BETTER METHODS

IMPLEMENTING GOOD DESIGN

Implementing **Better Placed**
design process into projects

GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECT
NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW
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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 process that will help you to design, develop and deliver both large and small projects.

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 design process presented in this document expands upon the process 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. Design is part of the picture, using collaborative processes to explore opportunities and integrate different needs.

Good design depends on good process.

Good design is complex

This document is not intended as an instruction manual – good design is a complex, iterative process that demands a high level of skill, training and experience. Rather, this is a series of prompts to help you gain maximum value from the design process, support and advocate for good design, and make well-informed design decisions about your project.

Evaluating Good Design

This document sits alongside **Evaluating Good Design**, a companion document which expands on the design objectives defined in **Better Placed**.

How to use this document

The following pages present a series of questions that will lead you through the key considerations that apply to any design process, regardless of the scale of your project. The questions are open-ended and exploratory, so you can apply these considerations to the specific needs of your project.

Designers can use this document to better implement the design process and more readily position themselves; to add value, demonstrate measured outcomes and provide leverage for potential negotiation with authorities.
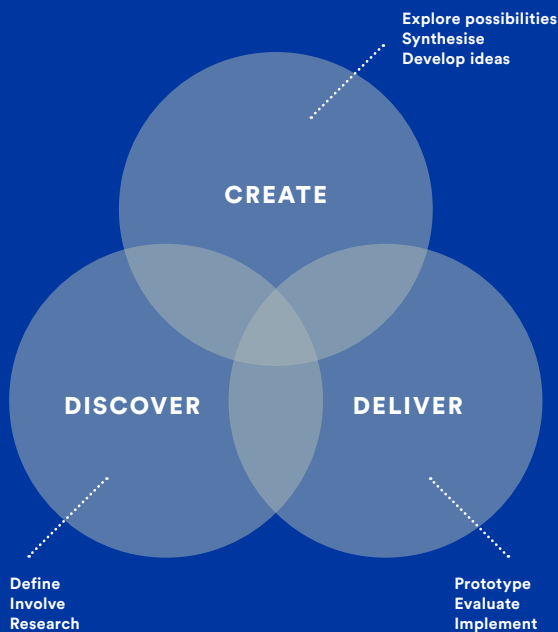
Clients, developers and planners can use this document to gain a thorough understanding of a design proposal, to identify the ways it meets or falls short of a good design process, to define the design's responsibility to the wider built environment and to consider its whole-of-life cost.

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.

GOOD DESIGN

IMPLEMENTING GOOD DESIGN

PROCESS
CREATE
DISCOVER
DELIVER

OUTCOME
BETTER FIT
BETTER PERFORMANCE
BETTER FOR COMMUNITY
BETTER FOR PEOPLE
BETTER WORKING
BETTER VALUE
BETTER LOOK & FEEL

EVALUATING GOOD DESIGN

Good design process leads to good design outcomes

The design process

Explore possibilities
Synthesise
Develop ideas

CREATE

DISCOVER

DELIVER

Define
Involve
Research

Prototype
Evaluate
Implement

These three activities form a cycle that is repeated at various stages throughout a design project. With each iteration of this design process, your ideas and decisions will become better informed and more resolved. Using this process, your project will gather and synthesise experience, insight, skills and knowledge from multiple contributors and sources.

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

DISCOVER

Define

How will your project, and its site or locality, be defined, analysed and understood? This is the foundation for your design process.

Setting the vision
Have you developed a vision statement for the project?

From the start of your project, your vision should:
— set the aspirations for the project
— determine the project's role
— outline its overarching objectives.

Preparing the design brief
Have you developed a comprehensive, locally specific, aspirational and clear design brief?

Who is included in your design brief? Have you included all the people, organisations and communities who need to be consulted or involved?

To gain the best results from your design process, the brief needs to be specific and rigorous about the project's requirements, without limiting or predetermining how these requirements will be met.

Your brief should:
— result from many, diverse inputs, not just select participants
— respond to wider strategic plans, directions or visions
— clearly articulate requirements and expectations
— identify challenges to be addressed by the project
— support public amenity, including health and social interaction
— explore unanticipated or unintended uses
— address the project's public role, current and future social responsibility and its core functions
— encourage experimental and innovative ideas.

Defining the place
Have you identified the character, role and image of the place you will be adapting or creating?

What are the constraints, issues and challenges your project will need to address, in terms of its place within the broader urban or regional context?

