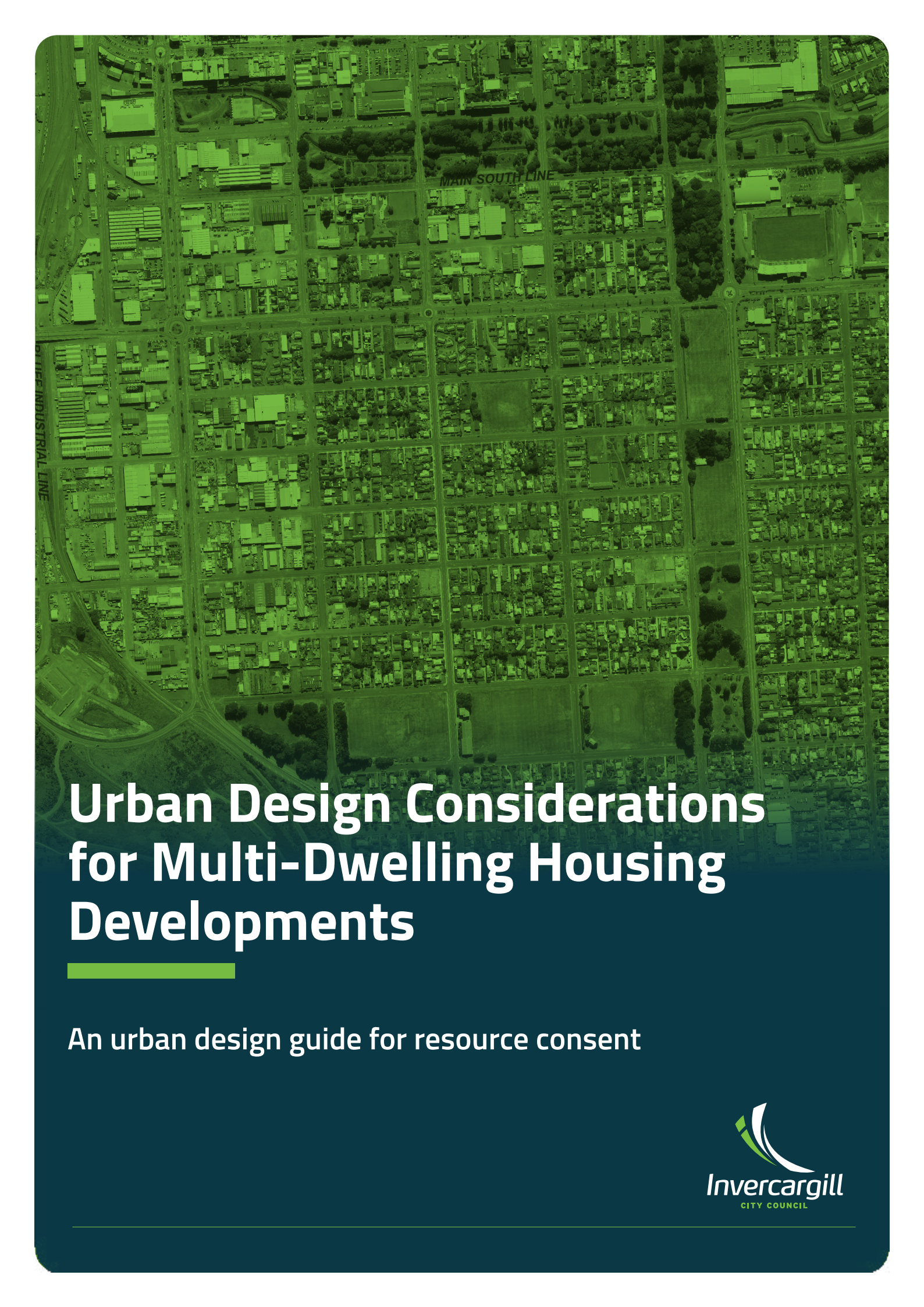




Urban Design Considerations for Multi-Dwelling Housing Developments

An urban design guide for resource consent

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Contents

What is Urban Design?	1	6.1 PRIVATE OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES	8
When are you required to incorporate good urban design?	1	6.2 BALCONIES	8
Outcomes	2	6.3 COMMUNAL OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES	8
Explanatory guidance	2	6.4 CONSERVATORIES AND SHEDS	8
1. Neighbourhood context	3	6.5 SERVICES	8
1.1 STREET PATTERN AND ORIENTATION	3	7. Access and Parking	9
1.2 CONSISTENCY	3	7.1 VISUAL IMPACT	9
2. Site layout	4	7.2 COMMON PARKING AND ACCESSWAYS	9
2.1 COMPREHENSIVE LAYOUT OF SITE	4	7.3 GARAGES	9
2.2 BUILDING LOCATION	4	7.4 TRAFFIC SAFETY	9
2.3 LAYOUT OF OPEN SPACES	4	7.5 SURFACING MATERIALS	9
3. Building design	5	8. Landscape treatment	10
3.1 FRONTAGES TO PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE AREAS	5	8.1 PERMEABLE SURFACES	10
3.2 DIVERSITY OF BUILT FORM	5	8.2 EXISTING VEGETATION	10
3.3 FAÇADE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS	5	8.3 NEW VEGETATION	10
3.4 SUN ACCESS AND SHADING	5	8.4 FENCING	10
3.5 UNIVERSAL DESIGN	5	8.5 LIGHTING	10
4. Entries to buildings	6	8.6 MAINTENANCE	10
4.1 ENTRANCE LEGIBILITY	6	9. Site facilities	11
4.2 ACTIVATION OF PUBLIC SPACES	6	9.1 STORAGE	11
4.3 PERSONAL IDENTITY	6	9.2 RUBBISH AND RECYCLING	11
5. Visual and acoustic privacy	7	9.3 BUILDING SERVICES AND UTILITIES	11
5.1 VISUAL PRIVACY	7	Other useful resources	12
5.2 ACOUSTIC PRIVACY	7		
6. Outdoor living space	8		

What is Urban Design?

Urban design focuses on the design of buildings and the spaces between buildings to create better housing developments, neighbourhoods, and cities. It is concerned with the design, arrangement and location of buildings and spaces to optimise their amenity and function for communities today, and in the future.

