2.0 The Street
The Character of the Street

Each street in the region is unique with its own personality. It represents the community and locality that it sits within. Each street is also part of a network of streets and places that makeup the public realm of the Region. These qualities and characteristics reflect and contribute to a locality’s ‘sense of place’ its DNA.

Any new elements, buildings or structures in a street can have considerable impact on the context of its neighbours, the street, the neighbourhood and depending on the level of changes to be made and the significance of the street, the wider community.

Factors that have considerable influence on the character of a street include the natural and physical attributes such as its topography, geology, and its history of development and use.

The understanding and recognition of the constituent parts of the street and their relationship to each other is essential to acknowledge in the appreciation of the character of the street as a place.

The character of a street is significantly influenced by elements such as existing buildings and other structures, trees and other vegetation, furniture, materials, their quality, how they relate to each other and the overall layout of the place.

The quality of materials and workmanship is also an important determinant in how people regard their environment and therefore their degree of ownership and belonging to it that they have.

When new buildings or elements are to be placed in the street they should contribute positively and relate to the qualities and character of the place’s architectural context, as such they should be ‘good neighbours’ and fit well with their surroundings.

Design Principles:

- When placing a new element or building into a street consider the context and character of the area of influence of the element or building.
  - Identify the positive elements that contribute to the local character and make the place distinctive and use these traits as guidance in determining the qualities of development or redevelopment of the street.
  - At the start of a design project an audit of existing materials and street furniture should be undertaken. Any historic or locally distinctive features should be identified so that efforts can be made to retain them in the new design.
  - Ensure the variety in design, style, material and colour of street furniture and other items in the street will allow for variation to enhance and reinforce local distinctiveness.
  - Reinforce the ‘sense of place’ of a locality by relating the design to the area, involving the community in the design process, and using local materials, patterns, grain and form common to the area.
The Edge of the Street

The edge of the street establishes much of the context and character of the street. It provides the backdrop for the activity that occurs in the street. The buildings that edge the street have a large bearing on the streets quality and attractiveness. They also provide much of the casual surveillance in the street and provide a feeling of activity and occupancy.

In residential areas the edge of the street is where our front yards, verandahs and porches, front doors and windows, signal that we want to be part of the street and neighbourhood yet with a degree of privacy that we determine (Figure 2.2).

• The appropriate setback for residential areas outside of centres should be defined with regard to the character of the street and the appropriate degree of privacy for the location. Front yards can provide a semi-private buffer that can be achieved with distance but also with variations in height (e.g. raised front porches to town houses).

• In residential areas limit the height of front fences to allow unhindered sight to the verge, to and from the entry and the front windows;

The edges of streets towards the centre of our communities are the most vibrant with the highest diversity of uses and with the most retail & pedestrian activity. In commercial and mixed-use areas this is where the shop fronts and the shops are, as they provide the accessible public face to the street and thereby the community.

They are the places where the highest level of social and economic exchange occurs as people go about their everyday business of shopping, accessing services, conducting business and meeting others.

Figure 2.2
Low Density Residential Minor Collector
Edge of the Urban Street

The most active and highest mix of users is found on the edge of the main street of our centre, the central business and retail street of the town and the community (figure 2.3).

The edges of the main street of the centre is traditionally made up of an attractive mix of small shop fronts with a diversity of businesses, shops, and entries to offices and/or apartments above. Where there are upper floors there is a direct visual connection between the upstairs uses and the street. The ground floor façades have a high level of transparency to them with a large proportion of windows and glazed doors.

To the ends of and around the corner from where the heaviest density, retail and pedestrian activity of the main street occurs the width of frontages begins to increase with a greater diversity of uses including slightly larger scale businesses such as small service stations and small service industries.

The frontages though having on average fewer and wider individual units than the centre of the urban area will still have ground floor façades that are dominated with windows, doors and display areas. There is often continuous weather protection provided over the footpaths.

To the very edge of the centre the frontages become more of a transition between the areas adjoining the centre (e.g. residential, work/live or work areas) and the more urban context of the centre. These frontages often include a mix of retail, commercial, service and intensive residential uses. They provide for businesses that are cost sensitive such as incubator businesses and professional offices. The edges of the centre also allow for dense residential uses that help in ensuring viability of the centre and future expansion of the centre.
The Urban Footpath/Verge

The public space at the edge of the street, the footpath or verge is much more than a place to locate utilities or the space leftover once the needs of vehicle are satisfied. It is the centre of pedestrian activity and the interface between the private and the public. It is also the part of public domain that we are most intimately knowledgeable of. It is the in-between, the space that links all things in the street. It above all is the part of the street that contributes most to the ‘sense of place’ of the street.

