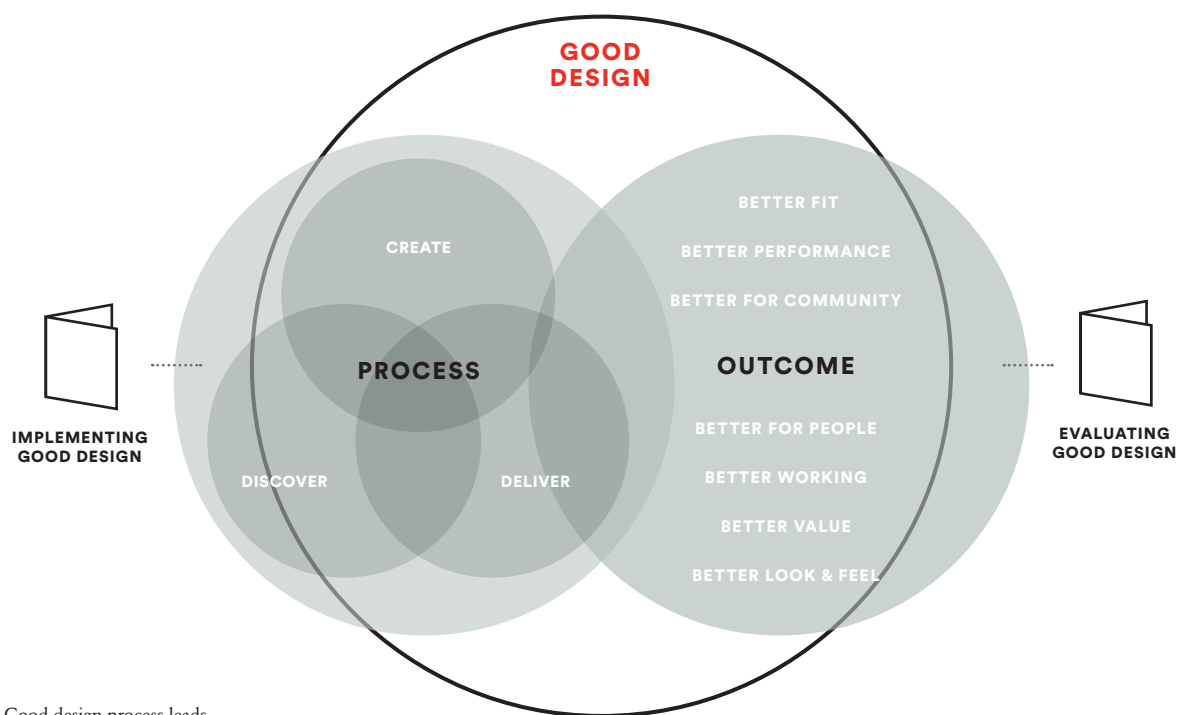
Why do we need to evaluate good design?

Evaluation – throughout the life of a project – plays a key role in achieving good design. GANSW supports the practice of design evaluation by:

- promoting a consistent approach to evaluation of good design across government agencies, tiers of government and industry sectors
- making these evaluation requirements accessible to all, and encouraging their wide adoption across any type of built environment project (large, small, public, private); these requirements are based on the **Better Placed** design objectives
- measuring the effectiveness of processes that improve design quality, such the **GANSW Better Methods**
- fostering a common language for talking about design, across industry sectors and throughout government
- building the skills and capacity of those involved with assessing design projects
 - designers, non-designers, clients, professional service providers and communities – to gain optimum value from the evaluation process
- collaborating with specialist sectors, such as service providers and clients working in education and heritage conservation, to influence and evolve integrated design approaches, e.g. green infrastructure.

Implementing Good Design

This document sits alongside **Implementing Good Design**, a companion document which expands on the design process set out in **Better Placed**.



How to use this document

The following pages present lists of requirements you can use as the criteria for evaluating a building, precinct, urban space, landscape element, public utility or item of infrastructure ... any component of the built environment, at any scale, and in any setting.

The requirements listed here stem from seven design objectives – these objectives are the core elements of the Government Architect’s integrated design policy for the NSW built environment: Better Placed.

