

NSW Government Business Case Practitioner Notes

Topic	Better Placed - Integrating design policy for the built environment into a business case
Key lessons learnt	<i>(Better Placed)</i> – an integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW, articulates the value and benefits of good design through seven objectives. To support a project’s claim of good design outcomes in a business case context, this Practitioner Note outlines methods to align project outcomes with the seven objectives and integrate good design criteria as part of the evaluation process. Good design adopted as part of a project’s strategic development generates value to benefit the entire project lifecycle. Key to this is collaboration between design teams and the wider project team.
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Introduction

This Practitioner Note introduces the Government Architect NSW (GANSW), *Better Placed* and its role and value in an Infrastructure NSW business case context. Practitioners promoting the value and benefits of their project will benefit from understanding the policy and its relationship to design evaluation as a means to,

- understand the benefits good design offers the built environment
- align the vision and values of their project with good design
- support preferred design options in a business case using qualitative evaluation
- add value by establishing design evaluation criteria and embedding the criteria as part of the decision-making process for the project’s life-cycle.

Key Considerations

Good design is government policy - *Better Placed* supports the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, specifically the object of the Act (g) “to promote good design and the amenity of the built environment”.

What is good design? - Good design is a phrase that encapsulates the aspirations of *Better Placed* including its vision for NSW, its definition of good process, and its objectives for the built environment. *Better Placed* establishes a cross-government baseline of what is expected to achieve good design of the built environment, defining its characteristics as **healthy, responsive, integrated, equitable and resilient**.

What is the value of good design? - Good design outcomes create useable, user friendly, enjoyable and attractive places and spaces, providing cultural, social, environmental and economic benefits to people, communities and the natural environment. A commitment to good design outcomes generates and continually adds value over extended periods of time.

***Better Placed* outlines seven design objectives** - Distinct yet interrelated objectives, address the broad range of built environment issues, considerations and parameters. Importantly their detail articulates and captures the benefits of good design. The objectives can be used on projects of any scale and degree of complexity, from urban design of precincts, to landscape and public realm, to individual buildings.

Design is an outcome and a process - Supporting a business case through collaboration should be part of a design team's project brief. Contributing to a business case should not be seen as a discreet activity but within a continuity of design activities that promote design quality (e.g. scenario testing & design review). It's important to note that design activities across a project lifecycle will responded to the scope and outputs of a business case. In this context, embedding an approach to good design as both a process and an outcome in a business case generates ongoing value for the duration of a project (e.g. developing design evaluation criteria and quality indicators).



Increasing the evidence

Better Placed supports the business case process of increasing the evidence base, building confidence and reducing risk by:

- providing a greater and consistent understanding of a project's benefits - establishing 'common ground' for a project in a built- environment policy context
- enabling alignment of a project's ambition and objectives with government policy for the built environment - linking proposed investment to the benefits of good design outcomes
- supporting investment decisions - establishing criteria and indicators for the evaluation of design proposals – for example; qualitative or place-focused evaluation
- positively influencing the project's on-going development - promoting good design is an output of a business case.

How can project teams use *Better Placed* in a business case context?

The detail of the seven objectives articulates good design outcomes and their benefits. Project teams looking to articulate their response to a project's integration requirements, ensure policy alignment and demonstrate their claim of good design can use *Better Placed* to:

- establish a shared position on what a good design outcome is – using the seven objectives for guidance
- demonstrate that the project's key guiding elements (the vision, objectives and supporting values and principles) are aligned with good design outcomes – for example, mapping the seven objectives against these key elements
- promote outcomes as being of good design and well integrated (e.g. incorporating differing areas of expertise) - using a logic model to group a project's requirements and ambition around specific themes (e.g. connectivity, urban quality, community-wellbeing) – mapping the design response to demonstrate the positive impact and benefits relative to these themes
- establish design evaluation criteria, using the seven objectives in combination with other criteria considerations. This sets the right conditions for design evaluation – for example incorporating wider, large-scale issues that shape the project (e.g. Premier's Priorities & Greater Sydney Commission objectives).

Better Methods - the leap to design evaluation and criteria

Evaluation of good design is best practice across a project's lifecycle and should be considered central to a design team's brief for complex projects. When established as a point of continuity, it adds considerable value to a business case and beyond. Evaluation is where things get serious, 'proofing up' project outcomes as being of good design demonstrates a proposal's capability to provide a wide range of benefits in an integrated way – the sum of the parts.

In a business case context design evaluation is considered qualitative or place-focused to complement Cost Benefit Analysis. Qualitative evaluation adds value when:

- a complex or integrated response to project challenges/opportunities is required (e.g. a contextual, place-based response to integrating complex infrastructure with new land uses)
- decision makers need to interrogate the components of a project relative to the big picture
- Strategic Business Case decisions involving holistic appraisal of diverse options are needed
- setting specific measurable targets for the remainder of the Gateway process as an output of a business case – providing positive impact from Final Business Case through to delivery.

Evaluating Good Design (as part of the GANSW *Better Methods* document suite) provides guidance for establishing evaluation criteria founded in the seven objectives of *Better Placed*. The document promotes criteria appropriate at any scale and in any setting for buildings, precincts, urban space, landscape elements, public utility or infrastructure.

There are no fixed rules in establishing criteria and metrics. *Evaluating Good Design* is a good start. To increase the evidence base collaboration is key, as criteria are diversified to accommodate specific project needs and integration requirements across differing areas of expertise. This may include nationally and internationally recognised metrics (e.g. measures of walkability) and quality indicators in use across NSW government (e.g. indicators from *The Pulse of Greater Sydney*- Greater Sydney Commission).

Source Material

Government Architect NSW policy and guidance documents

- Better Placed - an integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW <https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/policies/better-placed>
- Evaluating Good Design <https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/guidance/evaluating-good-design>

About the authors:

Angus Bell and Melizza Morales are Senior Design Advisors at Government Architect NSW, collectively they have NSW government and international experience in supporting the role of design in precinct scale urban design and infrastructure projects, including co-authoring business cases.