The verge needs to have clearly defined edges to what is private and what is public though a transitional space, a third space, that is both private and public may be appropriate. A space where the private life of buildings show their public face to the street.

The verge itself should read as a continuous linear element to be understood. This continuity is at its highest in the main streets of our centres where the pedestrian is led along a continuous edge of buildings built to the reserve boundary and free from breaks as in car parking entries and blank walls.

- The verge should be wide enough to accommodate the paths, plantings and elements that are needed in the street.
- Keeping the footway visually free of street furniture is important, allowing for clear sightlines for pedestrians.
- Combining, collocating or ‘bunching’ of street furniture can help achieve a clear way for pedestrians.

The same materials should be continued throughout on paths and across driveways to give sense of continuity to the street and path.

Figure 2.4 - Footpath /Verge

Woodford  Suttons Beach  Strathpine
When considering a footway width, try to predict pedestrian flow on each section and design accordingly. There are some instances where peak flow occurs and needs to be considered e.g. near school entrances.

Figure 2.5 - Footpath/Verge Widths

N.B. 1.8m is needed for 2 adults to pass, 3m or greater on a busy pedestrian street.
The Built Edge

The buildings on the edge of the street contribute much to the way the street is experienced. In the more urban part of our communities the facades of these buildings should be as close to the edge of the street as possible, (preferably on the boundary line) and continuous, to aid in defining the edge and to provide enclosure to the street.

Buildings should be seen as a coherent and integrated whole. They should fit well with their neighbours and the general context an character of the street and the area. Any additions to buildings or further buildings in a street should never result in an ad hoc collection of elements. Respect must be given to the built form around it.

A building design should reflect its use both functionally and aesthetically. The understanding of a buildings function can aid in the legibility of a street and an understanding of the character of a place.

In view of this, new buildings and structures in a street need to recognise their existing neighbours with proportions to facades and alignment of vertical and horizontal features.

When siting new buildings and elements in the street there needs to be consideration of the functions they will to provide for while respecting the existing layout and alignments of the street and reinforcement of its edges. Similarly the height and mass of a building or element in the streetscape must consider the scale and relationship to the context of adjoining buildings, the street and the neighbourhood.

The Ground

The quality and design of the building where it meets the ground and how it relates to the pedestrians on the street are significant in determining how comfortable and successful the street will be. Uses at ground level, first and second floor should have connection and directly address and overlook the street.

To ensure well activated streets in urban areas, buildings should be built to the street frontage for the full width of the site. Entries should be on-grade to the street and only setback where they contribute to and are coherent with the wider public space.

The height of ground floors of centres need to be open, comfortable and commanding of the street edge. To achieve this ceiling heights that comfortably accommodate retail uses need to have a floor to floor height that is 30-50% higher than the typical upper storeys for the full width of the frontage.

In urban areas the only residential use on ground floor frontages should be the entry to upper floor or rear residences. The ground floors in centres need to be populated by more active uses that activate the street throughout the day.

Facade Transparency

To ensure a feeling of connection to the street at ground level to ensure a high degree of casual surveillance of the street and a general light spill at night, the majority of the area of a building ground floor frontage must consist of display windows that are transparent thereby providing connection to the internal activity.
Entries that open directly onto the street are better connected to the activity of the street and play their part in activating the street.

Small recessed entries to shop fronts accentuates the entry and provide relief without losing the continuity of the street face.

Recessed entries also provide for an increase in display window area and a sheltered transition between inside and out.

The corner is the anchor to the street. Buildings on corners should be of a volume, mass or height that gives strength to the corner.

Traditionally banks and hotels were located on corners acting as bookends to the street.
Good ground floor façades are rich in detail and exciting to walk by, interesting to look at, to touch and to stand beside. Activities inside the buildings and those occurring on the street enrich each other. In the evening friendly light shines out through the windows of shops and other ground floor activities and contributes to a feeling of security as well as a genuine safety.

