

better places and spaces:

a policy for the built environment in Western Australia



Office of the **Government Architect**



An aerial photograph of Western Australia, showing the coastline on the left and the inland terrain in shades of brown and green. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

premier's statement

Western Australians have been blessed with a State of great beauty and reward. But with this gift comes great responsibility. Our wealth and economic momentum mean growth is both welcome and inevitable, but we have an obligation to ensure that this growth is carefully planned – and not allowed to happen unchecked.

Harnessing the opportunity presented by our state's prosperity, to shape the future of our cities and the places we live, work and enjoy will allow us to deliver on economic, social, cultural and environmental goals to the benefit of all Western Australians.


We spend a large proportion of our daily lives engaging with the built environment – these places need to be safe, attractive, functional, productive, sustainable, efficient, and inspiring. The nature of the built environment is fundamental to our quality of life. Our communities, housing, schools, hospitals, parks and public spaces need to work well and contribute to economic prosperity, social equity, cultural vitality and environmental benefits for all.

Better places and spaces return significant dividends. Good schools improve learning outcomes. Good hospitals can reduce reliance on drugs and shorten rehabilitation times. Good workplaces promote improved performance, communication and wellbeing. These impacts are true right across the built environment and it is our responsibility to shape the spaces in which we live, work and learn with due care.

These matters must be dealt with holistically. It is critical that we adopt a whole-of-government approach, which galvanises all departments and agencies, and ensures consistent, robust and informed decision-making. This policy is the commitment by the Government to ensure that our built environment provides places and spaces worthy of Western Australia.

WA is a creative state. Western Australians have a widespread reputation for excellence across research, design and the arts. Our unique identity is steeped in our relationship to the land and the environment. This *Better Places and Spaces* policy celebrates our prowess and uniqueness, and gives us the tools to shape our future with wisdom and vigour.

HON Colin Barnett MEd MLA
Premier, Minister for State Development
January 2013



minister's statement

Good design in our built environment is crucial to achieving value for money. Good design means creating buildings and making spaces and places that properly fulfil their purpose, stand the test of time, are safe and are environmentally responsive. It is vital that our investment in the built environment is undertaken in a considered, rigorous manner.

From inception to the delivery of our buildings and public spaces, we must apply the very best design thinking and leadership.

The State Government's investment in the built environment represents 25% of its annual budget. Capital commitment alone however, will not result in a high quality outcome. Public buildings and spaces require a continuum of investment on behalf of the community for ongoing maintenance and operational costs and must be considered carefully. Ensuring that this capital is wisely invested is a fundamental responsibility of Government. For every dollar we invest in the construction of a public building, we commit the community to an additional future cost of nine dollars over the building's life time. We must understand these economic, social and environmental imperatives and their long-term impacts.

The quality of the built environment that we live in affects all of us and we engage with the built environment in almost every aspect of our lives. Much of what we create today will be a legacy for future generations. The quality of the environment

that we leave behind will shape their prospects, responsibilities and opportunities.

Our State has the skills and capacity to create a built environment worthy of the community's expectations for today, and to meet our responsibilities for the future. We must continue to foster these skills and develop a commitment to a built environment of long-term social worth.

It is important that we acknowledge and celebrate the role of good design in contributing to an engaged, inspired and resilient community. *Better Places and Spaces* represents Government's recognition of good design and its inherent value to us all.

HON Simon O'Brien MLC
Minister for Finance; Commerce; Small Business
January 2013



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outline

The pursuit of design excellence in our public buildings and spaces is consistent with Government's commitment to seeking the best possible value from its investment in state infrastructure.

Better design will deliver better value by producing high quality, high performance facilities which will serve well the Western Australian community, both now and into the future. At the same time, it is acknowledged that these facilities must be delivered on time and within budget.



In committing to excellence in the design and procurement of public projects, this policy outlines strategies for Government leadership: for improving architectural quality in the public realm; for raising industry and community awareness about the value of good design; for recognising value for money across the life of a project; and for promoting sustainable design principles.

The policy seeks to foreground the responsibility of Government to demonstrate concern for the quality of the built environment. It details strategies for Government to become actively involved in procuring and delivering good design outcomes in its projects, in line with the Department of Treasury's Strategic Asset Management Framework .

This is important because improving the built environment is fundamental to Government being able to deliver on the full spectrum of its other social, economic and cultural policy objectives. For example, the social obligation of Government to encourage a decent, fair and inclusive society is dependent upon the quality of the built environment it creates and sustains.

Efficient and well-designed public buildings represent a sound investment; assist in stimulating local economies; promote urban regeneration;

and are important for economic competitiveness. Attention to design in public works improves the wellbeing of users, efficiency and service delivery; and results in significant reductions in whole-life costs.

