

Preserving and enhancing Adelaide's traditional high streets



A blueprint for shaping planning and
development policy

August 2016

Introduction

It's time the wider community had a greater say in planning and development issues in South Australia. Recent changes to the planning legislation, largely driven by the development industry, have dramatically reduced the ability of the wider community to have any influence on development outcomes. This is at a time when people already feel that state politics is too distant and that they don't have enough power over the places where they live and work.

It is no longer enough to simply respond to government policy initiatives or developer proposals.

To meet this new challenge the Community Alliance SA is taking a proactive approach to development. It will be outlining at an early stage what it considers to be acceptable or unacceptable development.

This blueprint focuses on preserving and enhancing Adelaide's traditional high streets. There is currently a major threat to the quality of these streets with many of them set to grow rapidly under policies that fail to protect their character and amenity, and with developments being approved which are contrary to development plans and best planning practices.

The Community Alliance SA would like individuals and community groups to use the information contained in this blueprint to drive policy for their traditional high streets.

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We are an umbrella organisation representing resident and community groups
Dedicated to 'Putting the People back into Planning and Development in SA'.
Our goal is a planning and development process which is accountable, transparent and sustainable,
And that guarantees genuine community engagement.

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WHAT AND WHERE ARE OUR HIGH STREETS?

High streets are those neighbourhood commercial districts with traditional main street physical qualities which make them pedestrian friendly and walkable.

They are well connected to neighbouring residential areas and provide a wide range of mainly small footprint shops, businesses, entertainment facilities and other land uses which front the high street and contribute to a fine grained urban fabric. These create active and vibrant pedestrian environments, and the accessibility and connectedness of high streets help make our city more walkable and cycle-friendly.

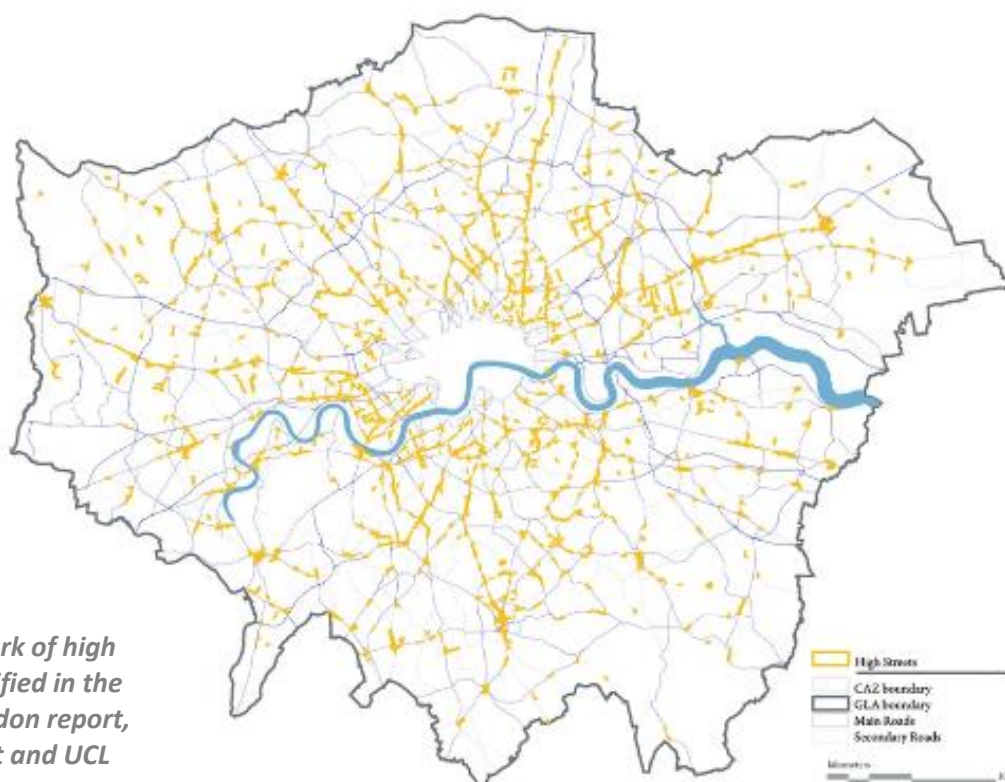
The variety and flexibility of buildings along high streets offer many businesses (particularly small and micro businesses) a range of space tenure and cost options.

The distinct structure of the high street also allows for a wide range of civic and public uses, such as performance spaces and parks, healthcare facilities, pubs, clubs, cafes and restaurants, places to listen to or make music, places of worship, and banks.