Public Spaces & Public Life Study (Jan Gehl)
Small Spaces

Small spaces on main street frontages should only be provided in locations where they will not disrupt the continual activation of the street edge. They can provide a respite from the hard surfaces of the urban area for relaxing or dining or just as a stepped entry.

They should not dominate the frontage or be repeated along the street. It is important that activation of street edges is maintained across the frontage where a space or setback is provided.

Fronts & Backs

It is important that development that fronts the street should overlook and address it to ensure that a constant casual surveillance is achieved. In this way entries/front doors should directly face the street with windows to the street providing casual surveillance in suburban as well as urban areas.

In view of this it important that uses and activities that are generally found to the rear of buildings that restrict transparency should remain located at the rear of buildings and not be relocated to the street edge. For example openings for entries to car parking and other utility uses that reduce the area of active street frontage should be kept to a minimum in urban areas with no breaks in the street face, especially along active frontages such as on the main street, or other major pedestrian streets of centres.

In residential areas backyard uses should stay in the back behind dwellings. Private open space, servicing and utility uses should be left in the rear. Backyards in residential areas should adjoin other back yards or abut a rear lane.

The move to bring private open space to the front yard results in loss of privacy for the householder and the need to provide high fencing to the street thereby loosing the connection to the street and the casual surveillance this provides. This is especially true in places of greater density where high fences and walls are erected and the street loses all connection with dwellings.

Figure 2.8 Small Space
The height and volume of buildings, their length and breadth can have significant impact on the qualities of the street. When the mass of a building is so out of scale with the street that it becomes uncomfortable for the pedestrian to walk beside it its size needs to be broken up to provide a more human scale one that is more compatible with the pedestrian. Alternatively the continuity and the height of the face of the buildings that line the street can help in giving the street a feeling of enclosure and comfort especially in the more urban streets of a centre.

Height & Enclosure
Streets are three dimensional places with width, height and length. In the more urban centres of towns and villages or even at the local shop a feeling of enclosure even if only on one side of the street can provide it with a strong feeling of an edge. This edge defines the public realm and the height of comfortable edges can be determined by a balance of height with the width of the street.

The relationship of the height of a building to a street’s width is important in reinforcing the sense of enclosure necessary to providing the appropriate feeling of three dimensionality of the street for the locality.

Where buildings are the same height as the street is wide, while still being of a human scale, there is a strong feeling of urbanity. This urban level of enclosure is found in main streets and the more urban streets of our centres.

Connection to the street is still important to the human qualities of the street and this connection can persist with further height till the ability to read facial expression between the building and the street below is lost, usually somewhere above the 6th to 8th floor. At this point the building height should be terminated or the building’s facade should be stepped in to reduce its impact at ground level.

This feeling of enclosure still continues until the width of the street is greater than three times the height of the facade at the edge of the street. (See figure 2.9) When the facade height is lower than a third of the street width the feeling of enclosure essential to comfortable urban streets is lost and a feeling of more unrestrained space becomes dominant.

This feeling of space can provide for a more comfortable domestic feeling when in a suburban context but often results in a feeling of lost connection and the uncomfortable and insecure feeling of being in a large unfocused space in the urban context.

Where the street is very wide and/or the buildings to its edge are low and provide little to no enclosure a wall of vertical elements in the street itself such as a row of trees as in a boulevard may provide the desired enclosure.
Preferred Ratio for Urban Street 1:1.5 / 2 thereby providing a height of building to width of street ratio that gives a comfortable feeling of enclosure to urban streets.

The minimum building height for urban streets should be 1/3 of the street width, any lower than this and the sense of enclosure to the street is lost.

The stronger the feeling of enclosure the more urban the feeling in the street.

Where the height of building cannot be achieved as above or the space between buildings too great, the space can be broken up with the use of strong vertical elements such as trees or public art.

* Enclosure of the public domain provides a greater 'sense of place'.

Figure 2.10
Determining Height of Buildings on street edge in urban areas through 'Sense of Enclosure' of Street.
Design Principles:

- **Buildings and additions are to be designed to fit well within their surroundings while being individually designed as an integrated and coherent whole.**
  - Contrast may be appropriate where the new element in the streetscape is significant and requires focus of attention or the existing diversity and complexity in the street requires it.
  - Context must not be followed slavishly especially if the context shows poor or negative outcomes.

