

DRAFT

# NSW Public Spaces Charter

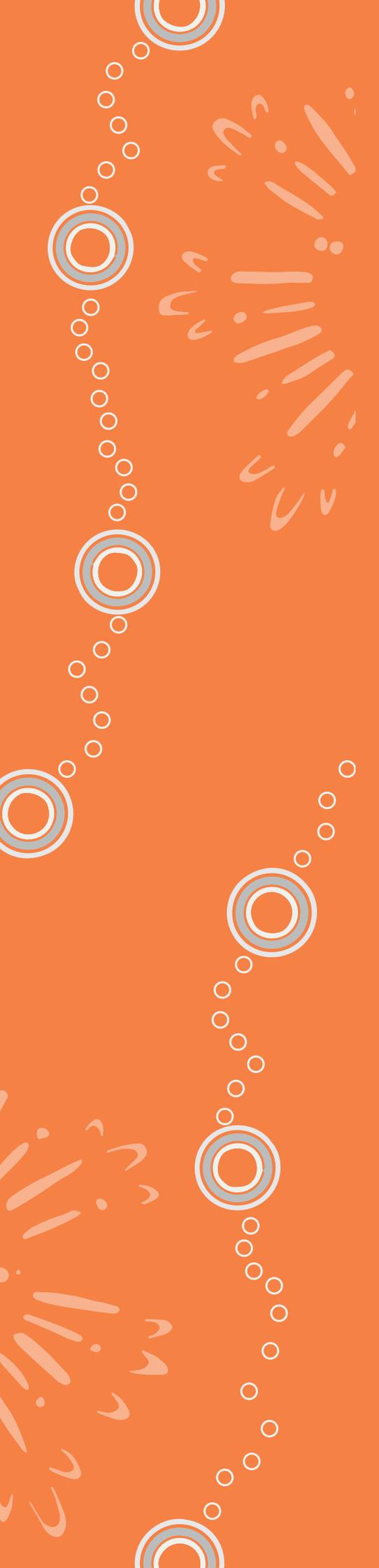
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NSW Department of Planning,  
Industry and Environment

October 2020





## Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Aboriginal people take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. The Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal people that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

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Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter

Image on front cover: Noreuil Park, Albury.  
Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Artwork (left) by Nikita Ridgeway

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# Preamble



Public space is where public life happens.

Our diverse range of public spaces are what make us proud to live in NSW. They are world-renowned for their beauty and magnificence, intimate and local. They resonate with history and memory that help us understand who we are, and in doing so, to feel belonging.

Public Space guides and shapes our experience of the towns and cities where we live, work and visit, filling them with vibrancy and energy as we connect, interact and share with others. It begins the moment you leave your front door and connects us to both work and leisure, and public and personal life. It includes the streets we walk or cycle in, the plazas we socialise in, libraries we learn in, community halls we gather in and parks, playgrounds and sport fields where we relax or play.

Public space is important because it unlocks a broad range of benefits that enrich our lives. It connects us to our communities and the people we love, brings us closer to nature, makes us healthier and happier, provides places for celebration, contemplation and creativity and helps businesses to prosper and thrive.

All public space in NSW is on Country, which is at the core of every Aboriginal person's identity and sense of belonging. It is the place from which Aboriginal language and culture is derived, which determine families and kinship and communities. Acknowledging and valuing Aboriginal cultural knowledge in how public space is planned, managed and delivered can promote and strengthen connection to culture and identity and create healing for both Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal people too.

## The NSW Public Spaces Charter principles are:

- 1 | Open and welcoming**  
*Public space belongs to everyone.*
- 2 | Community-focused**  
*Public spaces are where communities forge the ties that bind them.*
- 3 | Culture and creativity**  
*Public space is where we share our stories and values.*
- 4 | Local character and identity**  
*Public spaces make us proud of where we live.*
- 5 | Green and resilient**  
*Public space can help us adapt and thrive in a changing climate.*
- 6 | Healthy and active**  
*Public space supports healthy lifestyles and refreshes our spirits.*
- 7 | Local business and economies**  
*Public space supports more dynamic and exciting local economies.*
- 8 | Safe and secure**  
*Everyone should feel safe using public space at all times of the day.*
- 9 | Designed for people**  
*Public space that's flexible can meet the needs of our diverse population.*
- 10 | Well managed**  
*Public space is more inviting when it's well cared for.*

# Introduction

## Aims of the charter

The way we plan, design, manage and activate public spaces affects how we connect to them and how we value our experience using them.

