

Neighbourhood Character Strategy - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is neighbourhood character?

Neighbourhood character is essentially what visually differentiates one neighbourhood from another, and is the measure of a local identity. It encompasses the way a neighbourhood looks and feels. It is created by a combination of landscape, vegetation, the built environment, history and culture, and how they interact.

The character of a local area is distinctive. It influences the sense of belonging a person feels to that place, the way people respond to ambience, how it influences their mood, their emotional response, and the stories that come out of their relationship with that place. Therefore, it is important to understand character in a holistic way.

Neighbourhood character should guide how to manage a changing urban environment so that any changes are sympathetic to the valued characteristics and ultimately shape a preferred future character.

Neighbourhood character contains many different facets and is underpinned by the following core concepts:

- Character is a combination of the public and private realms and how they relate to one another.
- Every property, public place or piece of infrastructure makes a contribution, whether great or small.
- It is the cumulative impact of all these contributions that establishes neighbourhood character.
- The key to understanding character is being able to describe how the features of an area come together to give that area its own particular character.
- All areas have a character in the same way all people have a personality. In some areas the character may be more obvious, more unusual, or more attractive, but no area can be described as having no character.

The understanding of the key components of neighbourhood character ultimately informs the definition of preferred future character statements.

What is neighbourhood character versus general amenity?

Amenity is about the pleasantness, ambience and liveability of an area. Neighbourhood character is about sense of place and community value. Regardless of the character of an area, there are standards of residential amenity that apply to all residential development.

These basic amenity standards include matters such as overlooking, overshadowing, solar access, etc. Sometimes, these amenity standards can have an effect on neighbourhood character, but as a general principle, neighbourhood character and amenity should be treated separately.

What is the difference between neighbourhood character and protecting heritage?

It is important to understand the differences between neighbourhood character and places of heritage significance that are generally recognised in the planning scheme.

While all areas have a history, not all areas are of heritage significance. Heritage significance is determined by recognised criteria set by Commonwealth, State and local agencies, with reference to the Burra Charter. In Victoria, heritage places and areas are recognised by application of the Heritage Overlay in planning schemes or inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register. Cultural heritage is largely embodied in the underlying values and the broader physical context of a building and place. It is important to manage and retain this fabric and setting in order to retain the cultural significance of a place. Heritage significance can't be improved, but the fabric of a place can be improved, restored or reinterpreted.

In many areas building style is important to setting the character of the area. This includes not just typical form and massing, but may also include details, materials and colours. Buildings do not need to be old or historically significant to have a character that is important to people's understanding and enjoyment of an area.

What does a Neighbourhood Character Strategy aim to do?

A Neighbourhood Character Strategy aims to guide the design and placement of new development in residential areas, ensuring that it respects and responds to the preferred valued features or character of an area, while still meeting required targets set by State Planning Policy for growth in housing supply and housing diversity.

Specifically for Nillumbik, the Strategy will update and accurately reflect the existing and preferred neighbourhood character of the Shire and ensure that new development responds and contributes to the valued characteristics of Nillumbik's established residential areas.

When completed, the Neighbourhood Character Strategy will be the subject of a planning scheme amendment that will propose to implement the Strategy through the Nillumbik Planning Scheme.

What will the final Neighbourhood Character Strategy include?

The key elements of the Strategy will include:

- Definition of neighbourhood character.
- Overview of policy and statutory context.
- Overview of existing strategies and background information.
- Identification and summary of the key issues and threats regarding character in the Nillumbik Shire.
- Proposed Precinct Profiles of each neighbourhood character area (explained further below).
- Identification of proposed planning instruments to be used for implementation.

What are neighbourhood character profiles?

Neighbourhood character profiles are used to document the key attributes of a character area, and form a major component of the Neighbourhood Character Strategy. The profiles comprise of character descriptions, character area maps, a list of key character attributes, preferred character statements, preferred character objectives, a set of design guidelines and photos.

What does preferred neighbourhood character mean and what is a preferred character statement?

A key focus of a Neighbourhood Character Strategy, through assessment and community input and feedback, is to develop Precinct Profiles (including a preferred character statement) for an area that will be achieved over time with appropriate new developments and change.

Preferred neighbourhood character is either:

- the existing character of an area; or
- an identified future neighbourhood character different from the existing character of an area.

Where the existing neighbourhood character is the preferred neighbourhood character, it is important to identify the existing features and characteristics of the area to be respected.

A preferred neighbourhood character statement can articulate the valued features and characteristics of an area to be respected by new development. It is important that preferred neighbourhood character statements are 'forward-looking' so that if an area is identified for a change in housing growth, the growth is not undermined by neighbourhood character policies that seek to maintain the existing neighbourhood character.

What is the purpose and role of neighbourhood character objectives and design guidelines?

The purpose of the character objectives and design guidelines is to provide clear direction and guidance on built form outcomes based on preferred neighbourhood character outcomes.

The Preferred Character Statement directly informs five design objectives per character area, which can be specified in a schedule to a residential zone to implement the preferred neighbourhood character. These design guidelines are used as a basis for Council statutory planners when assessing residential planning applications.

Why is Council only including residential areas in the Strategy? Will other areas like Activity Centres be added later to the Strategy?

Subject to the State Government's framework for planning for new housing in Victoria, a Neighbourhood Character Strategy is only required and allowed for residential areas, which are defined as areas subject to one of the State Government's residential zones. The residential zones applied in the Shire of Nillumbik are:

- Low-Density Residential Zone – Applied to various residential areas across the Shire, such as parts of Diamond Creek, Eltham (South), North Warrandyte, parts of Research, Plenty and Yarrambat.
- Township Zone – Applied to most land within the Urban Growth Boundary that exists for each of the rural townships of Hurstbridge, Panton Hill and St Andrews.
- Neighbourhood Residential Zone – Applied to various residential areas across the Shire, such as Eltham, Plenty, parts of Research and Wattle Glen.
- General Residential Zone - Applied to various residential areas across the Shire, such as parts of Diamond Creek, parts of Eltham, Eltham North, Greensborough, and parts of Research.
- Mixed Use Zone – Applied to a section of the Eltham Gateway on Main Road, Eltham.

