SPECIAL 30 – (RIVERHEAD SOUTH) – URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The following urban design guidelines are to be utilised by landowners, planners and other persons involved in development at the early planning stages of land development and also by Resource Consent Processing Planners when assessing applications for development concept plans, subdivision and land use. Many of the concepts are general urban design principles and others are more specific to rural villages such as Riverhead. These guidelines have been refined to focus most specially on buildings streetscape and connections as opposed to wider urban design concepts.

2.0   THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The urban design principles have been divided into the following categories for ease of reference:

2.1 Layout
2.2 Public Open Spaces
2.3 Built Form

For ease of reference a checklist has been included after each section. This gives guidance to any assessment, however, the entire section should be read for a full understanding of the urban design concepts.

2.1   Layout

Conventional post-war subdivision has increasingly been designed to accommodate cars, disadvantaging pedestrians and in turn, perpetuating the need for more car dependence. Sustainable design acknowledges that people need to drive and park cars but that streets can be designed to encourage not deter pedestrians, which also makes it safer and more convenient for people walking to catch passenger transport. A street network that is more connected makes a place easier for a pedestrian to navigate, by providing a choice of routes to move between designations, creating shorter and more direct journeys than is acceptable by car.

In lower and medium density developments such as Riverhead it is important that the roading layout is sympathetic to the existing grain of the Riverhead settlement. The way that buildings relate to one another is important to create points of visual interest, develop a measure of street enclosure and provide a gentle continuity.
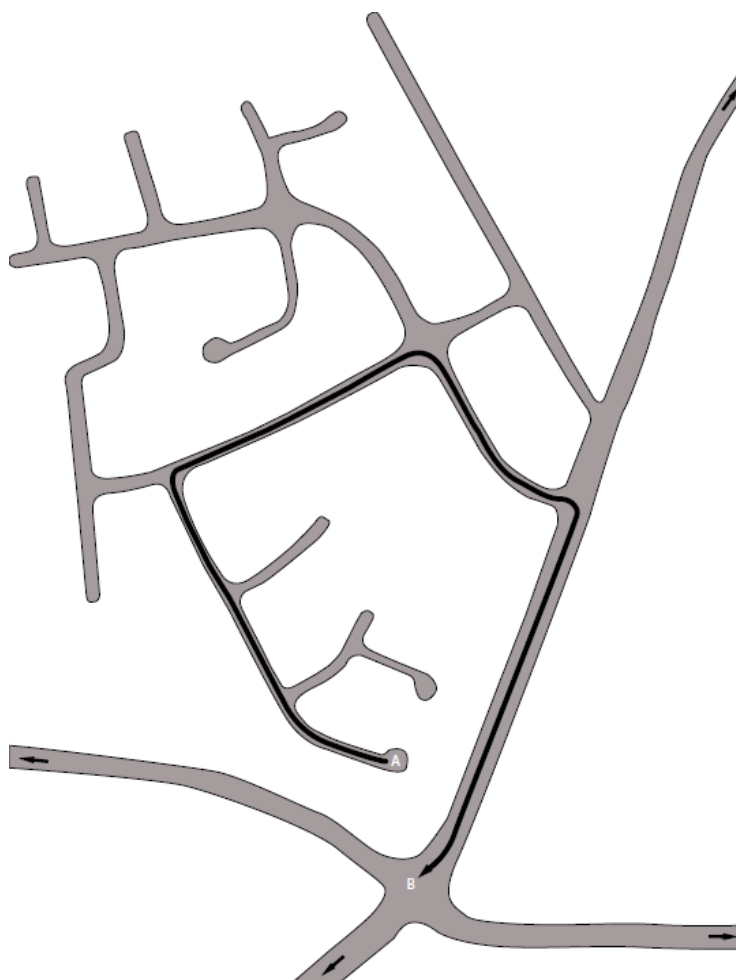
Getting from point A to point B in this type of layout is lengthy and therefore time consuming for the pedestrian. With this sort of layout high levels of car dependence even for local trips is likely.
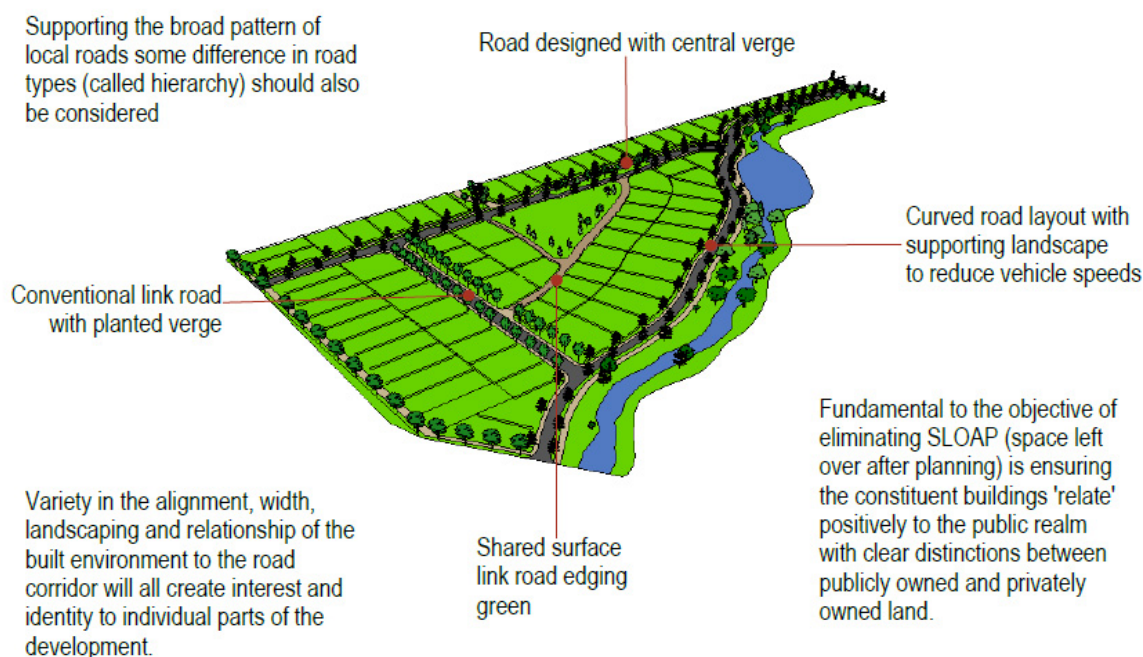
Road layouts that allow multiple routes and real choice for all modes of transport, with residential blocks generally of no greater than 120m length, remains the best approach to avoid adverse effects and provide for wellbeing.
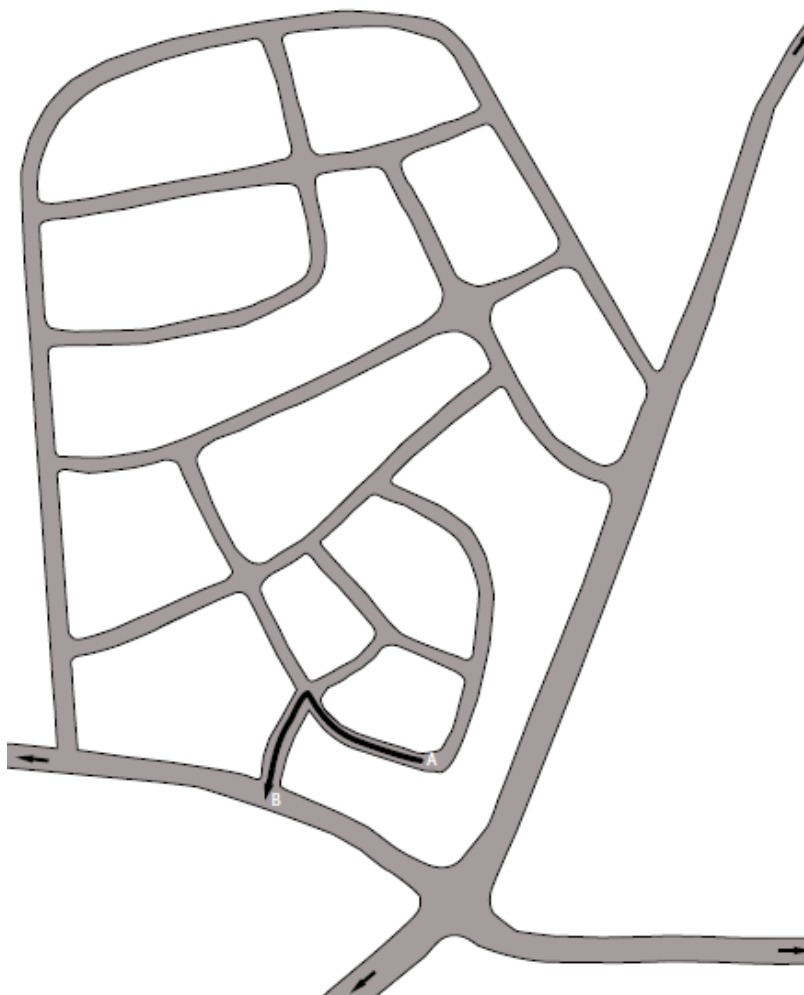
This layout creates more convenient connections reducing the reliance on cars and encouraging walking for short trips

