

Good design and design excellence in the planning system

‘To promote good design and amenity of the built environment’

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 No 203 Part 1, New South Wales

On 1 March 2018, a new object was introduced to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act), promoting good design in the built environment.

The objects of an Act are a statement of Parliament’s intention for the legislation. An object assists decision-makers to interpret how to exercise their statutory powers.

Design is already a relevant consideration for planning decision-makers. The ‘good design’ object is intended to elevate the role of design in the planning system by ensuring that design is considered and balanced with the other objects of the EP&A Act.

Considerations

What is good design?

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 well-being of individuals and the community.

Good design depends on good processes, including many that sit outside the planning system such as procurement approach, design brief development and the quality of consultant teams.

What is good design in the planning system?

Good design is NSW Government policy. All projects, large or small, should demonstrate good design. This expectation is now embedded in the objects of the EP&A Act. There are a range of guidelines and processes that support good design within the NSW planning system such as the Apartment Design Guide (NSW Department of Planning and Environment 2015) and local design review panels.

What is design excellence?

Design excellence as a term usually describes a requirement or expectation that a project will achieve a level of design quality that is above and beyond the usual.

What is design excellence in the planning system?

An Environmental Planning Instrument (EPI) may require a project to demonstrate design

excellence through the undertaking of a design excellence process. The term thus has two applications in the planning system – as an outcome and as a process. Design excellence clauses in EPIs are typically applied to projects that are prominent for physical or cultural reasons, or used to drive positive change towards better design in areas where this has been a challenge. Design excellence requirements can be triggered by factors such as capital investment value, building height or lot size. Because design excellence is connected to project prominence, it implies a higher standard of design quality than ‘good design’ and requires the implementation of a process that is more rigorous – often a design competition.

Is there a difference between good design and design excellence?

Yes and no. Design excellence is often used interchangeably with good design when referring to an aspiration for high quality design in a project generally. But in the planning system, design excellence usually has specific statutory definitions that refer to both a required process and the expected standard of the outcome.

Good design and design excellence processes

Design review

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

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projects, it is best done by panels comprising cross-disciplinary built environment experts. Design review for a smaller, simpler project might be internal consultation with colleagues.

Design review is an internationally tried and tested process proven to lift the quality of design projects.

Design review in the planning system

Design review is widely used and accepted across NSW where it is used by consent authorities at a local and State level to improve the design quality of projects. Design review panels (DRPs) and similar (design advisory panels, design excellence panels, etc.) currently exist in many local government areas, and at a State level have been established for individual large-scale projects as a requirement of planning approval. The Apartment Design Guide strongly recommends the establishment of DRPs at a local level to review buildings that fall under *State Environmental Planning Policy No 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development* (SEPP 65) as part of their assessment.

NSW State Design Review Panel

The NSW State Design Review Panel (SDRP) pilot is a design review process established by the Government Architect NSW (GANSW) to provide design advice to the Minister for Planning on State Significant Development (SSD) and State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) projects. The pilot NSW SDRP will run for 12

months and will demonstrate and test opportunities to lift the design quality of the built environment across the State, as well as ways to streamline the assessments process for SSDs and SSIs.

Design competitions

A design competition is a competitive design process in which multiple entrants submit design proposals to the same brief. An independent panel of design professionals will select the successful design based on an agreed set of design-related selection criteria.

How can GANSW help?

GANSW can help by working with you to understand and define your requirements and make recommendations about good design and design excellence processes, including:

- advising on a suitable process to achieve the design outcomes you require for your project
- providing resources and advice on how to organise a design competition
- providing guidance on establishing a design review process or participating in the NSW SDRP.

Further information

For more information see the GANSW website ga.nsw.gov.au

Government Architect NSW

GANSW provides design leadership

in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. In this role, GANSW works across government, the private sector and the community to establish policy and practice guides for achieving good design. GANSW provides strategic advice across design, planning and development to support good policy, programs, projects and places.

Contact GANSW

GANSW makes every effort to keep its advice up to date. From time to time we will release new versions of these advisory notes. For further advice, or if you think there is information missing, please contact GANSW.

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