When do you evaluate?

Design evaluation should happen at several stages throughout your project – from early design concepts to highly resolved proposals to completed works. For more information about using these requirements in your design process, see **Implementing Good Design** (GANSW 2018).

Designers can use this document to better evaluate their design process and output and more readily position themselves; to add value, demonstrate measured outcomes and provide leverage for potential negotiation with authorities.

Clients, developers and planners can use this document to gain a thorough understanding of a design; to identify the ways it meets or falls short of a good design outcome, to define the design’s responsibility to the wider built environment and to consider its whole life cost.

Government agencies can use this document to expand interagency conversations, to emphasise an interdisciplinary approach and to advocate for better design outcomes.

Communities can use this document to facilitate the involvement, engagement and transfer of knowledge about design between people; to articulate community needs and aspirations, to connect to industry, clients or government and to support local investment in good design.

For more information see **Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW**, accessible from the GANSW website.

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment



Better fit
contextual, local
and of its place



Better performance
sustainable, adaptable
and durable



Better for community
inclusive, connected
and diverse



Better for people
safe, comfortable
and liveable



Better working
functional, efficient
and fit for purpose



Better value
creating and
adding value



Better look and feel
engaging, inviting
and attractive



OBJECTIVE 1.

Better fit

contextual, local and of its place

Good design in the built environment is informed by and derived from its location, context and social setting. It is place-based and relevant to and resonant with local character, and communal aspirations. It also contributes to evolving character and setting.

CONTEXTUAL

a building, place or space that responds to the context in which it is designed

LOCAL

a building, place or space that relates to an area, or neighbourhood

OF ITS PLACE

a building, place or space that relates to its surrounds

Integrated design, spanning precincts, public realm and buildings, should encompass an appropriate contextual fit, through:

1. Considering the design in its immediate environs, and the wider context
2. Responding to the local landscape setting and its natural features, including topography, waterways and vegetation
3. Responding to the broader urban context in terms of existing street patterns, development and built form
4. Effectively addressing the immediate site conditions, surrounding public realm, neighbouring buildings or sites, and interfaces
5. Building on and reinforcing distinct and authentic local characteristics, qualities and attributes, referencing local heritage and local materials where applicable to support local identity
6. Retaining and enhancing existing buildings and vegetation of public value
7. Contributing to change in the urban context, where appropriate or desirable, in a managed, careful and responsive manner, establishing a reference for future built form and urban design
8. Contributing to the immediate public realm, through activation, passive surveillance, visual interest and improved amenity; supporting community interaction and addressing local needs and opportunities
9. Creating or contributing to a distinctive, defined urban character in the local area.



OBJECTIVE 2.

Better performance

**sustainable, adaptable
and durable**

Environmental sustainability and responsiveness is essential to meet the highest performance standards for living and working. Sustainability is no longer an optional extra but a fundamental aspect of functional, whole-of-life design.

SUSTAINABLE

relates to the endurance of systems, buildings, spaces and processes – their ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, which contributes positively to environmental, economic and social outcomes

ADAPTABLE

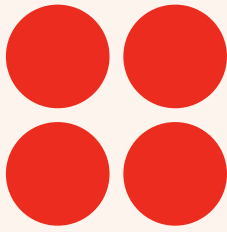
a building, place or space that can adjust to new conditions, or to be modified for a new purpose

DURABLE

a building, place or space that is built to be able to withstand wear and pressure

Good built environment design achieves high performance standards, through:

1. Facilitating and encouraging sustainable transport modes including walking, cycling and public transport and minimising the space dedicated to vehicle movement and parking
2. Accommodating an appropriate range of well-distributed, public or private activities
3. Accommodating future change in use or activities
4. Integrating green infrastructure, including tree canopy, open space, bushland and waterways with urban development and grey infrastructure, such as streets, roads and public transport
5. Contributing to resource efficiency (energy, water, materials), including minimising consumption, and accommodating localised energy generation, water recycling and food production
6. Prioritising the use of robust, locally sourced materials and resilient, climate-responsive plant species
7. Responding to local climate conditions, and using efficient, passive approaches and systems to provide shade, shelter, heating and cooling to reduce the burden on, or need for, mechanical systems
8. Arranging layouts, facades, materials and fixtures to optimise environmental performance, through access to fresh air, natural light, greenery and vegetation.