Good urban design responds to the existing context and contributes positively to future living environments for the well-being of residents and successful neighbourhoods. It considers a combination of efficient layout, appropriate indoor and outdoor spatial relationships, access to sunlight and natural ventilation, outlook, visual and acoustic privacy, storage, and ease of access for all age groups and degrees of mobility. This helps to achieve good-quality housing at a density appropriate to the site and context to support a well-functioning urban environment.

Well-designed housing developments can produce benefits including, but not limited to:

- Greater housing supply and choice;
- More desirable properties that hold their value;
- Accessible, warm, and dry housing;
- Lower long-term maintenance costs;
- Better safety and security, resulting in less fear of crime; and
- Increased civic pride through creating vibrant neighbourhoods.

When are you required to incorporate good urban design?

This guide has been prepared to assist developers, architects, designers, and other professionals when designing multi-dwelling and/or medium-density developments. Medium-density housing is typically more diverse and complex than other forms of residential development. There are many ways of achieving good quality living environments and this often requires creative design solutions that are hard to standardise. To achieve the objectives and policies in the Invercargill City District Plan, provisions contain a mix of both (quantitative) rules and (qualitative) matters of discretion. This guide offers relevant advice on achieving good design outcomes for housing developments, even when no resource consent is required.

In some situations, consent becomes a restricted discretionary activity or discretionary activity, and consideration of urban design outcomes regarding housing development is required:

- Residential 1, 2 and 3 Zone
 - When designing housing developments that breach allowable density (one residence per 400m² in the Residential 1 Zone, one residence per 750m² in the Residential 2 Zone, and one residence per 2000m² in the Residential 3 Zone).
- Residential 1A Zone
 - When designing medium density housing developments that breach allowable density (one residence per 300m²).
 - When designing multi-dwelling housing of 4 or more residences per site.

A range of multi-dwelling and medium-density development typologies are typically used in these Residential Zones. Densities in Residential 1, 2 and 3 Zone anticipate detached houses and semi-detached houses that are similar in character to existing developments. Densities in Residential 1A Zone anticipate more compact semi-detached houses, terraced houses, and low-rise apartments. These may be different to the existing character of this zone, and the zone character is likely to transition gradually over time.

Outcomes

The Invercargill City District Plan sets out objectives and policies for the Residential Zones that provide for good quality living environments. Residential Zones 1 and 1A set out more specific objectives and policies for more intensive developments.

This guide supports these objectives, in particular:

- That medium-density housing is enabled in defined residential areas and contributes to a well-functioning urban environment.
- That a range of housing types is provided to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population.
- That residential amenity is provided in accordance with the anticipated outcomes and character of the zone.
- That residential development is concentrated in existing urban areas.
- That new residential development in Residential Zones 1 and 1A incorporate good urban design outcomes for medium-density housing that provides a high-quality living environment for residents.

Explanatory guidance

The explanatory guidance below sets out the intent behind several urban design issues identified in the Invercargill City District Plan and provides advice on achieving good urban design outcomes. Each subsequent section of the Design Guide aligns with a matter of discretion and it is recommended that applicants refer to the explanatory guidance under these headings when preparing design statements and urban design assessments.

Not all design guidance will be achievable or relevant in every development context. In some cases, compromises may need to be made to achieve an optimum outcome. When preparing a resource consent application, such as responding to rule breaches or matters of discretion, this Design Guide can be used to demonstrate how good urban design outcomes are being broadly achieved.



1. Neighbourhood context

Good design responds and contributes to its context. New developments should generally recognise and contribute positively to the qualities and identity of the streetscape and local neighbourhood, both existing and planned.

Outcome:

That development has an integrated relationship with the surrounding neighbourhood, while introducing a new built form and character to the Residential 1A zone, by:

- Responding to and enhancing the qualities and identity of the local neighbourhood.
- Encouraging a respectful relationship between new dwellings and the neighbourhood.

1.1 STREET PATTERN AND ORIENTATION

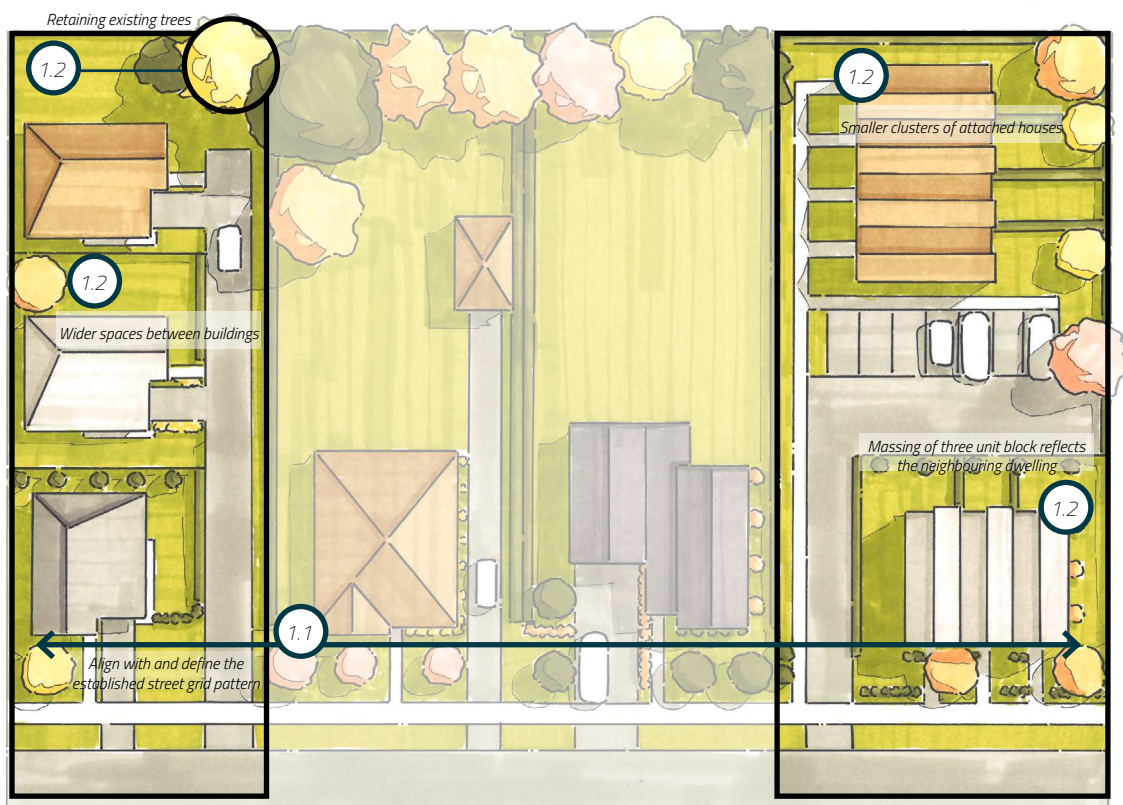
Design and locate buildings to align with and define the established street grid pattern that determines the character of the street and public interface with the neighbourhood. The block orientation in Invercargill often means building frontages conflict with good solar orientation of buildings and their associated outdoor living areas. Balance the public relationship of the building to the street and other public open spaces when considering the location of private indoor and outdoor living areas. Consider placing these spaces to the side, splitting public / private frontages, more visually open fencing and softer boundary planting.