Involve
How will communities, stakeholders, end users and design collaborators be an integral part of your design process?

Engaging communities
How will local people be an integral part of your design process?

Engagement should:
— use innovative participation techniques
— bring in a diverse range of perspectives and inputs
— reflect local cultures, habits and lifestyles
— inform the brief, design process, options and outcomes through local knowledge, personal experiences and preferences, and collective aspirations.

Inviting stakeholder participation
What systems and processes are in place for gathering and incorporating input from stakeholders, while retaining appropriate design integrity?

Stakeholders need to:
— represent diverse points of view (government, industry, academic institutions, professional associations, design professionals and the public)
— be engaged from the start of the project and as early as possible in the design process
— be brought together as allies, working towards a common vision for mutual benefit
— use this vision to make decisions that balance specialist knowledge with the contributions of local communities and non-professionals
— anticipate different concepts and use of language between specialist areas and exercise a willingness to listen and translate.

Crossing disciplines
What disciplines should be involved in the design team to ensure an appropriate diversity of skills and experience, to address the complexity of overlapping issues?

How will technical requirements inform the design process, without limiting the design vision?

Research
How will research and analysis inform your design?

Applying research and analysis
During your design process, how could research inform and improve your decision-making? Research can help you to find gaps in your design brief, draw on a broader pool of shared knowledge, challenge misconceptions or common assumptions and improve on conventional practice.

You could investigate:
— local planning (social, environmental, statutory) and its influence on place
— local history
— local cultural traits and activities: people, background, socio-economic circumstances
— the potential to celebrate local character
— the site and its wider context, e.g. how people use, move through and engage with a place depending on the time of day, responding to climate and across the seasons
— useful precedents and relevant case studies
— innovative approaches and opportunities for further research
— future social and environmental projections.

Enhancing performance
How can research support your design performance outcomes, such as community health, sustainability and economic activity?

How can research help you bring together the project's constraints, challenges and opportunities into a succinct design response?

How can research and analysis enable your project to respond to current and future needs, while retaining long-term value?

CREATE

Explore possibilities

How will you incorporate open exploration of diverse potential and opportunities, to achieve optimal solutions?

Visioning
Is your project vision both aspirational and achievable, inviting distinctive and experimental design approaches?

Does the vision support wider objectives (political, contextual, social, environmental, economic)?

Innovating and ideas
Will your early design processes and techniques include multiple, diverse, innovative and far-reaching ideas?

You could use:
— lateral thinking to move the design process beyond known constraints and conventional approaches
— research to inform potential, without limiting the possibilities or predetermining the outcomes.

Reframing
Can you devise other ways to look at the project, in order to understand different standpoints, opinions and needs?

Can you reframe the problem in order to see a fresh point of view?

Testing scenarios
What possibilities, directions, opportunities and solutions can be generated for the project, through an open, exploratory design process?

How can your design process test and accommodate the potential use of streets and spaces, to ensure resilience, usability and functionality in the long term?

You could explore scenarios:
— expansive possibilities, within the project constraints
— spatial arrangements for a variety of users and activities, for functionality, safety and amenity
— diverse, overlapping activities in the public realm.

You need to design for:
— people engaged in active and passive, necessary and recreational activity
— individuals and groups
— organised events
— impromptu gatherings
— daytime and night time
— weekdays and weekends
— seasons, or time of year
— optimal spatial area dimensions
— potential divisions into smaller spaces.

Making a wider impact
Can your testing of ideas for specific places also inform a wider urban design process and outcomes?

What opportunities to enhance, revitalise or reinforce the local area are encapsulated in the project?

Can your project be integrated into a public realm and green infrastructure network of spaces and connections, to inform its design?

Synthesise

How will the various design streams, inputs and approaches be integrated?

Integrating knowledge
Can different knowledge streams (e.g. existing context, sustainable design, economic development) be integrated through your design proposal?

What knowledge gaps can provide opportunities for innovation and experimentation?

Balancing requirements
What opportunities exist to link multiple elements or requirements to find better design solutions?

How can your design process encompass and address competing demands on public space from various users and requirements, to minimise later conflicts in the public realm?

Synthesising inputs
How will your decision-making interpret and translate options, priorities, synergies and overlaps between various themes and focus areas, in developing the design solution?

How will you synthesise inputs to emphasise and prioritise the project's vision and aspirations, rather than just pragmatic requirements?