The department has developed 10 draft principles for a NSW public spaces charter that can be used to help ensure everyone has access to high-quality public space that allows them to enjoy and participate in public life. We have developed these principles using evidence-based research and drawing on discussions with a diverse range of public space experts.

Many individuals, organisations and agencies are responsible for public space. By signing up to the charter, we are asking them to agree to plan, design, manage and activate public spaces they oversee in line with its principles.

The NSW public spaces charter will sit alongside and complement other key NSW policies that support the planning and delivery of green, public and open space. These policies include the state's *Better Placed* design policy and the

*Draft 50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*. The charter also draws on other key initiatives that are still in development, such as the Design and Place State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP), the *NSW Open Space Strategic Plan* and the *NSW Open Space Guidelines*.

Public space belongs to everyone, and it is critical that these principles reflect the NSW public's expectations and aspirations for public space. We are seeking feedback on the draft principles in this document to ensure we get them right and to understand the opportunities for how they can be applied.

Recent events have highlighted that public space is more important than ever for supporting human connection and our mental, physical and social wellbeing. The public spaces charter will provide an ongoing legacy for quality public space in NSW, and we want everyone to be part of this.

*Parramatta Square*  
*Courtesy of Destination NSW*



## What is public space?

Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive.<sup>1</sup> They include:



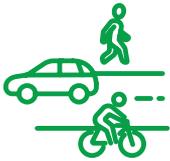
### PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

both active and passive (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 indoor public sports facilities



### STREETS

streets, avenues and boulevards; squares and plazas; pavements; passages and lanes, and bicycle paths.

The Draft NSW public spaces charter provides principles that its advocates can apply and scale to all these types of public space.

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals recognise that access to high-quality public space is critical to social, economic and environmental sustainability.<sup>2</sup> The New Urban Agenda, a document that provides guidance for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals includes a commitment to 'promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, waterfront areas, gardens and parks, that are multifunctional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being, economic exchange, cultural expression and dialogue among a wide diversity of people and cultures, and that are designed and managed to ensure human development and build peaceful, inclusive and participatory societies as well as to promote living together, connectivity and social inclusion.'



*Centennial Park  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*

## What is quality?

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

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

#### **they are accessible**

am I able to get there?

#### **people can engage 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?

# Who is the charter for?

The aim is for the charter to be used by all those who advocate on behalf of, provide advice on, make decisions about, plan, design, manage or activate public spaces in NSW.



**Place and asset managers** who manage 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 the needs of their users.



**Strategic planners** can apply the principles of the charter within strategic plans at a precinct, region or state level.



**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 to guide their oversight of public infrastructure projects.



**Government policymakers** 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.



**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.



**Community members and community groups**, such as home owners, 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 about and advocacy for their local public spaces.



**Industry bodies** can use the charter to understand the priorities of the NSW Government and to inform both their members and the advocacy they conduct on behalf of their members.



**Development professionals** such as architects, heritage specialists and arborists can use the charter to understand the priorities of planning authorities and to inform design of specific elements of a development.



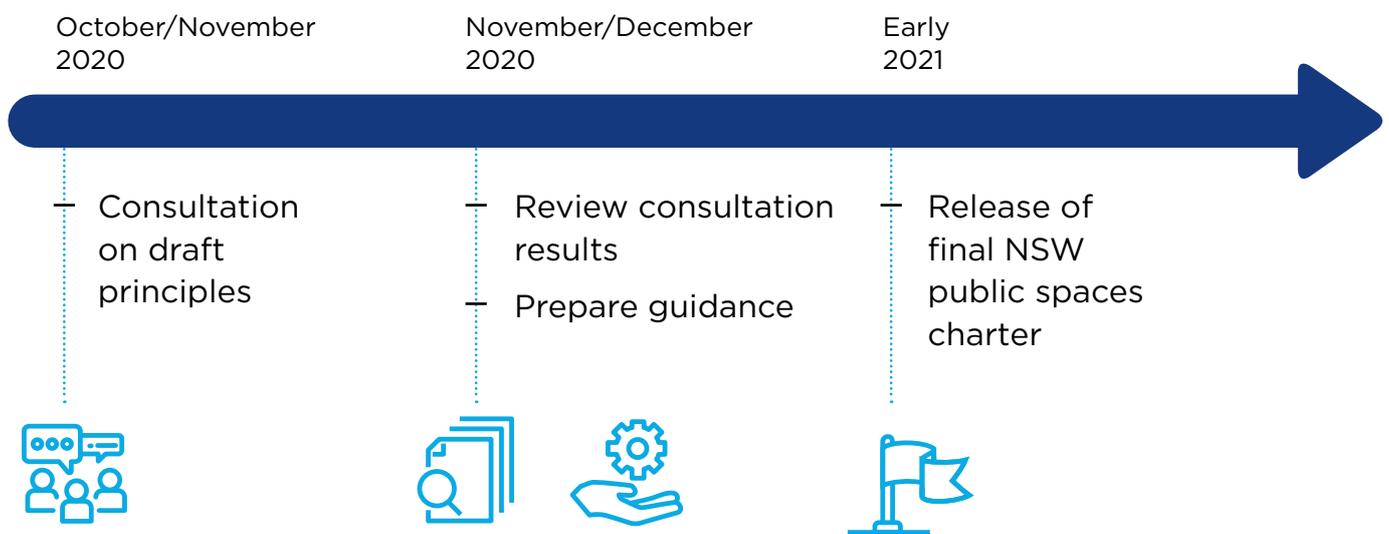
**Developers** can use the charter to understand the priorities of planning authorities and the economic benefits of public space investment, as well as to plan and deliver attractive and high-quality developments.