1.2 CONSISTENCY

Multi-dwelling or medium-density residential typologies can become visually dominant if they are of a type and size that contrasts significantly with an existing pattern of detached dwellings. Seek opportunities to create cohesiveness with established neighbourhood characteristics to help integrate more intensive developments into the existing neighbourhood, including:

- Retaining established trees to maintain the maturity of the neighbourhood and add value to the development through on-site amenity.
- Configuring the location, spacing, and massing of new dwellings relative to existing patterns of development and neighbours; such as smaller clusters of attached houses, wider spacings between buildings, and aligning frontage setbacks in lower density neighbourhoods.
- Incorporating façade modulation and articulation, including recesses to break down bulk of large buildings relative to neighbouring buildings, use of roof eaves, and matching window and door proportions.
- Using complementary building materials, finishes, textures, and colours.

The importance of these characteristics will be determined by the local context. Some neighbourhoods may have more consistency than others, and change is anticipated the Residential 1A zone. While coherency is important, replicating the detail of neighbouring buildings is not required. New buildings can relate successfully to their context in several ways, while also introducing new elements.



2. Site layout

Good design comprehensively plans buildings, open spaces, and access to work as a whole in the best orientation possible.

Outcome:

That development achieves a site layout that is internally functional and has a positive relationship to the street and surrounding neighbours, by:

- Planning and locating dwellings in a way that optimises the site and provides function, amenity, and liveability within the development and for adjacent neighbours.
- Ensuring private and communal open spaces contribute positively to the site's function and visual amenity.

2.1 COMPREHENSIVE LAYOUT OF SITE

Locate and orientate dwellings to prioritise the street and minimise impacts on neighbours. This contributes to street vitality and limits relying on neighbouring properties for amenity, such as outlook. Dwellings that front onto a street or park provide good opportunities to use public space for access and views without having to provide them on site.

Configure the development to respond to the site qualities, and utilise urban land efficiently. Designing attached dwellings, using shared driveways, and grouping car parking will minimise impermeable surfaces and maximise space available for building footprints, open space, and meaningful amenity planting, such as specimen trees.

2.2 BUILDING LOCATION

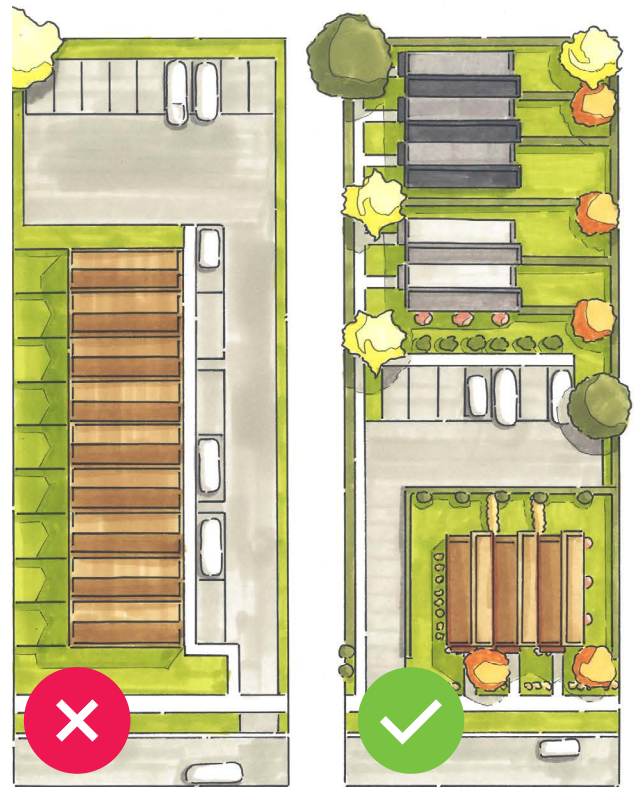
Increased separation between neighbours can be achieved by positioning outdoor living spaces, accessways, and common car parking in between buildings.

Orient dwellings and key rooms for sunlight and warmth to improve amenity and energy efficiency. This is best achieved by aligning longer façades to maximise the benefits of the sun, and by placing main living areas on the north or west side.

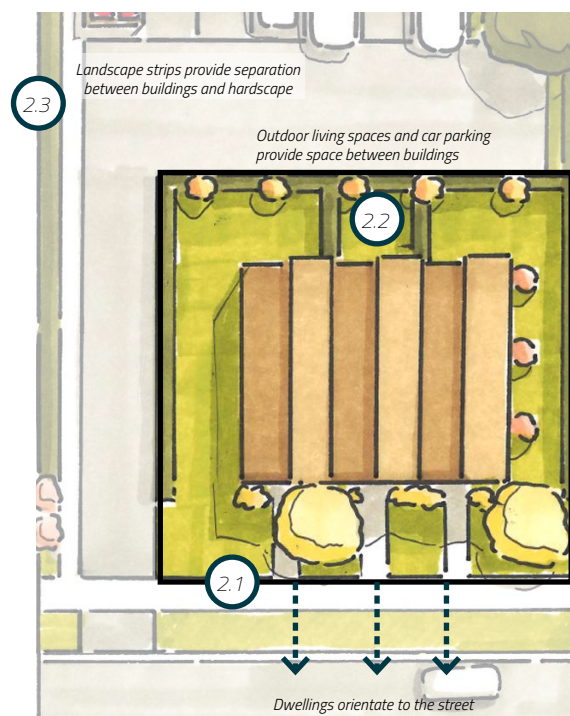
2.3 LAYOUT OF OPEN SPACES

Provide meaningful open spaces between and around buildings. Open space should be thoughtfully planned from the outset and contribute to site function and amenity, including:

- Private and communal outdoor living space should function as outdoor living rooms and provide amenity through planting. Well-designed outdoor spaces will relate to the interior living areas of the dwelling, receive sun and allow daylight into dwellings, and provide a reasonable outlook from habitable rooms.
- Landscape strips around buildings and along accessways should contribute positively to the site, by breaking down the visual dominance of large buildings, creating privacy, screening or softening fences / utility areas and managing stormwater runoff.



