

- Neighbourhood character is essentially the combination of the public and private realms.
- Neighbourhood character is established through the cumulative impact of contributions made by every property, public place and piece of infrastructure in an area.
- All neighbourhoods have character. In some areas the character may be more obvious, unusual or attractive – but no area can be described as having no character.¹
- Neighbourhood character should not be confused with attractiveness.

Neighbourhood character in Victoria

Designing and siting dwellings in a way that respects neighbourhood character is an important part of development assessment in Victoria. Applicants and Councils need to have a common understanding of the key features of neighbourhood character that relate to a proposal site.

Each application should:

- Include a satisfactory neighbourhood and site description that identified key character features
- Have a design that responds to the key features identified in the neighbourhood and site description
- Respect the existing or preferred neighbourhood character and satisfies all neighbourhood character requirements (such as a Character Overlay of Neighbourhood Character Policy) of the residential development provisions in the local Planning Scheme.

Respecting character:

- Does *not* mean preventing change.
- *Does* mean that a development should 'try to fit in, particularly by respecting the scale, form and architectural style of surrounding development'.

Deciding whether a development respects the neighbourhood character is ultimately a subjective decision that depends on the interpretation of the characteristics of the features in the neighbourhood and site description. The impact of the design response on the neighbourhood character will depend on the:

- Physical impact of the proposal
- Sensitivity of the area to the proposed development
- Planning objective that deal with those impacts.

It is very important that Applicants have a clear understanding of how neighbourhood character of the proposal site has been interpreted by the Council and whether the Planning Scheme includes a Statement of Preferred Neighbourhood Character for the precinct or neighbourhood and what objectives and design responses have been identified.

¹ For more information about character in the planning system in Victoria, see Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2018) Understanding Neighbourhood Character, Planning Practice Note 43, January available online: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/resource-library/planning-practice-notes>