OBJECTIVE 3.

Better for community

**inclusive, connected
and diverse**

The design of the built environment must seek to address growing economic and social disparity and inequality, by creating inclusive, welcoming and equitable environments. Incorporating diverse uses, housing types and economic frameworks will support engaging places and resilient communities.

INCLUSIVE

a building, place or space that embraces the community and individuals who use it

CONNECTED

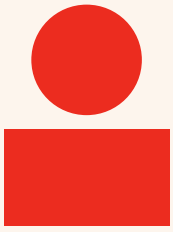
a building place or space that establishes links with its surrounds, allowing visitors and residents to move freely and sustainably

DIVERSE

a building, place or space that embraces a richness in use, character and qualities

Good design creates better communities, through:

1. Supporting appropriate layout, density and wayfinding for walking, cycling and access to services, facilities and public transport
2. Developing layouts in precincts, buildings and spaces that encourage exploration, movement, and equitable public access in public and community buildings as well as privately owned public spaces
3. Accommodating or contributing to a diverse and integrated mix of spaces and uses including diverse housing types, community spaces and commercial premises
4. Supporting equitable access to a diverse range of local economic or employment opportunities
5. Providing or contributing to a range of types of open space in the public realm, varying in sizes and configuration and connecting to wider networks, particularly in higher-density urban locations
6. Creating internal and external layouts which can accommodate a wide range of events, activities and informal social interactions
7. Ensuring permeable edges to buildings and spaces by creating frontages, connections and entrances that are legible, engaging and welcoming especially in town centres, main streets and higher-density areas
8. Contributing to an interconnected network of green infrastructure, linking tree canopy, open space, bushland and waterways.



OBJECTIVE 4.

**Better
for people**

**safe, comfortable
and liveable**

The built environment must be designed for people with a focus on safety, comfort and the basic requirement of using public space. The many aspects of human comfort which affect the usability of a place must be addressed to support good places for people.

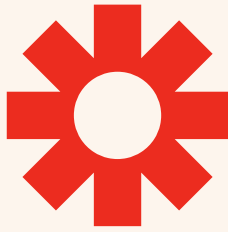
SAFE
a building, place or space that protects its people from harm or risk of harm

COMFORTABLE
a building, place or space that provides physical and emotional ease and wellbeing for its people

LIVEABLE
a built environment which supports and responds to people's patterns of living, and is suitable and appropriate for habitation, promoting enjoyment, safety and prosperity

Good design contributes to places that are better for people, through:

1. Prioritising people as the most important design consideration and the foundation for design decisions
2. Providing an appropriate range of climatic experiences – shelter, enclosure, openness, solar access and shade
3. Supporting a spectrum of public realm uses – including individual (walking, waiting, sitting), social (meeting, interacting) and active recreational activities (playing) – through the design of spatial layouts, furniture, materials, planting and other details
4. Accommodating an appropriate range of social and community activities by providing flexible spaces that are adaptable as future circumstances change
5. Optimising comfort and enjoyment within buildings and spaces, through acoustic and thermal comfort, appropriate lighting, appropriately proportioned spaces and connection to surroundings
6. Ensuring that layout arrangements and the relationships between spaces and perimeters maximise activation, visibility, clarity, activity and opportunities for passive surveillance
7. Contributing positively to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of local users and visitors; enhancing opportunities for physical activity, social interaction and access to healthy food.



OBJECTIVE 5.

Better working

**functional, efficient
and fit for purpose**

Having a considered, tailored response to the program or requirements of a building or place, allows for efficiency and usability with the potential to adapt to change. Buildings and spaces which work well for their proposed use will remain valuable and well-utilised.