Non-residential areas of the Shire are subject to other planning policies and strategies to protect character. For example, separate planning policy and other provisions within the Nillumbik Planning Scheme, as well as Nillumbik's Green Wedge Management Plan, aim to protect the amenity and non-urban values of the Shire's rural areas.

Further, planning for the Shire's Major Activity Centres (MACs) at Eltham and Diamond Creek is primarily provided by Council's adopted structure plans for each MAC and the associated planning provisions within the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. Note that as Precinct 2 (the residential interface located west of Bible Street) is included within the Eltham MAC, it is therefore outside the study area for the Neighbourhood Character Strategy.

How does the Neighbourhood Character Strategy relate to housing growth and development?

The Neighbourhood Character Strategy does not seek to prevent appropriate housing growth and development, as Nillumbik is still required by State Government Planning Policy to provide adequate growth in housing supply and diversity in residential areas. However, the Strategy provides a framework to encourage future development in Nillumbik's residential areas to appropriately respect and support the preferred neighbourhood character of that area, as defined by the Strategy.

In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that neighbourhood character is not a static concept as it is dynamic and can evolve over time to meet contemporary housing needs. The Neighbourhood Character Strategy will demonstrate that housing objectives for the Shire have not been prejudiced when determining areas for the protection of neighbourhood character. To achieve this, the Neighbourhood Character Strategy will significantly contribute to a Residential Development Framework (RDF) for the Shire. The RDF:

- Is an overarching housing framework that is required by State Government planning policy for each municipality.

- Will be informed by a Housing Strategy (discussed below), the Neighbourhood Character Strategy and other relevant considerations (e.g. heritage and environmental constraints) to provide areas of minimal, incremental and substantial change in a manner that balances the need to protect valued character with the requirement to ensure housing growth and diversity.

The relationship between a Neighbourhood Character Strategy and a Housing Strategy is discussed further below.

How does the Neighbourhood Character Strategy work with other planning instruments like a Housing Strategy?

Council has and is subject to various planning instruments including strategies, policies and rules that work together to guide how land is used, developed and protected across the Shire, including in Nillumbik's residential areas. The most significant of these instruments within residential areas are the Neighbourhood Character Strategy and the Housing Strategy. It is a requirement of State Planning Policy that Council develops these two strategies to provide appropriate growth in supply and diversity of housing while sufficiently identifying and respecting preferred neighbourhood characters in residential areas. The relationship between State Planning Policy, the Housing Strategy and the Neighbourhood Character Strategy are shown in the Neighbourhood Character Policy Hierarchy diagram shown on the Participate Nillumbik project page. There is also another diagram which shows the relationship between the Housing Strategy and the Neighbourhood Character Strategy and other local policies, strategies and guidelines that Council has prepared or is planning to prepare in the future.

Where is Council's Housing Strategy up to?

A priority action of the current Council Plan (2021-2025) is to develop a Nillumbik Housing Strategy. Work on this strategy is yet to commence and is awaiting necessary budget allocation. Like Council's project to develop the Neighbourhood Character Strategy, work for the Housing Strategy will be informed by a significant level of community engagement, as well as technical research. When completed the findings of the Housing and Neighbourhood Character Strategies will be used to draft a planning scheme amendment to give statutory weight to these documents and implement the recommendations of both strategies through the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. That amendment would also be subject to full public exhibition in accordance with the requirements of *the Planning and Environment Act 1987*. The Neighbourhood Character Policy Hierarchy diagram on Council's Participate Nillumbik website shows the steps that would lead to the proposed planning scheme amendment.

Can the Neighbourhood Character Strategy or Housing Strategy have any impact on the location of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) in the Shire of Nillumbik?

The Nillumbik Neighbourhood Character Strategy and Housing Strategy **will not and cannot have any impact** on the location of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) in the Shire. Neither strategy can question and/or seek to vary the location of the UGB, as the location of the UGB is fully determined by the State Government as outlined within the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

How can I have my say about development of the Neighbourhood Character Strategy?

Input from the community and stakeholders who live in and experience these unique residential areas is an essential part of developing the Shire's Neighbourhood Character Strategy. A total of three rounds of community engagement are being conducted for the project. The table below outlines these periods:

First round of engagement – Championing the strategy (Completed)	Second round of engagement – Consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Character Strategy (Current)	Third round of engagement – Close the loop (Yet to Commence)
28 March – 8 May 2022 (6 weeks)	29 August – 10 October 2022 (6 weeks)	Early-Mid 2023
<u>Purpose:</u> To inform the community about the project, the concept of neighbourhood character, the Strategy and the process to develop the Strategy. Further, to engage on what the community values about its neighbourhoods.	<u>Purpose:</u> To seek feedback on a first draft of the Strategy.	<u>Purpose:</u> To ensure all community feedback relevant to the draft Strategy has been properly considered.

Further information

Please visit participate.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/neighbourhood-character-strategy for more details of the project, to receive project updates and to view the various engagement periods and subsequent engagement activities through which you can have your say.

I am not comfortable using online tools; can I engage in another way?

Yes, you can. If you wish to do so, please don't hesitate to call Nillumbik Shire Council during office hours on 9433 3111 and request to speak to an officer handling the project.

Alternatively, you can visit the Council offices at Civic Drive, Greensborough or email Council at strategic.planning@nillumbik.vic.gov.au