Streets like Prospect Road, Unley Road, Henley Beach Road and the Parade in Norwood are obvious examples of traditional high streets and there are many others throughout the Adelaide metropolitan area. Unfortunately, Adelaide's 30 Year Plan doesn't identify our valued high streets nor outline policies for their protection and enhancement.

Adelaide's blinkered approach is in contrast to that of the Greater London Authority, which has identified its traditional high streets and has strategies to protect and revitalise them. Adelaide needs to do the same.

London's network of high streets as identified in the High Street London report, 2012, Gort Scott and UCL



THE VALUE OF OUR HIGH STREETS

Social value

High streets provide enhanced locations for social interaction and help people to become more socially connected. They provide a focal point for community identity and pride, and offer a sense of place, connectivity, integration and cohesion for residents.

They consistently provide strong support for local schools, charities and community projects.

In contrast, big box, car park dominated centres constrain pedestrian activity and hinder opportunities for social interaction and the creation of social capital and sense of community.



The Parade, Norwood – a traditional high street with good connectivity to neighbouring residential areas and opportunities for social interaction

Economic value

High streets provide a strong focus for independent businesses, which in turn keep profits local and support other local businesses and services, including family-owned businesses.

Independent businesses in high streets provide an extremely stable economic foundation, as opposed to the presence of a few large businesses or chains with no ties to the community.

High streets also have an increasingly important role in the knowledge-driven economy.

Tourism

High streets with a strong historic component often become major tourist attractions. When people travel or shop, they want to see unique places – especially ones that offer a unique shopping “experience” – and these are provided in traditional high streets.

Main Street, Hahndorf – a major tourist attraction offering walkability, heritage attractions and unique shopping and dining experiences



Sustainable transport and urban development

High streets offer convenience and sustainable transport patterns because they are easily accessible and within walking distance of residential areas, reducing the reliance on car-dependent shopping. This is particularly so when they are:

- Surrounded by a network of connected streets, paths and cycle-ways
- Integrated with public transport
- Within close proximity of a variety of residential dwelling types

Traditional high streets with pedestrian-scaled, mixed-use buildings fronting the street encourage access by walking and cycling. They are typically not set back from the main street and have 'active' ground floor uses, such as café seating areas and shop displays, extending onto the street.

*Murray Street, Gawler –
Upper image: the
widened footpath and
pedestrian refuges help
to make the street
pedestrian friendly
Lower image: café-style
outdoor seating areas
and bicycle racks attract
cyclists and visitors on
foot*



By providing a focus for residential and commercial density in the heart of communities, traditional high streets make cities more liveable, and help to reduce sprawl and protect the countryside from urban encroachment.

In contrast, retail centres configured in big box formats tend to cater exclusively for car-dependent shopping whilst failing to encourage healthy, active transport behaviours by providing a pleasant or easy walking or cycling environment. People are more likely to drive to the centre, even if they live within a comfortable walking distance.

ACCEPTABLE LAND USES

The Community Alliance SA wants the existing and future character and use of Adelaide's traditional high streets to be protected by retaining and/or encouraging mainly small footprint shops, businesses, entertainment facilities and apartments that contribute to a fine grained urban fabric.

High streets are a much sought after location for low-rise apartment living, but to be attractive for this purpose mid- to high-rise developments must be excluded. In the case of some traditional high streets, e.g. Glen Osmond Road, the streets need to be re-established as high amenity areas.

Woolworths, Walkerville Terrace - fine grained shops and businesses front the high street and mask the big box behind



This Coles development at Brighton, Melbourne, doesn't impart a fine grained image. The frontage of the development is dominated by the big box store

Industrial uses, conglomerations of large retail boxes, large-footprint multi-purpose service stations, and land uses which don't provide an active street frontage or fine grained urban fabric, e.g. large car salerooms or car yards, are not supported.

24 hour or late night business activities should only be allowed at an appropriate distance from residential areas and apartments.



On the Run Service Station, West Terrace Adelaide – a large footprint multi- purpose service station with inward facing shops and businesses

The need for change: high streets as more multi-functional and social spaces

The Community Alliance SA recognises that high streets, like many other major retail areas in the city, are being impacted by online activities. Similarly, business activities are being impacted by home-working, hot-desking and new forms of communication technology.

