

## Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter

### What is the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

The NSW Government has made a commitment to increase access to quality green and public space by 2023 across urban areas in NSW through the Premier's Priority for Greener Public Spaces.

The NSW Public Spaces Charter will support both achievement of the Priority for communities across NSW and an ongoing commitment to quality public space beyond 2023.

The Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter identifies ten principles for quality public space, developed through evidence-based research and discussions with a diverse range of public space experts and closely aligned to the UN Charter of Public Space. These principles are intended to support all those who advocate on behalf of, provide advice on, make decisions about, or undertake planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in NSW.

All NSW Government agencies will be asked to endorse the final Charter when it is released later in 2021 and to support planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in line with its principles. Local government, industry and other groups caring for and using public space across NSW will be encouraged to apply the principles in their strategies and planning.

### To what public spaces does the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter apply?

Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all, free and without a profit motive. They include:

- **Public open spaces:** active and passive spaces, including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and publicly accessible bushland
- **Public facilities:** public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and free indoor public sports facilities
- **Streets:** streets, avenues and boulevards, squares and plazas, pavements, passages, lanes and bicycle paths.

### Who should use the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

The Charter is designed to be used by all those who advocate on behalf of, provide advice on, make decisions about, or undertake planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in NSW, including:

- **Place and asset managers** responsible for managing public property and spaces can use the Charter's principles to guide the development of plans of management, inform land and infrastructure investment/divestment decisions and develop policies and programming that respond to needs of their users.
- **Strategic planners** can apply the principles of the Charter within strategic plans at a precinct, region or state-wide level.

- **Developers** can use the Charter to understand the priorities of planning authorities and economic benefits of public space investment, as well as plan and deliver attractive and high-quality developments.
- **Development professionals** such as architects, heritage specialists or arborists can use the Charter to understand the priorities of planning authorities and to inform design of specific elements of a development.
- **Decision-makers** can use the Charter's principles to influence public dialogue about the importance of public space and what defines quality public space, as well as guide their oversight of public infrastructure projects.
- **Community members and community groups**, such as homeowners, volunteers and community organisations can use the Charter to better understand what quality public spaces are and what opportunities may exist to improve their local area. Through this understanding, they may more effectively participate in public dialogue and advocacy for their local public spaces.
- **Industry bodies** can use the Charter to understand the priorities of the NSW Government and to inform their members and the advocacy they undertake on behalf of their members.
- **Local businesses** can use the Charter to better understand how quality public space can contribute to their business, and to inform advocacy in support of public space in their precincts
- **Government policy makers** across the NSW Government can incorporate the principles and priorities of the Charter within policy documents and advice that informs government investment and prioritisation decisions.

## What are the benefits of a Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

The benefits include:

- A consistent definition of quality across public spaces in NSW
- Creating positive change and shaping the thinking of citizens and communities, State Government and agencies, Local Government and stakeholders on public space planning, delivery and management.
- Building on and unifying the broad range of existing public space policies, strategies, plans and programs that exist across NSW Government.

## How will the Charter align with other key policies and strategies?

The Charter will sit alongside and complement other key NSW policies and strategies that support green, public and open space. These include the Better Placed design policy and the Draft 50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands. Importantly it will also ensure that it supports and aligns with the principles of the Connecting with Country framework.

We are also in the process of ensuring strong alignment and inclusion of the Charter's principles in environmental planning instruments including the Design and Place SEPP (SEPP).

The SEPP will put place and design quality at the forefront of development and aims to reduce prescriptive measures and encourage innovation by establishing central principles for design and place. Specifically, nine principles have been developed by the Government Architect NSW

(GANSW), one of which focuses on Public Spaces and the Charter as a document is a key consideration for the planning of precincts.

## How was the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter developed?

The Charter principles have been developed through:

- Research undertaken into Australian and international literature and research about public space and best practice planning, delivery and management approaches
- Interviews with ten Australian and international experts in a range of fields of public space practice and knowledge, including economists, public health researchers, urban geographers and transport planners.

## What is quality public space?

The quality of a public space is just as important as its availability. This is what makes people feel safe, welcome, included and comfortable to want to keep coming back. The quality of a public space is not only reflected in its physical form – how it's designed, maintained and integrated with its environment – but also through the activities that it supports and the meaning that it holds.

In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, the US-based Project for Public Spaces found that successful public spaces have four key qualities<sup>1</sup>:

- they are accessible – *am I able to get there?*
- people are engaged in activities there – *am I able to play and participate?*
- the space is comfortable and has a good image – *am I able to stay?*
- it is a sociable place - *am I able to connect?*

In addition to the Charter, we are developing a tool that will allow anyone to evaluate the quality of public spaces. You can learn more about this at [www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces](http://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces)

## How was the community consulted on the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

We want the Charter to reflect the community's expectations and aspirations for public space.

Between 20 October 2020 and 1 December 2020, the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter was placed on public exhibition for feedback on the draft principles and how they could be applied.

Over 190 individuals and organisations provided feedback on the draft Charter through seven workshops, the online survey, digital engagement hub and online/email submissions. This included representatives from NSW government agencies, local councils, non-government organisations, community, environmental and recreational groups.

During this time a targeted program of engagement was also undertaken to ensure that Aboriginal people and communities could provide feedback on the Charter.

<sup>1</sup> Project for Public Spaces, *What makes a successful place?* Retrieved from <https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>

## How will feedback on the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter be used?

Feedback from the public exhibition is being reviewed and will be incorporated into the final NSW Public Spaces Charter, which is scheduled for release later in 2021. A summary of feedback on the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter will be included with this release.

## What does being a signatory require and what support will be available?

We received a significant amount of feedback and suggestions from different stakeholders about how the Charter could support their work and what support and resources they would need if they signed up.

We will consider all this feedback and more information will be provided about the process for becoming a signatory and the support available when the Charter is released later in 2021.

## How does the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter respond to COVID-19?

COVID-19 has shown us, more than ever, the importance of having quality public space close to where we live to encourage our physical, mental, and social wellbeing. By signing up to the Charter when it is finalised, we are asking people who manage public space to agree to plan, design, manage and activate public spaces they are responsible for in line with the Charter's principles. This in turn can help support increased access to quality public space in NSW.