Poor and good site layout options



Private outdoor space and car parking provide separation between buildings

3. Building design

Good design achieves a scale and form appropriate to the existing or planned character of the street and surrounding dwellings while offering visual interest, functionality and individuality to occupants.

Outcome:

That building design provides relief from visual bulk and prominence and provides a functional living environment, by:

- Making a positive contribution to the amenity, vitality, and visual character of the street through variation in form and materials.
- Providing living environments that are healthy, comfortable, convenient, functional, and attractive for their occupants.

3.1 FRONTAGES TO PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE AREAS

Present dwelling frontages to the street and public open spaces with entrances, and generous windows orientated towards them, for ease of navigation and access for visitors and community safety. Where providing internal accessways, car parking areas, or communal open spaces servicing multiple units, treat these as public frontages. Where a dwelling fronts both, prioritise the street or public open space.

3.2 DIVERSITY OF BUILT FORM

Consider varying dwelling types, rooflines, and layouts to avoid undue repetition and inappropriate massing of buildings. Moderate repetition of well-articulated, legible, and attractive dwelling types can provide a cohesive overall development design; whereas excessive repetition of building forms can result in unattractive developments.

3.3 FAÇADE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Provide visual interest on new façades through modulation and articulation to eliminate extensive blank wall surfaces and reduce the dominance of taller buildings. This is particularly important at the street edge or where a façade is conspicuously larger, higher, or more prominent than others around. Visual interest may be achieved in several ways, including:

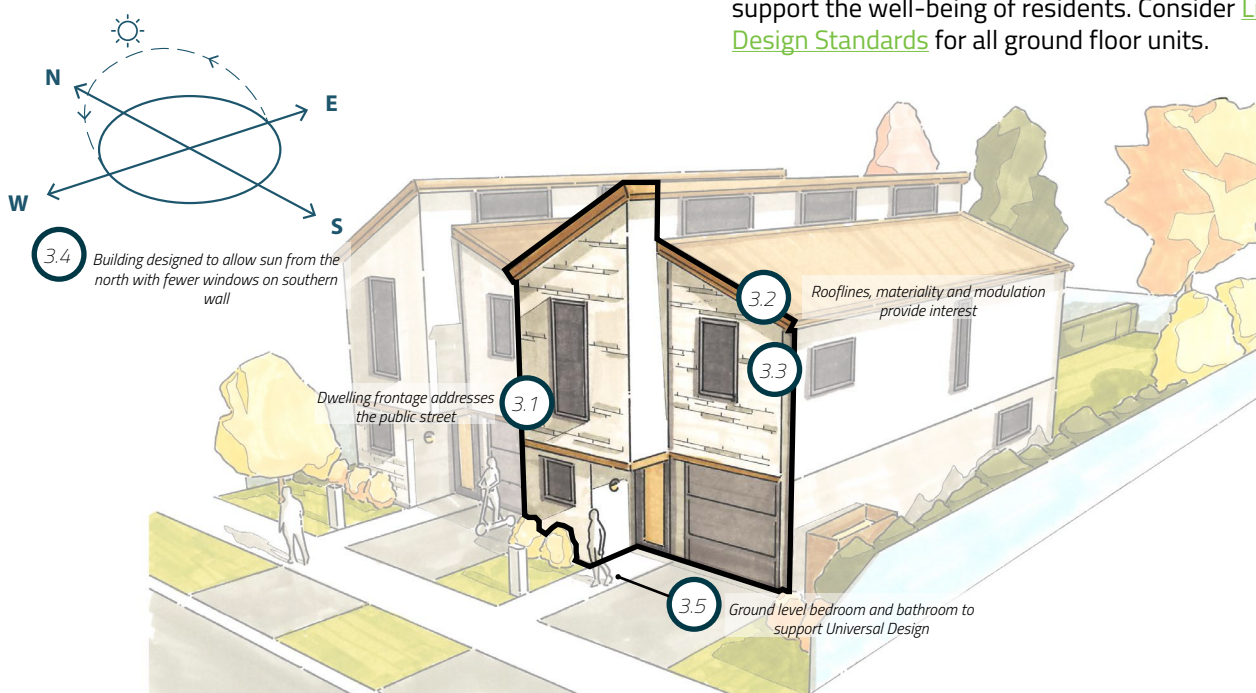
- Using rhythmic architectural elements such as roof forms, wall recesses or projections, balconies and widow placements; particularly on longer buildings.
- Using eaves and other shading devices serves a dual purpose of providing visual interest while helping to maintain indoor comfort in the summer and allowing sunlight to heat rooms in the winter.
- Differentiating individual dwellings or groups of dwellings by varying materials, textures and colours, while maintaining a cohesive design. Entrance porches are also useful and provide protection from the elements.

3.4 SUN ACCESS AND SHADING

Locate and design the living areas of dwellings to optimise access to sun and natural light. Orienting living spaces to the north or west is recommended for Invercargill. Within the development, configure buildings and open spaces to avoid unnecessary shading of private outdoor living spaces or the windows to main living rooms in adjacent dwellings.

3.5 UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Future-proof dwellings to provide for day-to-day living of all residents by considering the needs of an aging population, young children and disabled people. Accessible and inclusive design means providing level access, wider doorways, and ground-level living with space for stair lifts when needed. Recognising these opportunities helps support the well-being of residents. Consider [Lifemark Design Standards](#) for all ground floor units.



4. Entries to buildings

Good design creates legible and welcoming entrances that guide visitors, support identity and activate public spaces.

Outcome:

That entries provide distinguishable, visible, sheltered, and safe arrival spaces for dwellings.

4.1 ENTRANCE LEGIBILITY

Providing a good site layout is achieved, individual dwelling entrances or common apartment lobby access should be able to be readily identifiable, so that visitors can find them easily. A porch or recess at the front can support this legibility, while also providing weather protection. Any front yard services, such as bin storage, need to be balanced with the quality of visitors' experience through separation and screening. Service functions are generally best located in the side or back yard if there is good access.