In view of these trends the Community Alliance SA believes that current planning policies need to be modified to allow high streets to become more multi-functional and social places, by accommodating a wider range of land uses, e.g. big brand shops adding social and local activities, shared workspaces for freelance workers, online business looking for bricks and mortar locations and artisanal light industry.

Shared workspaces for startups, freelancers and creatives should be supported



Shared workspace in a London high street

High streets are also seen as ideal for accommodating manifestations of the slow food or locavore movement - old fashioned, service oriented food shops, greengrocers selling fruit and veg, old fashioned butcher shops and bakeries etc.



The Locavore, a slow food initiative in the main street of Stirling - all food is accessed from within 100 miles of the premises

TALLER BUILDINGS

It is critical that reduced heights, increased setbacks and/or the stepping of taller buildings should be applied to create sensitive interfaces with other buildings in the high street.

The upper levels of taller buildings should be set back from the high street on a podium (a horizontal base of a building differentiated from the upper levels) to maintain a pedestrian related scale and to mitigate unwanted wind effects. No building in a high street should be higher than 3 storeys unless the upper levels are set back on a podium. With a podium, 5 storeys may be appropriate, providing privacy and overshadowing issues don't arise for adjoining residential areas, and the character and amenity of the high street aren't adversely affected.



*August Towers, Hutt Street Adelaide - the 14 storey apartment mixed use tower has not been designed to complement the prevailing two storey character of existing buildings along the high street.
(Proposal approved by the Development Assessment Commission)*



Taller elements of buildings should be stepped down to the street or neighbouring buildings, or be wrapped in smaller buildings to mediate differences in scale between them.

Setbacks allow greater light access to the high street, broader views of the sky and reduce the 'canyon' effect for pedestrians at street level. The lower parts of buildings should not be set back from the high street curtilage.



*Malvern Road, Melbourne –
Upper image: the height of new buildings (5 storeys), with upper levels set back, is in keeping with the height of existing buildings.
Lower image (closer view): the upper level setback reduces the impact of the 5 storey building from the street.*

Active ground floor uses should occur along the high street to increase their safety, function and interest, and large blank walls, large service areas, and co-located garages or continuous garage doors visible from the high street should be avoided.

There should not be a direct line of sight into habitable room windows or secluded private open spaces of an existing dwelling on an adjoining property. Side setbacks should be used where they are important for retaining privacy and living areas should be located toward the high street or public places.



Cremorne Plaza proposal, Unley Road – this massive institutional type building is totally alien to the existing fine grained streetscape (Proposal approved by the Development Assessment Commission)

Malvern Road, Melbourne – this box-like building has no articulated faces and minimal active street frontage



High-rise apartments

High-rise apartments are not suitable in the traditional high street environment because they:

- Lack human scale and a fine grained urban fabric
- Have poor connectivity with adjoining residential areas and fail to promote a sense of community
- Separate people from the street, reducing propinquity and the opportunity for chance encounters
- Have poor credentials for environmental sustainability
- Can contribute to poor outcomes for health and wellbeing
- Can't be designed to be family friendly. In contrast, family-friendly design elements can be incorporated into low-rise apartments e.g., to provide good surveillance of outdoor areas from individual dwellings

*Alexandria,
Sydney –
family
friendly 4
storey
apartments
with
adjoining
outdoor space*



It appears that a glut of high-rise apartments is occurring in Australian cities e.g. the Australian Population Research Institute (APRI) has estimated that by 2020 Melbourne will have a surplus of 123,000 high-rise units and not enough family friendly dwellings.

APRI found that high-rise apartments mainly attract temporary migrants, especially students, and young singles and couples who move to family friendly dwellings when starting to raise a family.

PROTECTING HERITAGE

The scale and contextual treatment of new developments should be informed by heritage properties in the area, and tall building proposals must address the effect on the setting of, and views to and from, historic buildings, sites and landscapes over a wide area.

When a tall building is located adjacent to a lower-scale heritage property:

- new base buildings should be designed to respect the urban grain, scale, setbacks, proportions, visual relationships, topography, and materials of the historic context
- the existing heritage character should be integrated into the base building through high-quality, contemporary design cues
- additional tall building setbacks, stepbacks, and other appropriate placement or design measures should be provided to respect the heritage setting

Franchise businesses using standard building designs should not be located in or near heritage buildings.



approved by DAC

Proposal for 1 Nth Terrace, Adelaide. It is generally accepted that there not be stark contrasts in the scale & height of new buildings that adjoin heritage properties. Here the 24 storey towers overwhelm the existing 3 storey heritage building. Part demolition of the state heritage complex is also required.

