

WA leads by inspiring design

STREET WISE

■ Patrick Ford

“The architecture of our urban, regional, and rural places is reflective of our cultural aspirations and sense of identity.”

Well-designed public places and spaces are fundamental to our quality of life. We spend a big proportion of our lives engaging with buildings and places that surround us and they need to be safe, attractive, functional, productive, sustainable, efficient, and inspiring.

In recognition of the importance of our built environment, the State Government has enshrined quality as a primary objective in all capital works — the first State Government to do so.

Launched earlier this year, the Better Places and Spaces Policy was developed by the Office of the Government Architect to promote the value of good design; to establish parameters for measuring and assessing good design; and to foster a local culture of design excellence.

It commits the State Government to a leadership role in improving architectural quality, raising industry and community awareness of good design, recognising value for money across the whole life of a project, and promoting sustainable design.

“It aims for buildings and spaces that work better and provide better value for money,” State Government architect Steve Woodland said. “We are in the midst of great change.”

Mr Woodland said there was a rare opportunity for West Australians to shape growth and harness prosperity so that buildings and public spaces deliver long-term benefits to communities.

The policy embraces design quality



Quality: Old Port of Arthur Head upgrade in Fremantle. Picture: Martin Farquharson

guidance developed by the Office of the Government Architect to develop better schools, hospitals, sports and justice facilities. An action plan identifies strategies to improve the built environment, including implementing minimum standards for public works and a rigorous program of design review for key State projects.

The release of the Better Places and Spaces Policy confirms a State Government commitment to pursue the best possible value from infrastructure investment. The long-term ambitions of the policy are to encourage similar expectations of private sector development.

“The policy is distinct from building codes and regulations, which are by their nature aimed at defining the lowest common denominator

requirements,” Mr Woodland said.

“This policy seeks to inspire the best possible outcomes.”

It has drawn on ample global research about how communities benefit from good design of the built environment. From the Government Architect’s point of view “the ever-growing evidence base is very exciting. It provides us with increasing sophistication in understanding the long-term impact of our buildings and spaces on people.”

Globally, good examples of built environment policies can be found in the Netherlands, Britain, Ireland and Finland. Where they do exist they have proven to be potent agents of change.

■ Patrick Ford is the senior architecture officer and Melinda Payne is the associate at the Office of the Government Architect