Supporting the broad pattern of local roads, some difference in road types (called hierarchy) should also be considered. The Outline Plan provides the pattern for the main local roads, however there will, below this layer, be smaller roads which service development clusters. Variety in the alignment, width, landscaping and relationship of the built environment to the road corridor will create interest and identity to individual parts of the development as well as help to reduce vehicle speeds.

Supporting the broad pattern of local roads some difference in road types (called hierarchy) should also be considered

Road designed with central verge

Curved road layout with supporting landscape to reduce vehicle speeds

Conventional link road with planted verge

Variety in the alignment, width, landscaping and relationship of the built environment to the road corridor will all create interest and identity to individual parts of the development.

Shared surface link road edging green

Fundamental to the objective of eliminating SLOAP (space left over after planning) is ensuring the constituent buildings 'relate' positively to the public realm with clear distinctions between publicly owned and privately owned land.

Fundamental to the objective of eliminating Space Left Over After Planning (SLOAP) is ensuring the constituent buildings 'relate' positively to the public realm with clear distinctions between publicly owned and privately owned land. Positioning buildings so they overlook public areas including roads guarantees not only a measure of overlooking and therefore perceived security for pedestrians but also an understandable built edge for people. Developments which do not 'address' the street are confusing, especially for visitors and deliveries, and are contrary to the established character of our settlements. The drawings and photographs below illustrate the approach of positioning houses where their 'front' addresses the street and there is clearly defined ownership and responsibility.

Open spaces can also critically offer a protected outlook from surrounding sites, that if marketed can add value through their guarantee of never being built-out.


When land uses relate well to public open spaces they provide a greater feeling of safety due to the number of potential 'eyes on the street' that act to discourage crime from occurring.

Public Fronts and Private Backs

✔ Private 'Backs'   Public 'Fronts'   Private 'Backs'
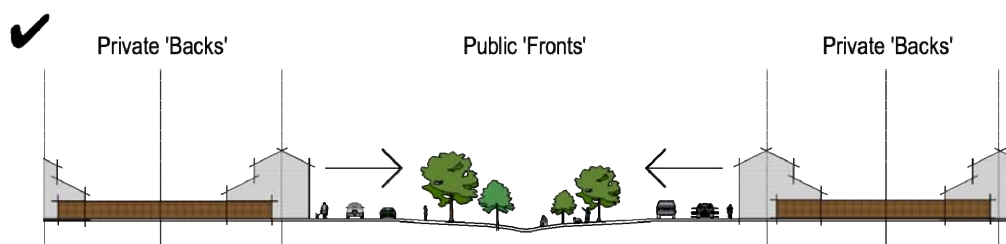
ORGANISED – Users will have little doubt over who is entitled to use which space.
Activity is focused towards public spaces offering the safest, highest-amenity environments possible.

✘ Public 'Fronts' Private 'Backs'   AMBIGUITY   Private 'Backs' Public 'Fronts'
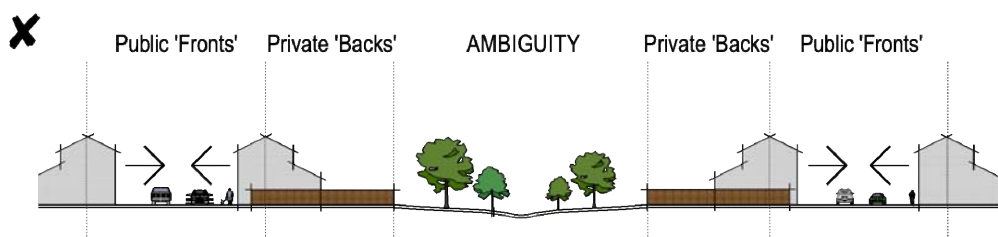
DISORGANISED – Users are less likely to use some parts of space due to poorly defined 'ownership'.
Many public spaces are treated with weak interfaces, poor lighting, and so on. Safety and quality
declines, as does social interaction.