How can different design aspects be linked, to support one another in delivering a cohesive and responsive outcome?

Which locally relevant insights and inspirations will inform the design process and its outcomes?

Can external inputs be effectively integrated and synthesised through a managed process, to inform the central design direction?

Explore links between:
— technical issues (including grey infrastructure, climate issues, time constraints and financial constraints)
— social and cultural outcomes
— constraints, challenges and opportunities.

Develop ideas

How will you further develop, refine and optimise your design ideas?

Enhancing and extending the vision
How will the project vision be manifested in the design concept, design development and beyond?

Iterating ideas
How will your design process develop and test multiple iterations of the core design ideas?

How can visual design tools (drawing, diagrams, models, graphics) be used and brought together to better communicate and develop your design proposal?

How will your ideas and directions be developed to reflect a positive future for the urban or regional area?

Should several potential solutions be explored, or will your design process define a single direction for future development?

Does the brief and time frame allow for potential design iteration, exploration and development and repetition to avoid rushing to a design solution?

Designing for wider public benefit
Can your design processes and concepts reflect social inclusion, avoiding aspects or elements which are likely to exclude certain people or groups?

Can your design ideas be measured for and by public outcomes, including community safety, legibility and accessibility, use and vibrancy?

How does your proposed design contribute to the health of individuals, community cohesion and a sense of ownership, place and identity?

How will your design allow for public interaction with and appropriation of the built environment, to add value to the local sense of place?

Does your design respond to predicted usage patterns, while accommodating unplanned activity? How does it consider amenity, balanced with flexibility?

DELIVER

Prototype

How will your design solutions and proposals be explored and tested, prior to confirmation and implementation?

Using evidence
How can evidence and data, collected through prototyping and assessment, influence your design decisions or the selection of options?

What processes, tools and technology will be used for collaboratively testing, refining, prioritising and selecting design proposals?

Refining through implementation
How can prototyping facilitate design experimentation and innovation, while ensuring design quality?

Consider:
— prototyping and testing your designs, to reliably assess and compare divergent design directions and improve the designs
— installing site-specific, full-scale, temporary, low-cost interventions to engage communities and evaluate designs
— compiling best practice case studies to compare scale, dimensions, activities, behaviours and movement patterns.

Testing options
What possibilities, solutions, directions and opportunities can be developed through your design process?

Consider:
— establishing several options to optimise your design process
— evaluating options against each other, using clearly stated criteria
— learning from the process to inform ongoing work and future efficiencies.

Evaluate

What tools, processes and methods will you employ to objectively evaluate the design options?

Evaluating options against the vision and the brief
How will an option, or combination of options, be identified as the optimal design direction?

At what stages will design evaluation be appropriate and useful?

How will you identify which aspects of the design are essential to the integrity and vision of the outcome?

Consider:
— drawing on research to help examine design options
— using design review[1] to assess options
— evaluating how the options balance time, cost and quality imperatives
— examing costs and value from a whole-of-life-cycle approach
— evaluating designs at multiple stages throughout your design process.

See **Evaluating Good Design** (GANSW 2018) for a list of evaluation requirements.

1. Design review is a process that offers independent, impartial advice on the design of buildings, infrastructure, landscapes and public spaces. It can be a formal or informal process. For large projects, it is best done by panels comprising leading, cross-disciplinary built environment experts providing independent early assessment of proposals. Design review for a smaller simpler project might be internal consultation with colleagues. GANSW manages a formal design review process – for more information see NSW State Design Review Panel.

Implement

How will your design vision, intent and integrity be retained and reinforced through the implementation process?

Transitioning from design to delivery
How will implementation over extended periods, possibly by multiple parties and designers, ensure continuity of design integrity?

Consider:
— a realistic time frame, including influential events
— how you will manage the transition from design to delivery, including sequencing, dependencies and role overlap
— how each individual element can provide clear local value, while contributing to the overall vision
— which elements of the design are core, and which can allow for design flexibility
— shifts in scale, from overall concepts to specific locations and details
— the leadership and coordination role, and retention of the core design team throughout the delivery process.

Designing for implementation
How will your delivery process provide sufficient design rigour and clarity to maintain the design vision and design quality throughout the implementation process, even if delivery is incremental, or paced over a long term?

How will physical robustness, durability and maintenance requirements be balanced with design quality?

How will your design ideas be framed as a strategy, or sequence of actions, towards achieving your ongoing vision?

Design objectives for NSW

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

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

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