- **In centres and urban areas, generally build to the street edge with continuous building frontages to provide a continuous and strong relationship between the building and the street.**
  - To ensure a comfortably enclosed street, buildings in centres are generally to have facades at the street edge of a minimum 7m or 2 storeys and be at least 1/3 the width of the street in height.

- **Maintain a generally consistent building height to the street edge.**
  - Where there is value in continuing a consistent skyline to the street edge new building parapet heights are to vary generally no more than 1250mm above or below adjoining buildings.
  - Buildings to be generally higher on corners to define and anchor street edges.

- **Buildings that are out of proportion with the street and the neighbourhood need to be modified to be at a scale more attuned to pedestrian use.**
  - Large buildings can be broken up to appear as smaller side by side buildings.
  - Terracing larger buildings by setting back the building mass after a few storeys can mean considerable increases in the comfort of pedestrians.
  - To reduce the impact of large building volumes on the street their mass can be broken up:
    - into smaller clusters of volumes;
    - by attaching smaller distinct scaled modules to the facade; or
    - placing volumes at the street edge that are more human in scale;
  - Buildings over three storeys to be designed with a distinct base, middle and top.
  - No long unbroken volumes or smooth undifferentiated facades along streets.
  - Respect the design characteristics of the existing or future built environment.

- **Built edge of streets are to support appropriate pedestrian activity by enhancing the visual qualities of the street, its legibility, safety and comfort;**
  - Orientate buildings, their windows and entries to directly address the street.

- **Communities should be centred with well defined mixed use development with a fine grained shop frontage to the main streets.**
  - Buildings on primary frontages shall be designed as segments (e.g. 8 – 10 metres) that are similar in scale to buildings seen traditionally in a main street.
  - Facades should be well articulated along their length with doors that are no more than 15 metres apart and no single ground level tenancy that is greater than 20 metres in length.
  - This may be increased to individual tenancies of no greater than 10 – 20m in width and single ground level tenancy of no greater than 30m in frontage length on secondary frontages.

- **Ground floor heights to buildings in centres should be generous to accommodate changes in use and to be comfortable to be in.**
  - Ground floors to be no less than 30-50% higher than the upper floors with a minimum of 4.5m.
• Upper floors of building to be well articulated with windows and openings to allow for good natural surveillance.
  • Balconies and other protrusions on the facade of buildings should not dominate the frontage.

• The majority of ground floor and a significant part of upper floors of building facades to be transparent, allowing visual access in and out of ground floor premises and out of upper floor windows and openings.
  • Ground floor building façades are to have display space or transparent window or doors for more than 50% of their frontage.
  • Place internal relevant active uses that are public orientated to the frontage to be viewed from the street.
  • No continuous/blank wall should be greater than 3m in length at either ground or upper floors;
  • There should be no ‘false’ or blank windows and where “rolla doors” or security screens are needed they should be integrated into the shop front.

• Plain or blank wall surfaces anywhere on a visible elevation to be articulated or punctured with openings.

• Respond to the subtropical climate of the region, providing protection from the elements i.e., sun, wind and rain, through the provision of continuous cover e.g. awnings in centres and a canopy of shade trees along pedestrian paths elsewhere;

• Entries to buildings to be accessed directly form the primary frontage of the building.
  • Where buildings have frontages to more than one street the main entry is to be to the most active frontage.
  • The distance between entries on main streets should be no more than 15m to ensure a well activated, fine grained street edge.

• Enclose and define corners with buildings. Have buildings turn around the corner and address the corner preferably with an entry, or as a minimum a transparent window to the activity inside.
  • It is best not to truncate the corner and loose the strength of anchoring the street.

• The full length of shop fronts in urban areas should be provided with awnings/canopies to provide shelter and shade in Moreton Bay’s subtropical climate.
  • Awnings should be a minimum of three (3) metres in width. If this is not available then the cover is to be sufficient in width to provide good weather protection to pedestrians.
  • Awnings to adjoining premises are to be coordinated to provide continuous weather protection.
  • On other frontages in the centre, cover is to be provided over building entries and where appropriate, where buildings meets the street edge.

• The quality of the street edge and entries especially on major retail streets must not be compromised by back of building activities and servicing functions such as car parking.

Not all uses make good neighbours.

‘Ensure Compatibility’