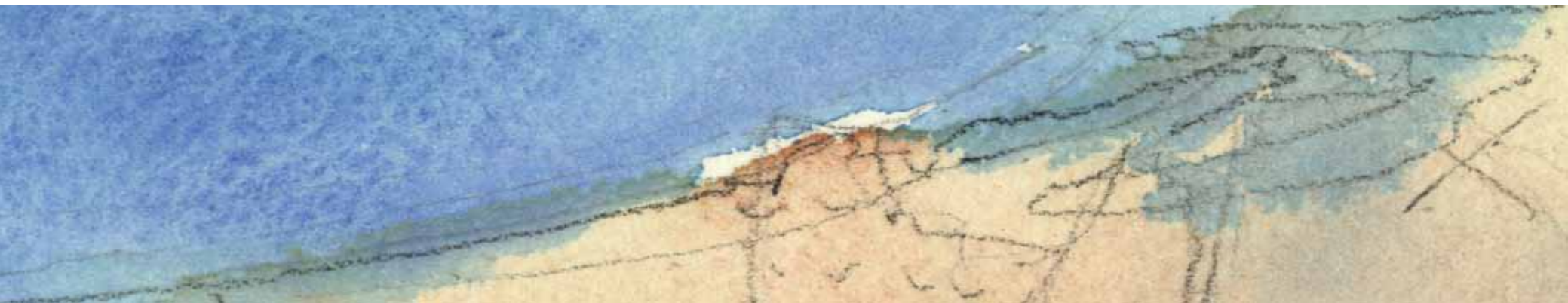
The quality of our architecture and of our urban, regional and rural places, is reflective of our cultural aspirations and sense of identity. The Government's role in promoting local culture is important in underpinning perceptions of Western Australia as a place of imagination, innovation and creativity – a desirable place to live, work and visit.

Finally, concern for the quality of our buildings and spaces is part of Government's responsibility for the conservation and continuity of our built heritage. What we build now affects how we conserve the past and dictates how we might achieve our objectives for a sustainable future.



value

The intention of this policy is to deliver improvements in the quality of Western Australia's built environment. The 'built environment' includes urban spaces; constructed landscapes and places; and elements of public infrastructure. The key to achieving improvements in the performance of our places and spaces lies in the recognition of the significance and value of good design.



What is good design?

Good design is not a subjective idea: it can be defined and measured. Notions of design quality extend beyond taste, style and appearance to encompass functionality, sustainability, response to context, structural integrity, flexibility in use, and cost efficiency, both during construction and over the life of the building.

Good design results from a clearly discernable approach and must reconcile a number of often competing priorities – function, budget, site, performance and aesthetics. In this sense, design excellence is neither veneer nor luxury. Well-designed buildings add more than aesthetic value to the public realm and have the potential to contribute positively to social interaction, economic activity, cultural vitality and deliver sound environmental performance.

Most importantly, good design – whether in the form of new build, refurbishment or maintenance works – results in an environment that performs well for all users and the broader community.

Good design should:

- make a positive contribution to the location, the environment and the community
- reflect community ambitions and expectations
- add value and reduce whole-life costs
- create environments that are safe to construct and safe to use
- create flexible, durable, sustainable and ecologically sound environments for the community
- minimise waste of materials and energy and minimise pollution both in construction and use
- produce facilities that are easy and cost effective to manage, clean and maintain.



Identifying Good Design

While it is important to encourage better outcomes, it is also necessary to identify a range of parameters against which to assess design quality. A high level of architectural achievement cannot be guaranteed by the application of a set of standard rules, and simply meeting a brief does not necessarily result in an exceptional outcome.

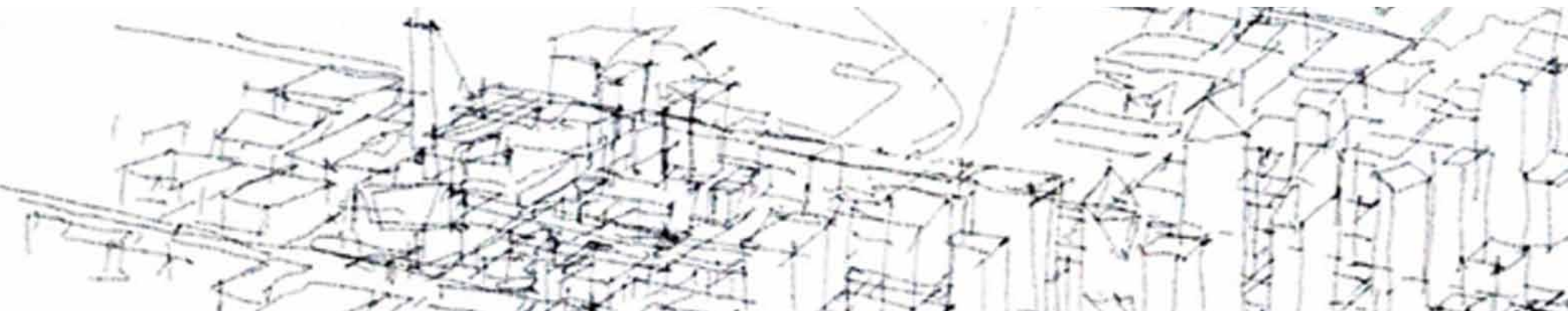
The following principles are considered fundamental to the pursuit of good design:

