4.8 Open space

Public open space underpins the liveability of urban areas. It supports physical activity and social interaction, both important for personal wellbeing.

In higher-density residential areas, public open space compensates for reduced private open spaces and helps to attract a wider range of households. In employment areas, it provides a place of respite from the workplace. In retail areas, it provides a resting, meeting and gathering place, a place for festivals, markets and performance.

Location and attributes

Public open spaces in a renewal area should be:
- distributed so that they are within an easy walk from all parts;
- diverse and flexible, to provide for a range of different active and passive activities, for people of all ages;
- designed for the demographic and cultural profile of the envisaged community;
- robust enough to cope with intensive use;
- safe, through passive surveillance and lighting.

Locating open space at the edge of a renewal area can assist in integrating it with the adjoining precinct.

An urban renewal strategy should analyse the amount, distribution, diversity, appropriateness, condition and safety of public open space. It should also identify nearby public open spaces and the ease of access to them. Where there is insufficient open space, or its design is poor, the strategy should identify opportunities for new or improved open space.

New open space

New open spaces are most easily created on publicly owned land. Examples may include:
- converting landscaped areas in the forecourts of public buildings into usable open space;
- converting redundant roads or parts of road reserves into open space including kerb outstands to create pause places;
- utilising open land within rail or light rail reserves and alongside waterways;
- restoring natural waterways where stormwater drainage has been channelised;
- seeking shared use of school sports fields and courts;
- enhancing access to and the amenity of cemeteries.

Where there is insufficient opportunity on public land, new public open space can be created as part of the redevelopment of large sites or through public acquisition of private land.

Access to existing open space should be improved by enhancing connections.
it creates a more diverse and therefore interesting, memorable and socially inclusive place;

it increases support for a greater variety of supporting shops and services (including public transport) by providing patronage across the day and evening.

Vertical mixing of uses should be encouraged to allow more active uses such as shops and services at street level, with more private uses such as apartments above.

**Housing**

Housing provides life outside business hours and patrons for local shops and services, including the evening economy of restaurants, bars and entertainment venues. Housing types and tenures should be mixed to contribute to social and cultural diversity and a balanced community. Urban renewal is also an opportunity to provide for social and affordable housing.

**Employment**

Where the creation of employment is a primary aim within a mixed-use precinct, care should be taken to avoid it being pushed out by a stronger residential market. Some businesses are deterred by the presence of residential uses.

**Transit-oriented development**

Employment and higher-density residential accommodation should be located in and immediately around higher-order centres well served by public transport, in line with the principles of *transit-oriented development*. 
Taller buildings increase land value, which precludes uses that cannot afford high rent, reducing the diversity of the area.

Taller buildings have a greater impact on the skyline in long-range views. This can reinforce the legibility of the broader urban area (e.g. the ability to identify a CBD from afar).

Buildings can impede views of surrounding hills and water bodies.

As noted in section 4.5 Urban structure, taller buildings can contribute to a legible urban pattern within the renewal area by being generally located at more important places in the movement network, including key intersections and corridors (i.e. all properties do not have equal development potential).

Buildings that line the edge of streets and public open spaces, rather than being set back behind or separated by car parking or landscaping, create more memorable, safe and inviting places (see section 1.22 Public realm edge).

Neighbouring amenity

Building height and spacing can affect the amenity of adjoining developments (see sections 1.19–1.21). The impacts of a particular built form scenario on the amenity of adjoining properties should be tested as part of the process of determining the preferred character. This may lead to a need for controls over the placement and design of taller forms.

Street integration

Above about five storeys, building occupants lose the ability for social interaction with people in the adjoining street or open space. This lessens their amenity. However, it is offset by better sunlight, daylight and views.

Rules of thumb

Where a new character is to be created, encourage new buildings to adopt a height approximately equal to the horizontal distance between them and the opposite side of the street (a 1:1 building height to street width ratio) to achieve a balance between spatial containment and a sense of openness. Parts of a building that are set back from the street boundary can be higher provided their height maintains a 1:1 ratio with the distance to the opposite side of the street.

A more intense character with greater building heights may be appropriate where urban consolidation imperatives are strong. Similarly, a less intense character with lower building heights may be appropriate in areas that cannot be well serviced.

Building heights along the longer sides of a public open space should be no less than one-third the width of the space, and preferably higher.