4.2 ACTIVATION OF PUBLIC SPACES

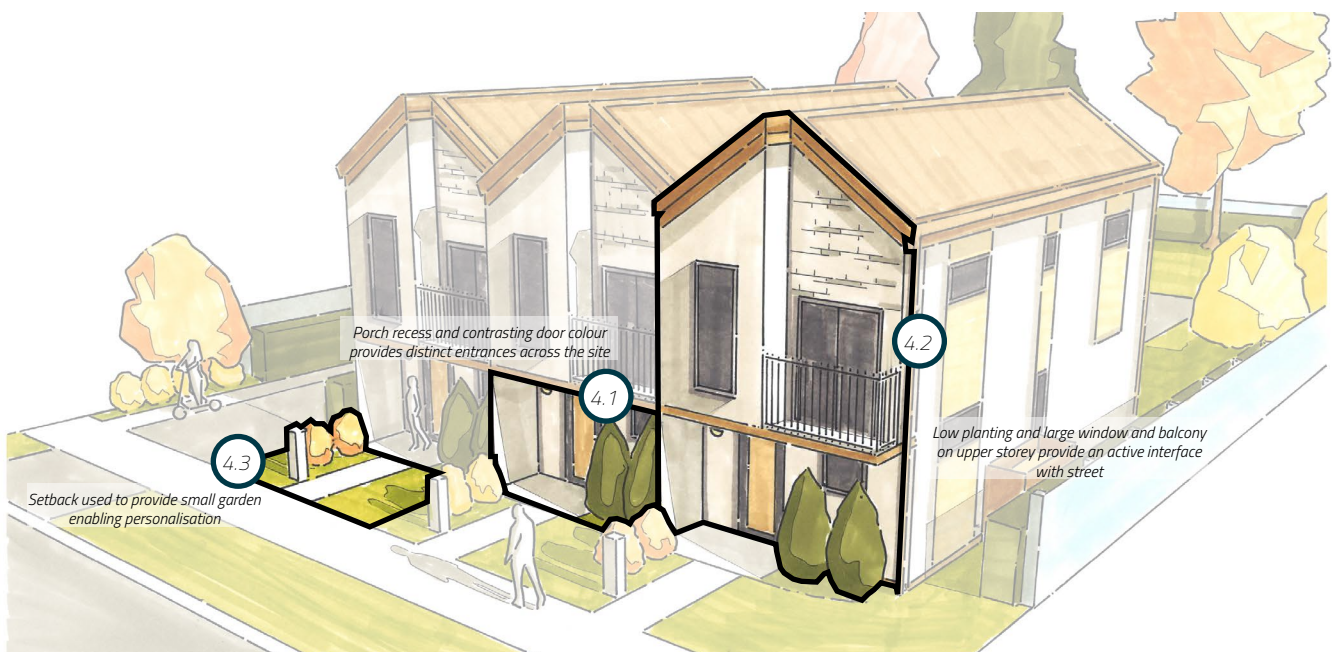
The creation of a small front yard buffer between the street or accessway and the private entrance can enhance the safety and comfort of residents by providing a transition between public and private spaces. Use of low planting or visually open fencing around front entrances enables a visual connection with the community and allows informal interactions between residents and the public, helping to activate streets and public spaces.

4.3 PERSONAL IDENTITY

Subtle variations through planting, paving and fencing, and front doors can bring a unique identity to each home. This improves the sense of ownership for residents and provides variety for the community, even within a multi-dwelling development.

When designing entries to buildings, other considerations include:

- Visibility from the street and public open spaces.
- Direct individual access from the street where the dwelling has a street frontage.
- Ease of access, ensuring ground-floor dwellings all have universal access.
- Public safety, such as good sightlines and lighting.



5. Visual and acoustic privacy

Good design mitigates overlooking and unwanted noise to enhance resident well-being.

Outcome:

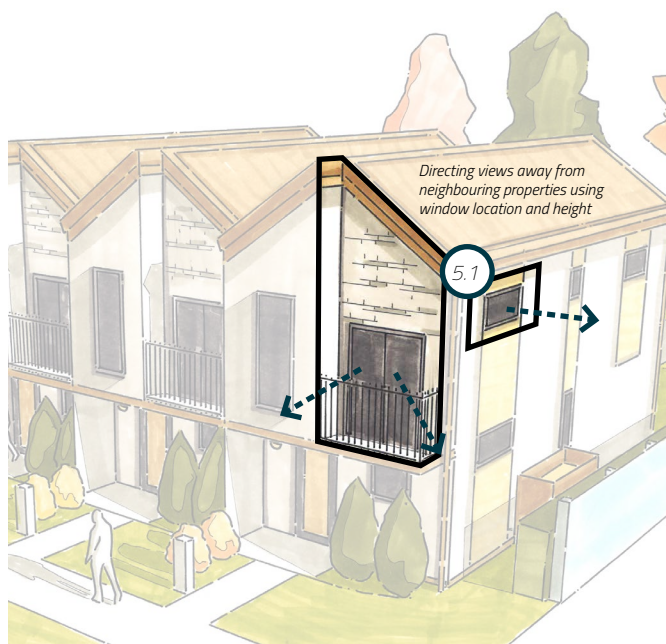
That new development provides reasonable visual and acoustic privacy, by:

- Designing to mitigate overlooking and noise effects associated with new development for the liveability of both occupants and neighbours.

5.1 VISUAL PRIVACY

In addition to initial site layout considerations, manage any short-range views from one dwelling directly into the main internal living areas and outdoor living spaces of any neighbouring property, including those within the development. This can be best managed by considering:

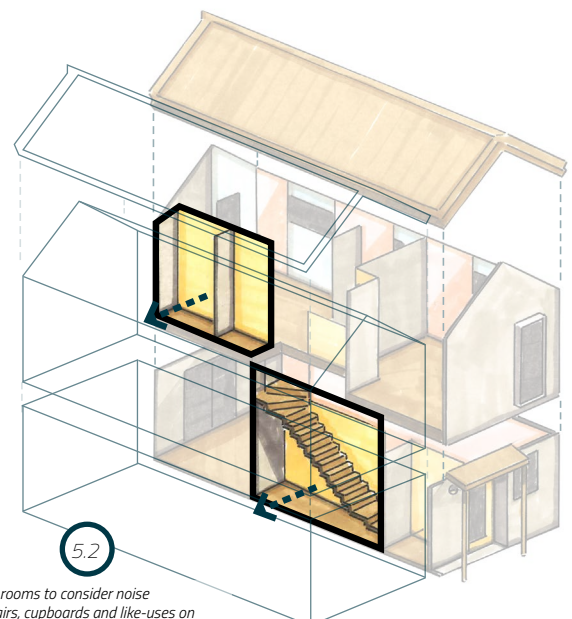
- Placing living rooms at ground level to benefit from screening from trees and fence lines. This is also an efficient way to incorporate the outlook space required.
- Rooms which need greater privacy, such as bedrooms, can be on upper levels and can use strip windows.
- Varying the size and position of upper-level windows or balconies within the development to minimise direct views.
- Using building features to help shorten or redirect views, such as vertical fins, louvres, screens, or opaque glass on balcony balustrades.
- Establishing planted buffers helps to create a physical and visual separation while providing outlook amenity.



5.2 ACOUSTIC PRIVACY

For more peaceful living, consider designing the site layout and dwelling interiors with good acoustic separation from external and internal noise sources, including:

- Position sensitive areas, such as bedrooms, away from higher levels of external noise, such as access ways, rubbish collection areas and mechanical systems (e.g. heat pumps or extractors), or shield these external spaces with physical barriers.
- Where designing attached dwellings, locate similar household activities along the shared walls, such as staircases and living areas, so that the expected noise levels match.
- Bathrooms, storage areas, and wardrobes can also be used as noise buffers within houses.



6. Outdoor living space

Good design ensures that outdoor living spaces are comfortable, attractive and meet the needs of the residents.

Outcome: That private and communal outdoor living spaces are functional and provide adequate privacy, sunlight, and landscape treatment by:

- Ensuring outdoor living spaces are of a good quality that will provide a pleasant outlook while creating a usable, safe, and visually attractive setting for residents.
- Appropriately integrating conservatories, storage sheds and other services into private outdoor living space.

6.1 PRIVATE OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES

Provide a private outdoor living space directly accessible from the main living area of the dwelling, so that it can function as an extension of the home. Where possible, locate the private outdoor space to the north of the dwelling for the most sun access. Private outdoor living spaces located to the east or west of the dwelling may also be appropriate for morning and evening sun, or where privacy is more compromised to the north. Good quality private outdoor living spaces should:

- Be located to receive optimal sun exposure.
- Have a degree of visual privacy, particularly when placed adjacent to the street or other public space.
- Incorporate vegetation for amenity and shelter from prevailing winds.
- Provide space for functional day-to-day use, such as outdoor dining and play areas.

6.2 BALCONIES

Balconies can be appropriate smaller outdoor living spaces for upper-storey dwellings and can be used in combination with communal outdoor living spaces. Two-storey dwellings may provide a balcony as a secondary outdoor living space, but the primary outdoor living space should be on the ground floor. Balconies are most useful when they are well-configured for tables and chairs relative to the size of the dwelling. Locate and design balconies to consider privacy impacts on neighbouring properties by diverting views and / or including opaque balustrades where appropriate. Prioritise opportunities for balconies to provide passive surveillance over streets, internal accessways, and public open spaces.

6.3 COMMUNAL OUTDOOR LIVING SPACES

Medium-density developments can provide communal outdoor living spaces to offset individual private spaces and add the positive benefits of being an efficient use of the site, providing more or higher quality facilities, and enhancing social interaction between residents. In addition to the qualities of private outdoor living space (listed above), good quality communal outdoor living space should:

- Form an integral part of the site layout and function of the development, including landscape amenity.
- Incorporate features that facilitate social interaction, such as BBQ areas, raised gardens and play spaces.
- Be well-overlooked by dwellings on-site.
- Be universally accessible and have direct or convenient connection to all dwellings served.
- Exclude driveways and manoeuvring areas for vehicles.

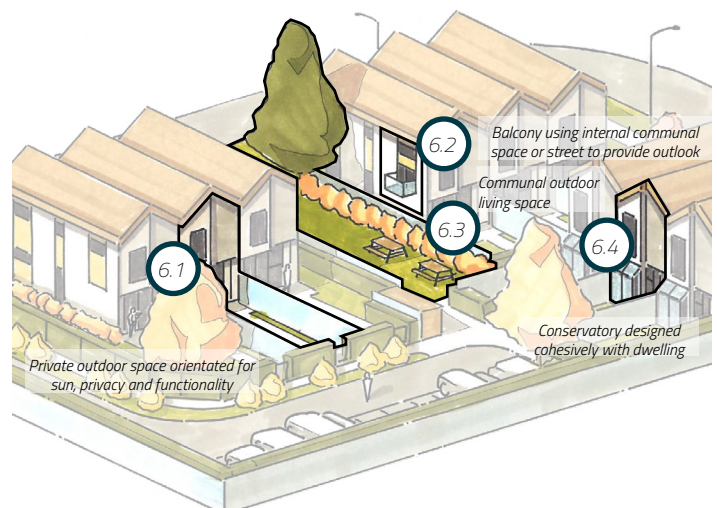
6.4 CONSERVATORIES AND SHEDS

Conservatories should be considered as part of the overall site design and complement the design of the dwelling. Treat conservatories like private outdoor living spaces when considering privacy for the dwelling and both on-site and off-site neighbours.

Consider providing external storage sheds where dwellings do not have private garaging and may require storage of outdoor equipment, such as gardening tools, play equipment, or bicycles. Locate sheds beyond outlook space standards and integrate them as part of the overall site design.

6.5 SERVICES

Place permanent fixtures such as heat pumps, water tanks, and clotheslines so that they are not visually obtrusive from the street, shared accessways or public open spaces, and do not interfere with the functionality of the private or communal outdoor living spaces.



7. Access and Parking

Good design positions vehicle access and parking in safe, convenient, and non-visually obtrusive locations.

Outcome: That vehicle access and parking are integrated into the site and contribute to a safe, accessible and attractive environment by:

- Ensuring safe and functional pedestrian access for residents.
- Minimising any detrimental effects of vehicle access, parking and garages on the visual quality of the streetscape and site.

7.1 VISUAL IMPACT

On-site parking should generally be placed away from the street frontage and towards the rear of the development. Consolidate the number and width of accessway footpath crossovers while still providing direct access to the street. Where frontage setback provides for car parking, specify hard surfaces and landscaping so that any parked car does not dominate the street edge, retaining an appearance of 'front garden' rather than 'parking space'.

Car parking can be highly visible to neighbours and occupants within a development. Manage this impact by screening with buildings, incorporating vegetation around the edges and breaking down large paved areas into smaller clusters with landscape strips in between. Limit paved surfaces to the minimum area required for parking spaces and manoeuvring. Planting trees adds an attractive outlook from all dwellings that overlook them.

7.2 COMMON PARKING AND ACCESSWAYS

Designing common car parking can help to optimise space on the site. Positioning car parking and accessways along the southern or eastern boundary can move buildings more centrally into the site, away from the neighbour's best aspects. If accessways are shared by people and cars, these should be designed for slow speeds through their width, paving and planting. This can create a more

comfortable environment for residents and neighbours. Ensure parking and accessways have clear visibility from dwellings for community safety. Providing convenient, weathertight and secure bike, scooter and pram storage close to each dwelling also encourages them to be used more.

7.3 GARAGES

Avoid monotonous repetition of garage doors along the street frontage or within the development. Set these back from the front façade of a dwelling to minimise the visual dominance of large garage doors. The distance between the building and the street boundary or accessway will need to be narrow enough to discourage vehicle parking across accessways, or wide enough to fully accommodate a parked vehicle.

7.4 TRAFFIC SAFETY

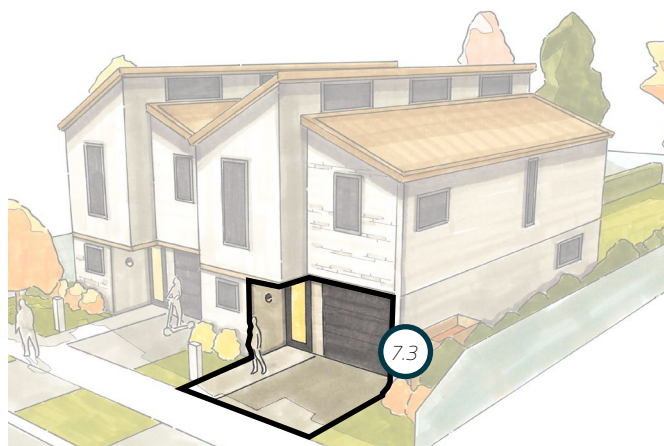
Plan common parking or vehicle manoeuvring areas to provide for safe pedestrian access and activity. If accessways are shared by people and cars, ensure they are designed for slow speeds through their width, paving and planting. In larger medium-density developments with higher vehicle movements, provide pedestrian paths separate from vehicle driveways where possible.

7.5 SURFACING MATERIALS

Use paving patterns, materials and/or potentially combinations of material types in association with planting to give visual interest to areas used for parking and vehicle circulation. The selection of paving materials and the detailed design of the paving itself influences whether the area is viewed only as a service area or whether it adds to the visual quality and character of the development.



Amalgamated site - Common car parking is provided to the rear of the site and softened with planting



Garage doors are set back from building frontage with separated path for pedestrian entry

8. Landscape treatment

Good design uses landscape elements to integrate the development into the wider neighbourhood and manage stormwater, while offering visual interest and privacy to individual residents.

Outcome: That landscape treatment meaningfully contributes to a good quality and well-functioning living environment by:

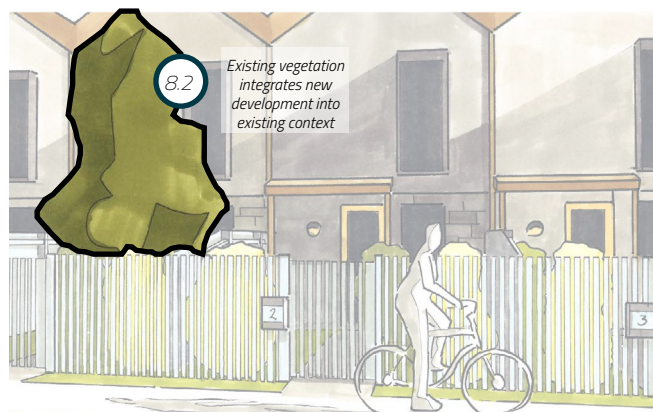
- Integrating the development into the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Managing stormwater runoff through attenuation of flow and treatment.
- Enhancing the on-site visual amenity by contributing to outlook and privacy.
- Considering long-term maintenance requirements of landscape elements.

8.1 PERMEABLE SURFACES

Reducing stormwater run-off helps to manage the existing stormwater network and can prevent flooding and pollution of waterways. This is best handled at the source. Consider opportunities to collect and re-use rainwater or integrate swales and raingardens into the design. Maximising permeable areas, including pervious paving, can reduce the effect of stormwater run-off.

8.2 EXISTING VEGETATION

Retention of mature vegetation helps to maintain local character and better integrate the development into the neighbourhood. It also provides an attractive outlook, which contributes to visual privacy for residents and neighbours, and gives the development a well-established appearance. Retain notable existing trees and vegetation where practicable and where they can be usefully integrated into the residential development. This includes planning the site layout to avoid street tree removal.



Visually permeable fencing at the front boundary

8.3 NEW VEGETATION

Landscaping plays an important role in integrating new developments into their surrounding neighbourhood, greatly increasing amenity for residents, neighbours and public. Provide a range of planting, such as trees, shrubs and ground covers, that are suitable for the Invercargill climate and soil types; and prioritise native species, as these will be well-adapted and enhance biodiversity. Consider planting in areas directly adjacent to fencing or exterior walls that screen or soften views from other dwellings within the development.

8.4 FENCING

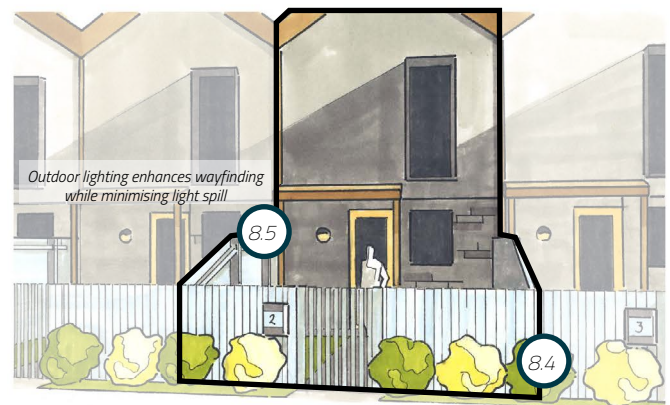
Use low, visually open fencing within front yards. Doing so plays a key role in fostering a sense of community, enabling passive surveillance and encouraging informal interaction with residents and the public. Where fencing for private outdoor space fronts a street, public open space or accessway, provide a balance of privacy and passive surveillance through a combination of fence height and visual permeability. Planting, such as hedges, can complement visually open fences to create a softer edge to the development.

8.5 LIGHTING

Common pedestrian accessways, car parking and service areas are often used at night within multi-dwelling developments. Provide targeted external lighting to enhance wayfinding and community safety, while minimising light spill impacts on neighbours.

8.6 MAINTENANCE

Consider maintenance (how and who) when selecting and locating amenity planting in communal or hard-to-reach areas. Consider growth rate, mature size and easy-to-maintain species to ensure landscape treatment is practical and enduring. Landscape edging helps landscapes stay tidy, attractive, and easy-to-maintain by providing defined boundaries to lawns and garden areas and keeping loose materials, such as bark and soil, in the intended location.



Low fencing at the front boundary, with internal boundary fencing providing privacy between outdoor living spaces

9. Site facilities

Good design incorporates provision for functional storage spaces, services and utilities as an integral part of development.

Outcome: That storage space, services and other household activities are provided and integrated into the design.

9.1 STORAGE

Storage space should increase with the number of people a dwelling is designed to accommodate. Provide sufficient internal storage to accommodate larger items such as recreational gear, maintenance equipment, prams, and suitcases. This can increase the efficient use of indoor space and avoid larger items being stored in outdoor living spaces.

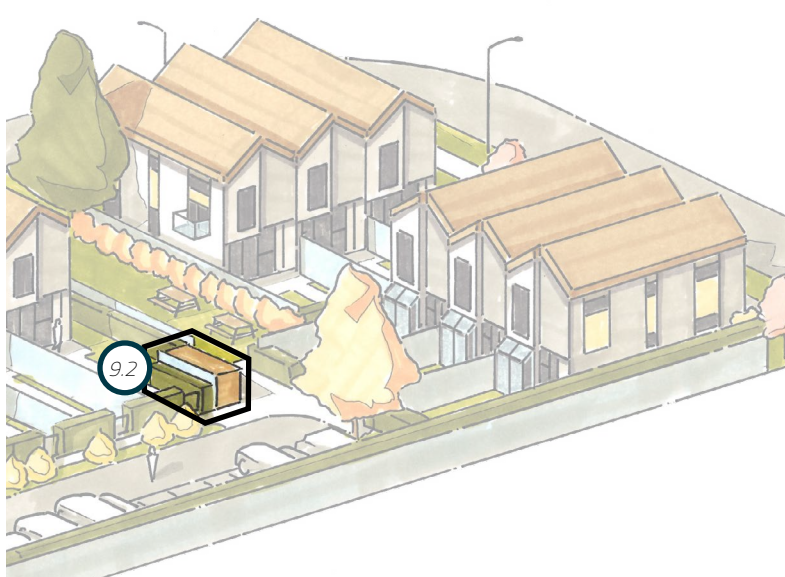
9.2 RUBBISH AND RECYCLING

Provide sufficient, suitably screened outdoor space to meet the rubbish and recycling storage needs of residents. This could be bin space associated with each dwelling, based on the council system; or a shared bin storage space, determined by the waste management provider. This space should be:

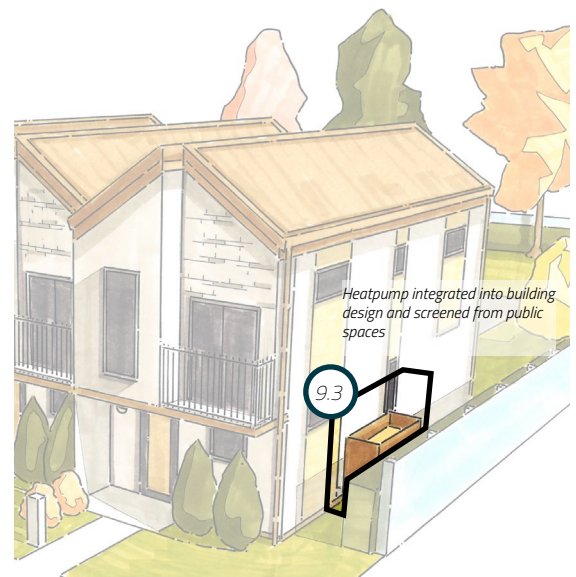
- Sufficiently large to store and give access to bins for each dwelling. Where servicing multiple dwellings, consider communal waste collection to save on storage and collection space.
- Located or screened to be visually unobtrusive and not dominate the main entrance to any individual dwelling, the wider development, or neighbouring dwellings.
- Positioned and ventilated to avoid significant nuisance (e.g. smell and noise) to any dwelling.
- Conveniently accessible from the dwelling(s) served, for both day-to-day bin access and moving bins for collection.

9.3 BUILDING SERVICES AND UTILITIES

The functional parts of developments, such as external access ways and mechanical, electrical and communications equipment, should be integrated within the building(s) to minimise their visual impact, particularly from streets or public open spaces. External stairs and walkways used to access upper-level apartments can often appear utilitarian or out of place. It is better to ensure they are integrated with the overall design of the building. Also, anticipate what future residents may require (heat pumps, mailboxes etc) and minimise the need to retrofit these buildings post-occupation.



Amalgamated site: Communal bin store and bike sheds provided in common car parking area



Other useful resources

Below is a list of references and resources used in developing this guide:

[National Medium Density Design Guide \(Ministry for the Environment, 2022\)](#)

[National Guidelines for Crime Prevention through Environmental Design in New Zealand \(Ministry of Justice\)](#)

[Residential Design Guide \(Queenstown Lakes District Council, 2020\)](#)

[Medium Density Residential Design Guide \(Central Otago District Council, 2024\)](#)

[Takapō | Lake Tekapo Character Design Guide and Medium Density Residential Design Guide \(Mackenzie District Council, 2022\)](#)

[Passive Solar Design \(BRANZ, 2025\)](#)

[Lifemark Design Standards \(Lifemark\)](#).

