

7. VISUAL AMENITY

7.1 Explanation

“Visual Amenity” is a measure of the visual quality of a site or area experienced by residents, workers or visitors. It is the collective impact of the visual components which make a site or an area pleasant to be in. In this section, the term assumes a broad context, relating to elements which contribute to the visual pleasantness and character of towns, localities and neighbourhoods rather than any site specific considerations.

7.2 Key Issues

Visual amenity issues are intrinsic to the planning assessment of all development proposals, but in the assessment of an individual proposal, the issues tend to be localised. Some amenity issues cannot be addressed purely on a local level, as they relate to a larger area and number of land parcels. Others cannot be adequately addressed in sections of the Strategic Plan relating to a specific preferred dominant land use, as the issues cut across land uses. Nevertheless, individual proposals contribute towards an end result on a cumulative basis, so there is a need to separately deal with those amenity issues which transcend the applicability of the specific sections.

The following summarises the key issues forming the basis for a Visual Amenity strategy. They include:

- the importance of water bodies, such as oceans, beaches, rivers and lakes, and public accessibility to them in characterising the amenity associated with Sunshine Coast life, which must be balanced against managing the pressure for coastal urban growth;
- the significance of the Shire’s vegetated character, particularly in forming backdrops to urban areas including the rich agricultural areas in the railway towns’ corridor, the Dulong/Kureelpa Ridge, Forest Glen and the edges of waterways such as the north shore of Maroochy River;
- the prominence and uniqueness of the Shire’s landform on the character and scenic quality of localities including Buderim Mountain, the ridges between the railway towns and the coast (such as Kiel Mountain), isolated mountains such as Ninderry, Peregian, Coolum and Eewah, the Blackall and Conondale Ranges and islands such as Mudjimba, Chambers and Goat;
- the effect of the visual quality, scale and character of built environment elements relative to natural elements such as hills and vegetation and the way in which they are visually contained by the natural elements;
- the importance of “naturalness” to the perceived character of the Sunshine Coast particularly where it is challenged by large scale or tall development which is visible from a significant proportion of the region;

- the compatibility of new development to the scale, character and visual quality of the existing urban fabric and landscape with the potential impact on local character and identity;
- the failure of most settlements to establish a prominent focus for community interaction which can act as a catalyst to social activity and to creating a community spirit;
- the significance of strong architectural traditions in characterising some of the Shire’s older settlements;
- continued pressure for more urban development and higher-density urban renewal, especially on coastal fringes; causing settlements to merge and leading to a loss of distinctive identities;
- the impact of vegetation loss on the character of many localities particularly where forested slopes are cleared and not replanted, such as in many rural residential and new urban development;
- the impact of development, clearing, the provision of infrastructure and extractive industry operations on scenic quality particularly on hills and slopes;
- the importance of major roads, particularly the Sunshine Motorway, Bruce Highway and the David Low Way, which offer ever changing experiences of the diverse range of landscapes evident in the Shire, in conveying a Shire image to residents and tourists;
- the failure of the landscape treatment of many developments to respond appropriately to the sub-tropical vegetative characteristics of the Shire; and
- the proliferation of signage in both urban and rural areas and its adverse impact on scenic character.

7.3 Visual Amenity Strategy

The following outlines the planning strategy developed to address the issues raised above.

- (1) Primarily the Strategic Plan Map protects the more significant geological formations, land possessing the highest environmental values, land which is steep or otherwise constrained in its suitability for rural activity and closer settlement, and land which has other aesthetic qualities. This is achieved through the allocation of the Conservation and Rural or Valued Habitat areas on the Strategic Plan Map.
- (2) Many visually important landforms, landcover and other cultural features have also been identified as having scenic values within the Key Character Element description of the Shire’s Planning Areas in Volume 3 of this Planning Scheme. These places or features are specifically identified under the Key Character Elements description of Design-Intent, Landscape and Built Form, and or Environmental Values in the Planning Area description. It is

intended that the identification of a site within a scenic area will influence the design, character and intensity of the proposal.

- (3) Provision is also made to maintain visual amenity within the Shire on an application basis by the inclusion of objectives and implementation criteria relating to a range of visual amenity issues.
- (4) Visual amenity has been considered in formulating the Planning Area and Precinct provisions (in Volume 3 of the Planning Scheme).

7.4 Objectives and Implementation Measures

7.4.1 To Protect the Integrity of Water Bodies and Their Edges and Enhance Access to them

The Shire’s oceans, rivers, creeks and lakes and their beaches/foreshores identify the Shire as an interesting coastal environment with an equally interesting hinterland. Their maintenance as dominant and accessible features of the landscape recognises their importance to the Shire’s natural environment and enhances the Shire’s image as a desirable place to live and tourism destination.

