Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter

What is the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

The Charter will describe the rights of NSW communities to have access to quality public space and provides a NSW Government commitment to principles guiding planning, delivery and management of public space.

It 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.

All NSW Government agencies will be asked to endorse the final Charter when it is released in early 2021. Local government, industry and other groups caring for and using public space across NSW will be encouraged to utilise the principles in their strategies and planning.

Why was the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter developed?

Charters have a long and important history protecting the rights of people to access quality space, stretching back to the Charter of the Forest in 1217 and most importantly includes the UN Charter of Public Space.

The NSW Government has made a commitment to increasing access to quality green and public space by 2023 across urban areas in NSW, through its Premier’s Priority for Greener Public Spaces. The NSW Public Spaces Charter is a key project in supporting the achievement of this commitment for communities across NSW.

There are many NSW Government agencies responsible for public space and by signing up to the Charter, we are asking them to agree to plan, design, manage and activate public spaces they are responsible for in line with its principles.

What public spaces does the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter apply to?

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 (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.

Who is the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter for?

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 range of benefits include:

- A consistent definition of quality across public spaces in NSW

- The Charter will help shape the thinking of citizens and communities, State Government and agencies, Local Government, and stakeholders on public space planning, delivery and management.

- It will build on and unify the broad range of existing public space policies, strategies, plans and programs that exist across NSW Government.

### How has the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter been 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, because it’s what makes people feel safe, welcome, included and a place they 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 ones have four key qualities:

- 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 do I provide feedback on the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter?

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

We are seeking feedback on the draft principles and also on how they could be applied. When published, the Charter will also include ideas, information and resources to support users to commit to the principles in the Charter.

We are asking for the community feedback on the draft Charter from 20 October 2020 to 11.59 on 17 November 2020.


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

Following the public exhibition, community feedback will be reviewed and incorporated into the final NSW Public Spaces Charter, which is scheduled for release in early 2021. We will also compile a summary of feedback on the Draft NSW Public Spaces Charter.

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 ensure increased access to quality public space in NSW.

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1 Project for Public Spaces, *What makes a successful place?* Retrieved from [https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat](https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat)