

App A Local Charter for Sunshine Coast Places



Charter for Sunshine Coast Places

December 2011

Introduction

The panel's consideration of 'Urban Design Values for the Sunshine Coast' arose out of a request from the CEO of the Sunshine Coast Council at the inaugural meeting of the panel in 2010. The CEO saw the need for a high level strategic document which described the principles and values which could guide development on the Sunshine Coast, be it policy, private development or public infrastructure.

At the same time, the Queensland Board of Urban Places developed an overarching 'Charter for Queensland Places', which outlines seven principles to guide the scoping, planning, procurement, development, transformation and evaluation of places.

These principles effectively describe the qualities which all public spaces across the State should exhibit, and are therefore applicable to places on the Sunshine Coast. However they are generic and not place specific.

With reference to Sunshine Coast places therefore, the Board's Charter will apply, but it needs to be supplemented by a document which relates specifically to the Sunshine Coast.

Purpose and Intent

The strategy adopted by the Panel therefore has been to identify the specific values and principles which:

- have been responsible for defining the unique and particular urban and rural character of the region, and which
- are valued by its residents and visitors, and which
- need to be respected if the region is to continue to exhibit that character under the pressures and opportunities presented by growth and change.

The Board's document can be seen to identify principles for the design of 'good' places. The Panel's document can be seen to identify principles for the design of places which embody the character of the Sunshine Coast.

The two documents are therefore complementary, and need to be used together in the design of Sunshine Coast places, and referenced when decisions are made which in any way affect the future urban and rural development of the Sunshine Coast.

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1. OUR COMMUNITY OF TOWNSHIPS

The Sunshine Coast consists of a considerable diversity of places, each with their distinct identity. In particular, the cities, towns and villages are clearly identifiable by their defined form and clear separation from each other by sizeable areas of natural landscape and agricultural land.

The maintenance of the clear and physically distinct form of cities, towns, and villages in the region, and of the separation between them, is critical to the future urban character of the region.



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2. OUR COASTAL CONTEXT

The attractive and relaxed urban character of the Sunshine Coast has been largely determined by its location along the coastline of the southern Coral Sea.

The constant proximity of the ocean and rivers and the extensive open natural space they provide has generated a built environment which is focused on the ocean and the beaches.

The urban form draws its amenity from the expanse of open space provided by the ocean and by the beach zone (natural headlands, coastal beaches, dunes, and estuaries), and from the views to these landscape elements.

It is critical to the urban future of the Sunshine Coast that dominant presence of the natural coastal environment is maintained throughout the process of urban growth and intensification.



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3. *OUR RELAXED CASUAL ENVIRONMENT*

The presence of coastal landscape elements and the rural hinterland described above, in conjunction with a mild climate, has generated an urban environment which is generally open, relaxed, and where the surrounding landscape dominates the built form.

This informality permeates the structure and layout of the urban forms of the region, and encourages development which is in organic balance with topography, climate, and landscape.

It also structures the material palette of the urban environment, promoting more natural and organic materials over the more formal and civic.

The resulting fit between 'relaxed informal lifestyle' and urban character is a defining characteristic of the Sunshine Coast region.



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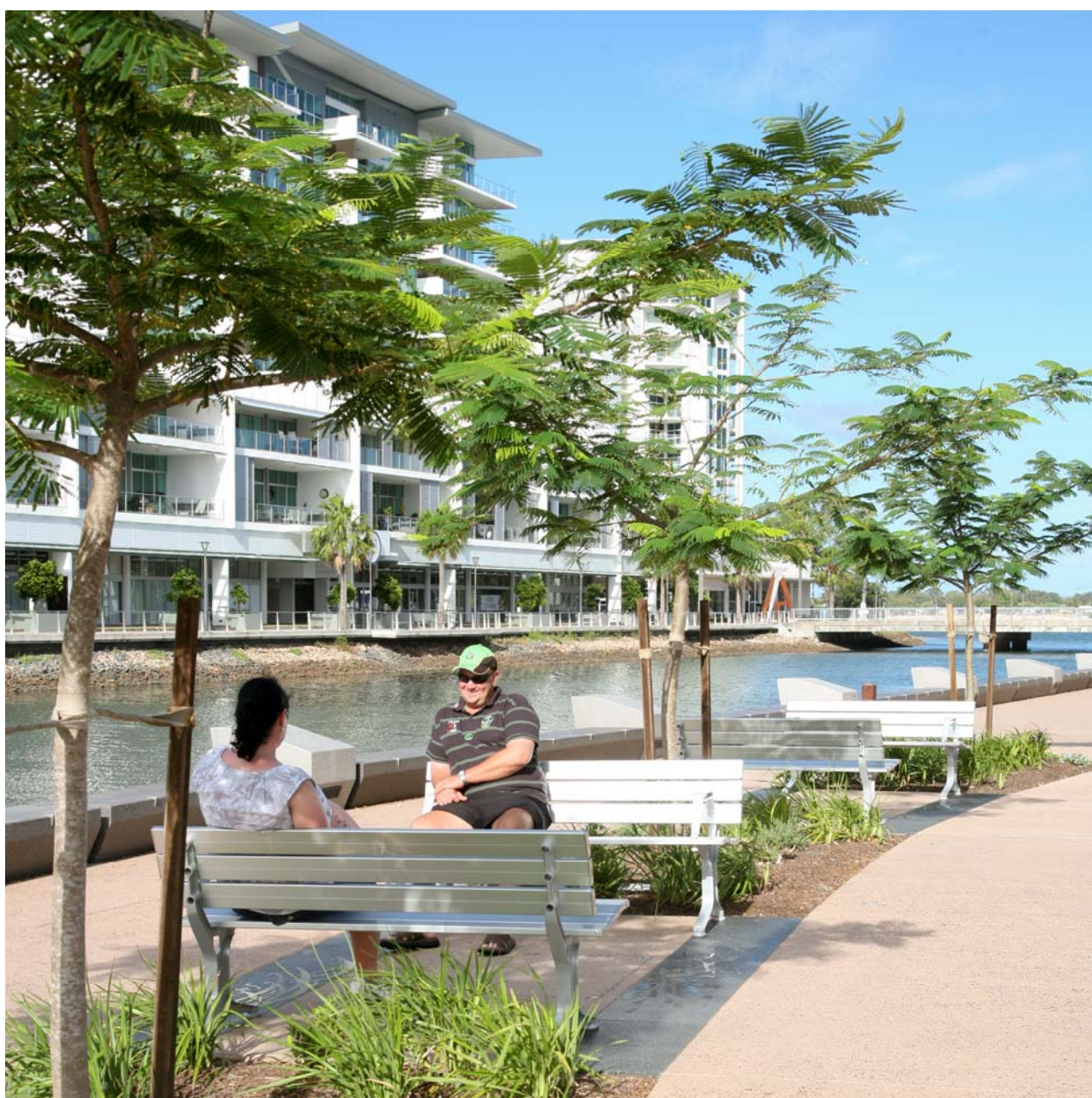
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4. OUR HUMAN AND COMMUNITY SCALE