Implementation

- (1) In assessing relevant development applications in the immediate vicinity of water bodies, Council shall consider the visual impact of the proposal on the water bodies.
- (2) Council shall also consider how public access to those water bodies is enhanced by the proposal.
- (3) In assessing the adequacy of proposals to satisfy this objective, Council shall have regard to:
 - the maintenance of coastal, waterway and terrestrial environments and ecosystems;
 - the provision of public parks and soft landscaping;
 - whether the proposal is visible from the water bodies and compromises their character;
 - the provision of roadways and pedestrian and bicycle paths from urban areas to water bodies; and
 - the provision of buffers and preservation of vegetation along waterways.

7.4.2 To Maintain the Dominance of Important Topography and Natural Vegetation over Urban Development

Considerable emphasis has been given to the importance of the topography and natural vegetation within the Shire to the visual amenity and character of many

urban and rural areas as well as to the quality of life of residents and to the image of the Shire to visitors.

In urban situations, the character of an area can be diminished by an inappropriate development of prominent land, particularly steep, well vegetated sites on the edge of urban areas or serving as a backdrop to them. The preservation of such features in their natural state is an intrinsic part of maintaining and enhancing the character of some urban areas.

In rural situations, character is influenced by land uses and land management practices. The land use planning strategies set out in the urban and rural sections of the Strategic Plan aim to minimise inappropriate land uses. With respect to land management, while the conduct of most rural pursuits is not subject to Council approval, Council has a role in controlling and guiding the establishment and management of some rural and non-urban uses.

Implementation

- (1) In assessing relevant applications for development in urban or rural areas, Council may have regard to scenic values. Council will consider the implications of development on land which makes significant contributions to the character of the locality. It may seek to ensure that:
 - specific land is left in its natural state and, for visual amenity purposes, that land is dedicated to the Crown, subject to affected landowners receiving just compensation, or otherwise managed or protected through statutory mechanisms and/or management agreements;
 - the creation of fragmented landscape systems and islands of vegetation cover be avoided; and
 - urban design principles are adopted to retain the dominance of the natural environment and to respond to topographic features such as ridgelines, spurs, knolls, rock outcrops, water bodies.
- (2) Specific attention will be focussed on development in the vicinity of the ridges between the railway towns and the coast (such as Kiel Mountain), isolated mountains such as Rosemount, Ninderry, Peregian, Coolum and Eewah, the Blackall and Conondale Ranges, Buderim Escarpments, and development which may intrude into sightlines between urban areas and Mudjimba, Chambers and Goat Islands.
- (3) In assessing relevant applications for development in the rural areas, Council will have regard to whether the proposal would compromise an existing continuous rural character, either by virtue of the proposal itself or, in the case of a lot reconfiguration, by virtue of the compromises that may be effected on viable rural production.

- (4) Council may initiate or support education programmes aimed at encouraging land owners in rural areas to utilise appropriate land management techniques.
- (5) Council may, with the cooperation of landowners, investigate other means of protecting land with important landscape values including acquisition, voluntary management agreements and infrastructure agreements.

7.4.3 To Manage Development Along and Visible from the Shire's Major Roads so as to Project an Attractive Shire Image to Motorists and to Enhance their Function as Open Space Corridors

The Shire's major roads, particularly the Bruce Highway, Sunshine Motorway and David Low Way, display to residents and visitors the Shire's natural and built environment. They consequently have an influence on people's perception of the Shire as a place to live or visit.

Implementation

- (1) Council may request that it be demonstrated how a proposal on sites abutting the Bruce Highway, Sunshine Motorway and David Low Way and other major roads as identified by Council, or on sites close to and visible from these roads, is to project an attractive image to motorists travelling along the relevant road.
- (2) Council may not support or may require modifications to proposals which may compromise the character of a rural, natural or otherwise intrinsically attractive scene. Unless the proposal is considered unacceptably intrusive, modifications may relate to elements such as buffering, landscaping, building setbacks and lot reconfiguration design.
- (3) Council will seek to implement landscape works in the Shire's major road reserves. Where a development site abuts a State controlled road, such landscaping is to be provided as part of the buffering for visual amenity and for traffic noise, emissions and dust attenuation.

7.4.4 To Retain and Enhance the Townscape Character of Discrete Local Communities and Rural Towns

One of the major attractions of living in and visiting the Shire's rural towns and some of its discrete local communities is their village character, the general subservience of the buildings to the natural environment and the compatibility of building scale and character evident throughout the towns and localities. Enhancement of that character is beneficial to residents and to the Shire's image as an attractive and interesting place in which to live or holiday.