FUNCTIONAL

a building, place or space that is designed to be practical and purposeful

EFFICIENT

a building, place or space that is constructed and functions with minimal wasted effort

FIT FOR PURPOSE

a building, place or space that works according to its intended use

Well-designed environments work better for all, through:

1. Accommodating and responding to people's daily needs and amenity, including activities, use requirements and movement patterns in the urban environment
2. Supporting a range of diverse uses which activate places day and night, inside and outside, by overlapping or extending the times of use by different groups
3. Supporting housing and commercial activity at higher densities close to local shops, services and public transport; minimising travel distances and providing easy access to services
4. Creating indoor and outdoor spaces which accommodate and prioritise shared use, to optimise value for building occupants and the public
5. Ensuring spatial layouts are accessible, legible and easily navigable
6. Ensuring spatial layouts are flexible to accommodate potential future changes in use, responding to future requirements and movement patterns
7. Ensuring spaces are appropriately sized to accommodate activity while maintaining movement paths.



OBJECTIVE 6.

Better value

creating and adding value

Good design generates ongoing value for people and communities and minimises costs over time. Creating shared value of place in the built environment raises standards and quality of life for users, as well as adding return on investment for industry.

CREATING VALUE

conceiving and providing new opportunities for a building, place or space that increase social, economic or environmental benefits to the community

ADDING VALUE

leveraging and building on the existing characteristics and qualities of a building, place or space to increase social, economic or environmental benefits to the community

Well-designed built environments create current and future value for those who create them, and for their end users, by:

1. Accommodating a range of economic, small business and entrepreneurial opportunities in local areas and ensuring they are well-connected and accessible
2. Facilitating the enjoyment of public space by all people, including active and passive occupants (pedestrians, consumers, onlookers and visitors)
3. Providing or supporting a range of housing, uses and urban density to encourage accessibility, diversity, affordability and leverage efficiencies of access to services and public transport
4. Developing built elements and surfaces that are resilient and durable while reflecting quality and permanence, ensuring visual and functional quality over time
5. Taking a whole-of-life approach when considering cost, and considering wider public benefits over time
6. Considering ongoing maintenance costs such as cleaning, vegetation, water and energy use
7. Facilitating and encouraging social interaction in buildings and spaces, while also making appropriate provision for privacy and seclusion
8. Delivering ongoing public value through new or enhanced public spaces and interfaces with the public realm, with the flexibility to respond to changing usage patterns and functional needs over time
9. Allowing for future adaptation to accommodate demographic changes, new patterns of use and the integration of new technologies
10. Demonstrating inventiveness and innovation in design.



OBJECTIVE 7.

Better look and feel

**engaging, inviting
and attractive**

Our built environment should be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing, encouraging communities to use and enjoy local places. The feel of a place, and how we use and relate to our environments, depends upon the aesthetic quality of our places, spaces and buildings. The visual environment should contribute to its surroundings and promote positive engagement.

ENGAGING

a building, place or space that draws people in with features that generate interest

INVITING

a building, place or space that is welcoming to visitors, community and individuals

ATTRACTIVE

a building, place or space that is aesthetically pleasing, or appealing

Well-designed built environments look and feel better, through:

1. Demonstrating a clear aesthetic intent
2. Creating engaging and attractive environments
3. Creating a series of connected and distinct places that contribute to the interest and legibility of the built environment
4. Establishing appropriate, visually appealing built form in terms of scale, proportions, location and the configuration of buildings and spaces
5. Integrating landscape design and service elements with the building design to create welcoming and interesting places
6. Achieving a purposeful composition of materials and elements including colours, textures, finishes, light and detailing
7. Thoughtfully integrating public art
8. Developing active street frontages and an engaging environment for pedestrians, visually and materially, by minimising blank facades at street level to positively contribute to the public realm
9. Reflecting a commitment to and investment in design excellence.

Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.



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The role of the Government Architect is critical in helping deliver good design and planning outcomes across all projects in NSW. This strategic advisory role provides an opportunity to work across government, the private sector and the community to improve social, environmental and economic outcomes for NSW and its communities.

The Government Architect is charged with championing the Better Placed initiatives and supporting government agencies and local government to create and deliver high quality architecture and design outcomes.

Find out more
ga.nsw.gov.au