We are encouraging all NSW Government organisations and agencies to sign up to the final charter when we release it in early 2021. We urge industry, community and others to refer to the charter to help guide policies for, delivery of and conversations about public space. The final charter will build on feedback we receive to include guidance, ideas, inspiration, information and resources to support the principles.

# We want to hear from you

We want to hear what you think about the draft principles. We will consider your feedback as we develop the final charter, which we aim to release in early 2021.

## Timeline



As you review the 10 draft principles on the following pages, you may like to consider these questions:

- What do you like most about the principles?
- Is there anything missing? If so, what?
- Do you think the principles will support better access to and use of quality public space?
- What do you think the principles would look like successfully in action? (We have provided some ideas as well).
- If you plan or manage public space, how would you apply these principles in your work, and what guidance and support would you need to do so?



Please visit the website [www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces](http://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces)



or contact [publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:publicspace@planning.nsw.gov.au) for more information.

# 10 Principles

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*North Wollongong  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*



# Open and welcoming

*Public space belongs to everyone.*

Public space is free, open and welcoming for people of all ages, genders, backgrounds and abilities to use and enjoy. It should be designed and maintained to ensure that it has the highest possible level of accessibility. It should be easy to get to by walking, by cycling or on public transport.

What might this principle look like in action?

- Roads and streets designed for people of all mobilities to navigate.
- Inclusive play spaces where everyone can play regardless of age, ability or cultural background.
- Diverse day and night programming in libraries, galleries and museums.



*Sydney Park, St Peters*

# Community-focused



*Public spaces are where communities forge the ties that bind them.*

They are places for people to meet gather and interact. They support us to create the connections and experiences together that build shared histories and community and a powerful sense of belonging.

Public space allows for the expression of shared values, participation in public and civic life, and the celebration of all its diverse members. It should enable people and groups to engage in community activity that facilitates interpersonal connection and fosters the growth of mutual respect, understanding, empathy and compassion for one another.

*Burwood Park*

What might this principle look like in action?

- Monthly street closure program to enable neighbours to socialise and connect
- Local regulations that support and encourage activation of local parks by the community
- Strong community engagement and community-led programming in local libraries
- Shared-use agreements that give the community access to school grounds and facilities out-of-hours



# Culture and creativity

*Public space is where we share our stories and values.*

It has layers of history and memory that are deeply embedded and accessible. It helps us understand who we are, connecting the past with the present and inviting new ways of thinking. All public space is on ancient Country and should acknowledge and celebrate the profound and enduring culture of First Nations Australians. It should provide opportunities for cultural expression and for people of all backgrounds to connect to the history of their community, while feeling included in the shaping of its future.

*Redfern, Sydney*



What might this principle look like in action?

- Enabling the community to hold events that celebrate different cultures
- Designing with Country to recognise First Nations culture and history in public spaces
- Libraries and cultural and creative organisations extending programming and sharing collections in surrounding local public spaces

# Local character and identity

*Public spaces make us proud of where we live.*

Public space has character and identity that reflects and celebrates what is unique about its local community. They should be authentic, consistent with the physical form of their surrounding area and bring a sensitive understanding of what their community values and cherishes. They should be inclusive, capable of evolving and visibly representative of their community's diversity so that all users feel pride, attachment and a sense of belonging.