The rural origins of the region has given it a human scale where the individual and the small community have not been dominated by urban form and infrastructure, even during the last decades of more intense urbanisation.

The urban places which have resulted are notably distinct from those of the large regional or capital city, and are scaled for occupation and use by individuals and small groups, rather than large crowds, corporations or institutions.

Rapidly increasing population in the region, unless carefully managed and designed for, will threaten this balance between people and urban form, and remove an essential characteristic of the region.



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5. OUR PRODUCTIVE AND FERTILE RURAL BASE

The region has long been sustained by its agricultural and seafood industries, and in turn, these industries have lent a distinct character to the Sunshine Coast environment, both in terms of physical presence, and associated lifestyles.

The preservation of rural agricultural land and working waterfronts is not always easily achieved in the face of residential development pressure, but without their substantial and genuine presence, the longstanding character of the environment of the region will be substantially affected to the detriment of the resident population.

In addition to providing valuable buffers between towns and villages, agricultural land provides significant landscape amenity and environmental well-being to the region as a whole.



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6. OUR VIEWS AND VISTAS

The unique landscape and topography of the region is characterized by the coastal belt of ocean, beaches and dominant headlands, and a hinterland of low flat country interspersed with spectacular mountain ranges and volcanic peaks.

This contrast of low beach/high headland, and low plain/high mountain creates a visually rich and striking landscape which clearly expresses the structure and form of the entire region.

As a consequence, views and vistas are extremely important in defining the character of the region, and important to preserve.

The number and diversity of these views and vistas across the region is large, and difficult to record definitively. However it is critical to the preservation of the character of the region that all new development is assessed in terms of its impact on existing views and vistas alongside other impacts.



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7. THE DIVERSE CHARACTER OF OUR RURAL TOWNS

The towns across the region are long established and each has developed its character based on its original function (timber town, sugar town, beef town) married with its particular landscape and topographical context. Each township is therefore unique, with its own special urban character, form, typology and scale.

The coastal towns have generally been more heavily subjected to sustained tourist development pressure and population pressure than their rural counterparts, though they too retain different and unique urban characters.

A sophisticated understanding (deeper than the merely picturesque) of the character of these towns is essential to enable the drafting of detailed development plans for each.



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8. THE STRONG PRESENCE OF VEGETATION

The lower density of historical development in the region, the outdoor lifestyle, and the spectacular presence of coastal and rural landscape have made the significant presence of vegetation a defining characteristic of the region.

The recent expanding full variety of urban development components (residential, industrial, retail, warehousing, roads and other infrastructure) across the region have not been made to recognise or provide for the higher than normal presence of landscape within their planning and design. As a consequence, these developments lack a critical aspect of Sunshine Coast character, and diminish that of the older environments they surround or replace.



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9. OUR RESPONSIVE DESIGN ETHOS AND GREEN CREDENTIALS

The Sunshine Coast has always been notable for its remarkable natural assets. Its professional design community has developed a sensitive contextual and climate-responsive architectural approach which is internationally recognised.

Its local communities have developed grass-roots products, initiatives, industries and attitudes which are respectful of and in balance with the natural environment, and its local authorities and community groups have encouraged sustainable practices and low energy usage across the environment.

The next wave of development pressure, and the changing climate parameters, will necessitate an even greater focus on high quality climate and energy responsive design and planning initiatives if the natural assets and lifestyle of the region are to be preserved.