Innovation and creativity

Creative thinking and innovative responses to a brief are markers of good design. A well-designed project creatively reconciles aesthetics and functionality; contributes to the wellbeing, safety and productivity of all users; and engenders a sense of civic pride.

Innovation and the exploration of design possibilities are encouraged by defining qualitative requirements at the earliest stage of briefing and can deliver competitive advantage by facilitating better environmental performance, better service delivery and attracting staff and users.

Innovation and creativity will improve procurement procedures and building management strategies. Careful consideration of the local market will enable adaptation of procurement processes to suit individual projects, deliver new solutions to construction and maintenance problems and improve the technical performance of buildings.



Functionality and build quality

Good design delivers high quality, fit-for-purpose buildings and spaces and responds intelligently to briefing requirements to provide both economic and social value. It optimises functional activity and provides efficiency for both staff and users while contributing positively to the public realm.

Good design also contributes to the safety and security of our public places by considering their legibility, visibility and degree of public access; and by taking into account appropriate land uses.

Good design also ensures that a building is constructed on whole-life cost principles using good quality, durable materials in a suitable manner in order to minimise maintenance.

Good design avoids the frivolous application of expensive materials and the unwarranted incorporation of lavish features. Instead, it seeks to achieve the highest quality functional outcome for a given brief within the confines of budget, program and technology.

Good design avoids over-specification and employs appropriate construction processes. This results in competitive capital costs and ensures savings on maintenance and running costs over the life of a building.

Efficiency and sustainability

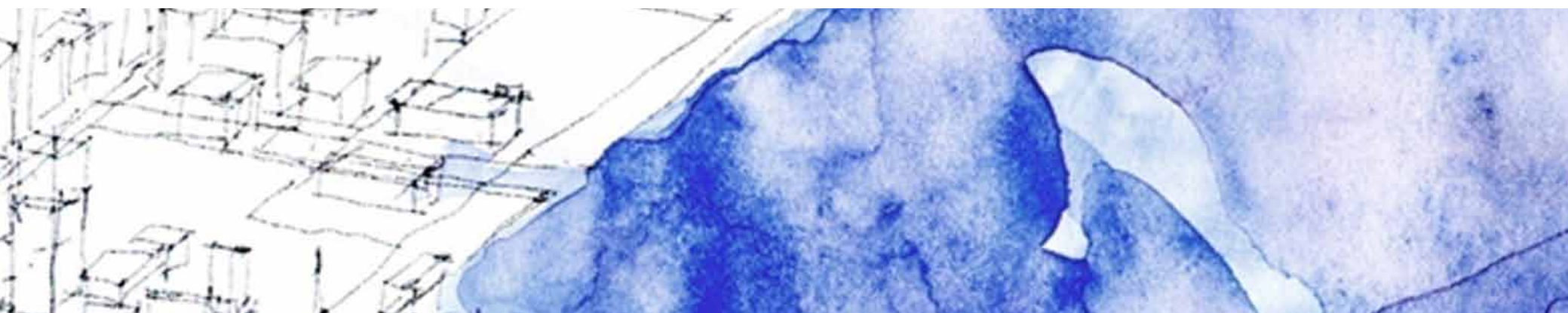
Good design takes full account of sustainability and environmental concerns, resulting in buildings that are less resource-intensive and provide better environments in which to live and work. Sustainable design approaches take into consideration factors such as solar orientation, natural lighting, maintenance costs, energy and water consumption, waste and recycling; and incorporate flexibility to meet future needs.