*Cape Byron Lighthouse, Byron Bay  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*

What might this principle look like in action?

- Public art policies that prioritise local artists that are engaged early in the process and can respond to place.
- Local histories and stories incorporated into public space design.
- Repurposing underused public buildings for cultural and creative activities.



# Green and resilient

*Public space can help us adapt and thrive in a changing climate.*

Public space that is softer, greener and more connected to nature can cool towns and cities, providing relief and respite and reducing the impacts of extreme weather conditions. It can provide a network of essential hubs that bring communities together and provide refuge and escape and build our capacity to withstand shocks during times of crisis.

What might this principle look like in action?

- More trees planted along pedestrian routes and cycleways and creating free community spaces like free street libraries.
- More parks and better connections between existing parks.
- Sustainable water and energy features integrated into public spaces
- Plans to use local libraries and community centres as places of refuge during natural disasters



*Tree planting by students from Rosemeadow Public School*

# Healthy and active

*Public space supports healthy lifestyles and refreshes our spirits.*

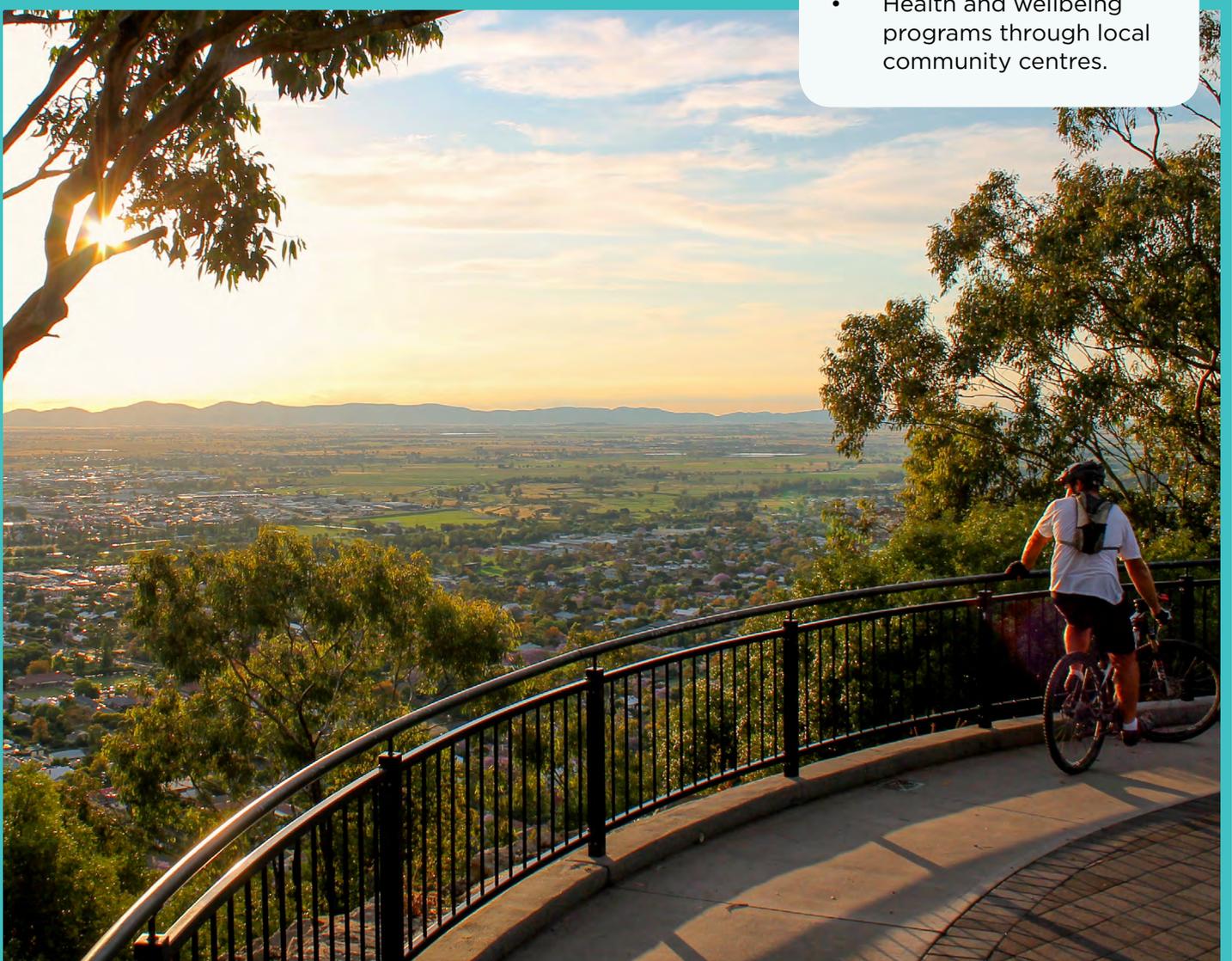
Public spaces should be easily accessible so we can build healthy activities into everyday life. They should be well connected to each other to encourage a culture of walking and cycling. They should include spaces and facilities for physical activities such as sports and recreation as well as tranquil places for sitting and relaxing. Public space should be fun and spontaneous, integrating elements of play for people of all ages, and offering both physical and mental health benefits.