(Proposal approved by the Development Assessment Commission, despite being opposed by the delegate of the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation)



23 storey tower proposed for the corner of Rundle St and East Terrace, Adelaide – the context is similar to that of the 24 storey tower proposal at 1 North Tce, but this proposal has been refused by DAC



Facadism should be strongly discouraged, including with the requirement that at least the front 10 metres of a heritage building should be retained. This would help to retain context and the integrity of important transitions and relationships such as entrances and complex roof structures.

Hearst Tower, New York – facadism should be strongly discouraged

Replication of historic detail from adjacent heritage commercial buildings or other earlier styles of buildings should not be used in the design of infill buildings.

Contemporary detailing that is sympathetic to the heritage buildings should be used and signage should be designed to highlight the architectural features of the building.



Warwick Fabrics, Wright Street Adelaide – a successful blending of old with new in terms of building heights and finished materials



254 Parade, Norwood (above left) - a quality design but not sympathetic with the existing streetscape & heritage buildings in the immediate vicinity (above right and opposite)

(Proposal approved by the Development Assessment Commission)



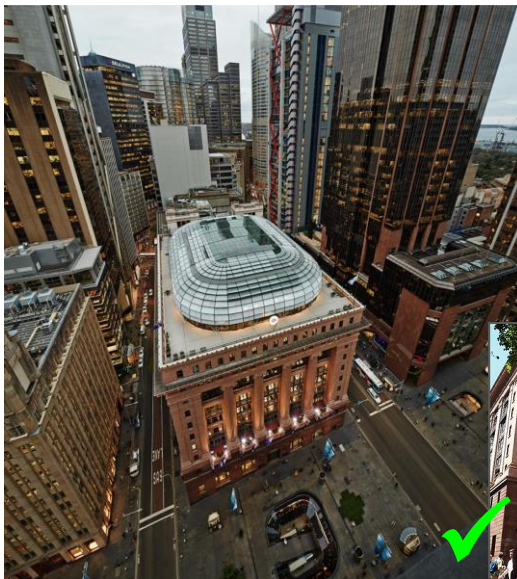
Malvern Road, Melbourne – the facade treatment on the new building complements the character of older buildings

Generally, rooftop additions to low rise (1 to 3 storey) heritage buildings are not appropriate, but may be accommodated in some circumstances with sensitive design.

An inappropriate rooftop addition



282-284 Bay St, Brighton Melbourne – a rooftop addition that detracts from the heritage character of the original bank building
((Proposal approved by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal))



50 Martin Place, Sydney - rooftop additions to taller heritage buildings may be appropriate.
Inset: the rooftop addition is not discernible from the street



BIG BOX DEVELOPMENT

Large numbers of apartments are being developed along high streets and this is attracting big box developments (*The Age 15 March 2014*).

Conglomerations of big box developments are not acceptable in traditional high streets.

Where single box developments are considered appropriate, the majority of the associated parking should be underground or in discreetly designed and located one- to two-level structured car parks.

Conglomerations of big box developments are not acceptable in traditional high streets



Coles, St Peters - a big box store with an excessively long unbroken blank wall



Large blank walls of big box developments should be relieved with changes in roof line, recesses and projections of walling, windows, awnings and arcades.

A big box development should not line a high street. Instead it should be located behind smaller retail and business premises which have their own separate windows and entrances facing the street.

Woolworths, Walkerville Terrace –

Below left: a potentially long blank wall broken up with roof and verandah changes

Below right: Recesses and projections help to relieve the impact of a large unbroken wall, and smaller retail buildings which are part of the principal building face the high street and have outside windows and separate outside entrances





Radio Rentals, Main North Road – this structure overwhelms the streetscape and has no active street frontage. This wouldn't be appropriate in a traditional high street

Woolworth's, Stirling – the big box development doesn't dominate the streetscape. Substantial landscape plantings help to reduce its impact.



Foodland, Stirling – the impact of the big box is reduced by good articulation of the building, substantial landscape plantings, a small car park at the front of the store and a large subsurface car park



CAR PARKING AREAS

On-street parking can play a vital part in a streetscape, fostering a more vibrant pedestrian commercial environment. It is also useful to calm vehicle speeds, enhance the perception of safety for pedestrians and minimise the number of off-street car parks required.

Large car parks in front of buildings create physical and psychological barriers to the building, whereas buildings placed close to the street frame the public space and create more welcoming and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes that attract users.