Implementation

- (1) In assessing relevant applications for development of land in the Shire's rural towns and in discrete urban centres that display cohesive characters, the Council will encourage the enhancement of that character having regard to:
 - the intent and desired character of the Planning Area and Precinct in which the site is situated;
 - the scale and general design elements of buildings and structures relative to that town or locality in general and to that on adjoining land in particular. The extent to which building design elements are to be considered important will depend on the architectural significance and integrity of groups of existing buildings;
 - the existence of elements common to site development in the immediate vicinity, such as the awnings, built to the alignment buildings, one to two storey construction, street alignment shop-fronts and rear parking common to rural town centres;
 - for Local centres and General stores, the relationship of the centre or store to its residential environs; and
 - the importance of dominant natural elements, such as significant vegetation stands or prominent hills, in forming the local character.
- (2) Detailed Planning Areas and Precincts have been prepared to guide decisions in specific locations such as the rural towns of Eumundi, Palmwoods, Woombye, Eudlo and Yandina.
- (3) Consideration will be given to such design and aesthetic features as:
 - the height, scale and form of buildings;
 - design details such as awnings and verandahs, parapets, fenestration; and
 - the colour and texture of materials.
- (4) Local area planning has been undertaken to address broader community issues including road network, streetscape, character, parks, car parking, pedestrian and bicycle access, and the like in conjunction with the issues noted in (3) above.

7.4.5 To Minimise Visual Scarring of Significant Natural Elements

Development land clearing, works associated with infrastructure and extractive industries can visually scar prominent landscapes which are important elements of an area’s character.

Implementation

- (1) With respect to applications relating to any works on steep, distinctively vegetated and highly visible sites, Council may request the applicant to carry out a landscape sensitivity analysis to determine the nature of works that may be sustained by the environment without longer term scarring. Areas identified for specific consideration include the edges of the Buderim Plateau, Blackall Range, the Conondale Range and in and around Nambour and Coolum.
- (2) Where possible, Council will seek commitments from public infrastructure authorities to similarly analyse the landscape sensitivity of land proposed to be used for infrastructure corridors.

7.4.6 To Ensure that Signage Complements the Character of Rural and Urban Areas

Signage in urban and rural areas often conveys an image about the locality in which it is located. It can clutter scenes, contribute to visual confusion, exacerbate an unattractive scene and detract from an otherwise attractive scene. Control of the amount and the erection of signage can make a significant contribution to the character of localities and the image of the Shire.

Implementation

- (1) In general, Council will require signage which complements the premises on which they are displayed and the character of the surrounding locality. They should not adversely affect the area with their appearance, size, illumination, overshadowing or in any other way.
- (2) Council will regulate the design and siting of advertisements using the Planning Scheme code provisions.

7.4.7 To Encourage the Use of Landscaping Which Reflects the Sub-Tropical Character of the Shire’s Natural Vegetation

Landscaping is a vital element in integrating the built environment with the natural environment and minimising the impact of development on its surroundings. It can also contribute to amenity by hiding obtrusive elements, providing shade and creating interesting streetscapes. Species native to the local area can grow well without special care, can demonstrate

a link with the natural environment and can enhance fauna habitats.

Implementation

- (1) In assessing applications for development in urban or rural areas, the Council will encourage and/or require the use of semi-tropical and sub-tropical species native to the region or the locality in accordance with the Planning Scheme code provisions.

7.4.8 To Encourage the Rehabilitation of Degraded Land Areas

Locations exist throughout the Shire where earlier land management practices or failed rural activities have led to the land being degraded. Degraded land as well as having potential stability and erosion problems can also have a poor visual presentation in a Shire that values its amenity. Encouragement to owners to rehabilitate is desirable.

Implementation

- (1) Council will assist Landcare groups wherever practical to achieve the rehabilitation of degraded land.
- (2) Council will assist in making land owners aware of the negative aspects of degraded land and encourage them to undertake appropriate rehabilitation.

7.4.9 To Encourage the Design of Buildings and Landscapes which Relate to their Physical Context and are User Friendly

Building design can produce a more livable building if the design has regard to local climate, effective use of passive (low energy) design principles, the appropriate use of native landscapes and the physical relationship to adjoining buildings or potential buildings. The visual character of the building is important if it is to be reflective of the Sunshine Coast and respect the immediate amenity in which it is to be located. The building design must not lose sight of its purpose and its accessibility to its users.

Implementation

- (1) Council will develop local area codes for the Shire’s Town and Village centre Precincts and Local centre Precincts to ensure that the site layouts, including building and landscape designs, address local climate and topography including such issues as the use of space, effective use of passive (low energy) design principles and site excavation. Centre design codes will be developed for Maroochydore, Nambour, Mooloolaba, Sippy Downs, Coolum and the Rail Towns.
- (2) Development is designed to be in accordance with Council’s Planning Scheme codes to ensure that:

- Landscape works appropriately incorporate the use of endemic and non-native species, and shade planting; and
 - Pedestrian, disabled and vehicular access, vehicle parking and service areas are adequate, functional and do not unduly compromise other aspects of the development or its visual amenity from the street frontages.
- (3) Council in assessing applications will have regard to the visual character of a development to ensure that the character of the particular Planning Area, the immediate amenity and the historical and cultural character of the area in which it is located has been considered. The visual character of a development will also integrate any associated infrastructure which must be designed as a part of the total visual presentation.