*Oxley Scenic Lookout, Tamworth  
Courtesy of Destination NSW*



What might this principle look like in action?

- Expanded walking and cycling routes and loops across urban areas.
- Flexible park design that provides multifunctional offerings in different areas for different activities.
- Health and wellbeing programs through local community centres.



# Local business and economies

*Public space supports more dynamic and exciting local economies.*

Public space should connect people to businesses and support vibrant retail and hospitality precincts. Our streets, laneways and plazas should support the local and visitor economies by creating vitality through how they look and feel. Public space can host low-impact businesses and activities, such as food and retail outlets that make places more appealing and enjoyable.

*Bowral*



What might this principle look like in action?

- Streamlined local approvals for reallocating carparks and footpaths for pop up outdoor dining areas
- Space for weekend farmers' markets in town squares
- Privately owned public space governance and management has community representation and supports community and creative programming and activation
- Complementary businesses integrated into public facilities where appropriate to activate and support the sustainability of the space but not compromise public access.

# Safe and secure

*Everyone should feel safe using public space at all times of the day.*

The design, management and programming of public space should create a feeling of safety, including pedestrian-friendly lighting, clear sight lines, and signage. They should give special consideration to the experience of women, children and vulnerable people in public space and their perceptions of safety. Activating public space at night and encouraging stewardship can help make them feel safer.

*Darling Square,  
Darling Harbour*

What might this principle look like in action?

- Streetscaping and traffic calming that improves pedestrian safety.
- Safety audits to understand public perceptions of safety and develop strategies to address concerns.
- Creative lighting design that improves visibility at night.



# Designed for people

*Public space that's flexible can meet the needs of our diverse population.*

Public space should be comfortable and fit-for-purpose, designed with an understanding of its function within its area so it can accommodate a broad and rich range of social activities. It should encourage formal and informal interaction and provide places and facilities that encourage people to stop and use the space. It should have complementary uses whenever possible and be well-connected to surrounding areas to provide a richer experience for its users.

*Marrickville library,  
Marrickville*

What might this principle look like in action?

- Enhanced and activated laneways with programming and activities.
- Multipurpose community facilities designed to accommodate a range of uses and activities.
- Public toilets provided and maintained to support freely accessible public space and improve amenity.



# Well managed

*Public space is more inviting when it's well cared for.*

Public space that is well-managed and cared for makes us proud, encouraging us to feel a sense of ownership and become stewards of the place. It should stay clean, well-maintained and appropriately lit; offer shade, shelter and places to stop and rest; and provide public amenities that reflect local needs. These spaces should be easy to get to and get in and, once in, should be easy to freely move around. Public space should have rules that restrict only those activities and behaviours that it must to ensure its safe management.

*Aboriginal Heritage Tour,  
The Royal Botanic Gardens*



What might this principle look like in action?

- Programs to support community participation in decision-making and management of public spaces.
- Incorporated Aboriginal land-management and caring-for-Country principles into how public spaces are managed.
- Smart infrastructure integrated into public space to analyse experience and to monitor use, cleanliness and upkeep.



## References

- 1 UN Habitat Global Public Space Toolkit, p24
- 2 United Nations Development Programme, Sustainable Development Goal 11.7: “By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities”
- 3 United Nations, *The New Urban Agenda* (2017), 13
- 4 Project for Public Spaces, *What makes a successful place?* Retrieved from [www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat](http://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat)



Please visit the website  
[www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces](http://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/great-public-spaces)



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