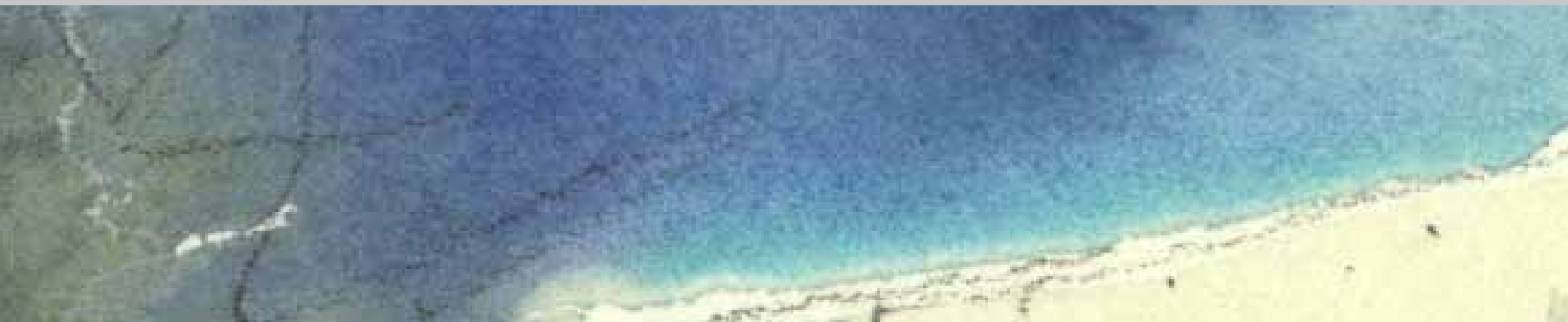
Sustainability also relates to the conservation, reuse and adaptation of existing buildings and recognition of the economic, social and cultural value of our landscapes and built fabric.

Responsiveness to context

Western Australia's unique built heritage and quality of place contribute to its collective sense of identity.

Good design is distinguished by careful responses to the inherited urban fabric and existing building stock, as well as to the state's diverse and unique natural landscapes. It also demonstrates a considered relationship with the character of its context and is appropriate to its site, purpose and status. This means that good design must contribute to a specific local architectural identity and acknowledge that today's buildings are tomorrow's heritage.





purpose

The purpose of the *Better Places and Spaces* policy is to promote the value and benefits of excellence in architecture and the built environment, to establish the parameters for the development of well-designed public buildings and spaces and to encourage and reward exemplary achievement in the field.

The policy commits Government to providing an outstanding legacy of well-designed new public buildings, streets, parks and spaces.

In this way, the policy will contribute to the development of successful, sustainable places in Western Australia.

The objectives of this policy are:

- to promote the value and benefits of excellence in architecture and the built environment; encourage debate on the role of architecture in public life; and to generate an understanding and expectation of good design within the community.
- to establish the parameters for the development of well-designed public buildings and spaces and implement procedures for promoting and facilitating design quality in public project procurement. Good design will be embraced as a means of achieving value for money and sustainable outcomes.
- to foster excellence by recognising and rewarding achievement in the field of architecture and the built environment and by nurturing local design culture.



implementation

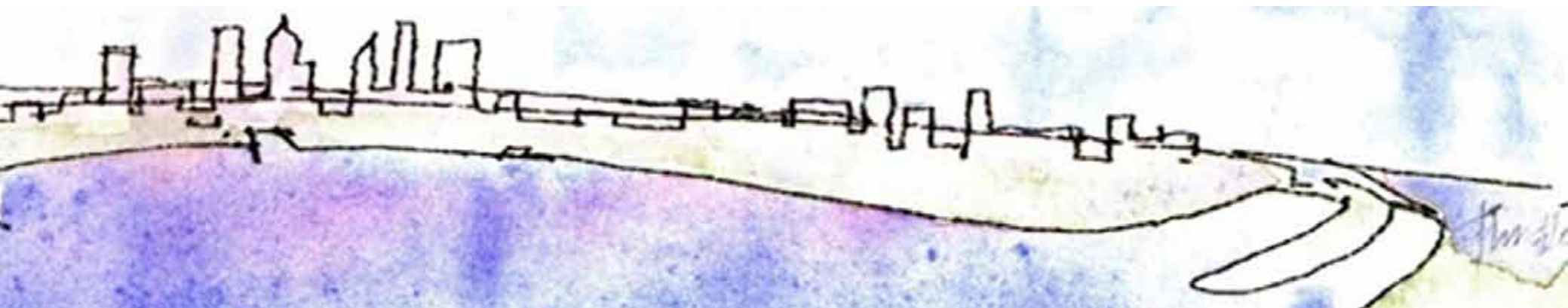
It will be the responsibility of the Office of the Government Architect (OGA) to lead the implementation of the *Better Places and Spaces* policy and to work with various government agencies to pursue the actions developed to accompany the policy. The OGA will consult with Government, industry and other bodies who may be working with the policy. The progress of implementation will be reviewed by the Office and the policy's Action Plan will be updated every two years. Progress reporting will be made to the Minister for Finance.

The Design Standards developed by the OGA (in concert with the Department of Finance's Building Management and Works unit) will provide the primary mechanism for implementing the actions associated with the policy. This will see the OGA guiding departments and agencies to prioritise design outcomes through the public works procurement process. The OGA will assist in the development of project briefs, with the appointment of architects, and will establish and chair Design Review Panels to consider architectural proposals. It will also monitor project development and outcomes.

To see the *Better Places and Spaces* policy and Action Plan online, please visit:
www.finance.wa.gov.au/betterplaces



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