Foodland, Glen Osmond Road, Frewville (above and right) – a big box store with no articulation of the building, minimal landscape screening and extensive car parking located at the front of the store



Foodland, Stirling – subsurface car park under big box store



Parking areas, particularly those at-grade, take up space, create additional hard surfaces and reduce pedestrian connectivity between areas. Sub-surface or discreetly located one to two level structured car parks should be created for big box developments.



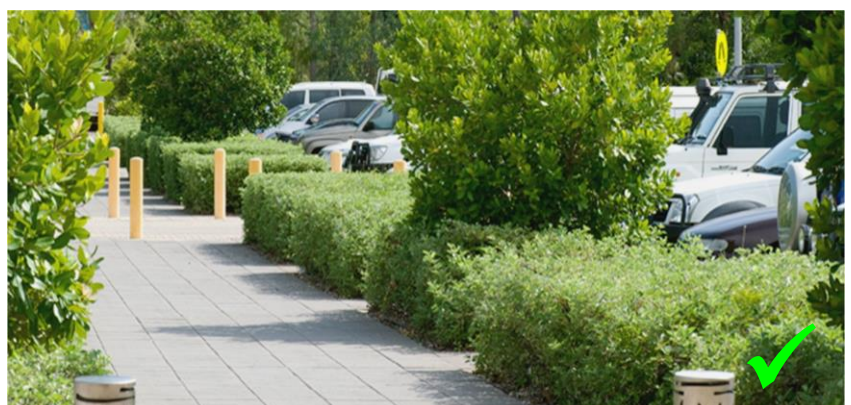
St Agnes shopping centre – a poorly sited and designed 'structured' car park

When a parking lot abuts a high street the parked cars should be screened from the street frontage to obscure a majority of the parked cars. Screening can be continuous landscaping, attractive fencing or stone walls, among other materials. Expanses of parking should be broken up with landscaped islands and planted strips, which include shade trees and shrubs. Such landscaping provides a canopy cover and reduces the urban heat island effect in the summer.

Community Alliance SA members have been appalled by the lack and/or enforcement of appropriate landscaping conditions in high street car parks and it recommends the State Government conduct a special enquiry into this problem.



BWS, Glen Osmond Road – the car park has ineffective landscaping screening



A car park with more effective landscaping

SIGNAGE

Signs should be compatible with the scale, character and design of the building on which they are displayed. Signs above verandah level need careful controls to ensure that they don't detract from the design and appearance of buildings and the streetscape.

Signs should not project beyond the lines of a building and shouldn't cover windows or important building details. Pole signs should not be higher than the surrounding buildings and sign supports should be minimal.

Sky signs should not be allowed unless they are displayed in a positive way to create continuity of the building form within the streetscape. Illuminated signs should not impair the amenity of adjoining residential areas.

Unley Central, Unley Road – signage not sympathetic to the scale and character of the streetscape – note the unsightly sign supports

Radio Rentals, Main North Road, Prospect – signage covering window spaces and unsightly sign supports. This wouldn't be appropriate in a traditional high street.



Whole buildings or large portions of buildings should not be painted in corporate colours.

Where larger buildings contain several storefronts, signs for each business should relate well to each other in terms of location, height, proportions and colour.



Dulux store, Magill Road St Morris - the whole building, a former movie theatre, is painted in corporate colours



Main Street, Seymour, Victoria - a whole building painted in corporate colours

For the most part, signs in the high street should be oriented towards the pedestrian and as a consequence they do not need to be large.

Signage clutter, including having signs in multiple formats, should be avoided as it not only detracts from individual buildings but reduces the effectiveness of individual signs. Repetitive signs should be avoided.



Prince Albert Hotel, Murray Street Gawler – signage is of an appropriate scale and in keeping with the character of the building and street

Multiple signs and sign formats create signage clutter



McDonalds, UK - one of many examples throughout the world of major retailers accepting less visually obtrusive signage



English Heritage has said that retailers should tone down their signs to prevent their brands dominating the streetscape, and that "We get a lot of letters about how aggressive some signs are.....regular shoppers know where supermarkets are and don't need to be told so vigorously".

The same could be said about signage in Adelaide's high streets and historic areas, and more appropriate design standards should be adopted.

Target store, Portland Oregon – this version of a Target store doesn't detract from the existing character of the building or streetscape
Inset: the corporate signage is minimal and yet effective



Further information

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Please contact the Community Alliance SA for further information or to share examples of what you consider to be good or bad developments.

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