Lot Shape – Detached Housing

Generally narrower deeper lots that allow for usable backyards are preferable to wider shallower lots that
have little or no back yards.

CHECKLIST   ✓/✗

(a)   Recreation amenities that are located so that awareness of them and pedestrian access to them is obvious. Public spaces are clearly public and private spaces (backyards) clearly private?

(b)   Are open spaces edged by a public road. Overlooking public spaces from dwellings helps to create a feeling of safety and reduces opportunities for anti social behaviour.

(c)   If there are natural areas or cultural features of importance in the area, have these been incorporated into open spaces?

(d)   Does the roading pattern help define the character of areas and relate to the broader context e.g. through the creation of view corridors to points of interest within and outside of the development area?

(e)   Does the proposal deliver a connected street network that provides a variety of direct routes for pedestrians along the network and includes traffic calming measures where appropriate?

(f)   Is the roading network well connected and does it minimise the use of cul-de-sacs and minimise block length?

(g)   Are walkway and / or cycle networks provided as a part of the street network and do these link with areas of open space?

(h)   Is parking integrated, overlooked and convenient?

(i)   Have generally narrower deeper lots been provided to enable useable back yards and echo the character of neighbouring settlement patterns?

2.2   Public Open Spaces

Public open space which is well-located and thoughtfully designed can add to the amenity of a neighbourhood, and provide an attraction for the wider community. Parks can no longer be arbitrary left-over spaces with limited public overlooking, but need to be visible from streets and surrounding development. Residential neighbourhoods still require local community spaces accessible to and usable by local residents. These can be combined with natural features and land forms, but also create useable spaces for informal recreation.   Smaller local purpose open spaces provide visual amenity for neighbourhood and passers by, as well as gathering and playing space for nearby residents.

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) provides a set of guidelines for the design and management of public spaces to reduce opportunistic crime and provide a sense of safety for users. Perceptions of safety on a street or park is greatly increased when there are windows or activities overlooking the public space – a sense of "eyes on the street" or ownership. Well-maintained public and private spaces give the impression of "zero-tolerance" for anti-social behavior and a sense of pride and community ownership, which adds to passers-by perception of a safe and welcoming place.

Location of Open Spaces & Surveillance

Subdivisions commonly create new open spaces but other key land uses such as corner shops, community facilities, and schools will also be provided. The location and relationship of these amenities to activities and networks around them will influence how well and efficiently a neighbourhood can meet its needs.

Recreation amenities that are located so that awareness of them and pedestrian access to them is obvious and easy, provide the best opportunities for healthy lifestyles.

POOR LOCATION - Amenities like this often operate as de-facto communal private space benefiting only a few local residents (the only people who know the amenity exists)

PREMIER LOCATION - The contribution open spaces and amenities can make to promoting community wellbeing is maximised when they are prominent, easy to find/use, and add to the sense of 'place'

Casual contact between pedestrians is also a key building block in achieving a sense of community. People knowing each other then helps lead to neighbours exhibiting guardianship. In turn a wider sense of public safety can be developed.

CHECKLIST   ✓/✗

(a)   Are recreation amenities located so that awareness of them and pedestrian access to them is obvious and easy and so that public spaces are clearly public and private spaces (backyards) clearly private?

(b)   Are open spaces directly fronted by a public road and is passive surveillance from dwellings overlooking the space provided?

(c)   Is open space obvious and prominent regardless of size, rather than large and hidden.

(d)   If there are any natural areas or cultural features in the area, have these been incorporated into open spaces?

(e)   Do roads create terminus axial views of surrounding countryside or internal green spaces to contribute to legibility and orientation around the street network?

2.3   Building Form

Simple rectangular forms of building provide the built character of much of the surrounding area. These simple forms can be added to provide additional elements such as extra rooms, garages or porches and verandahs. Simplicity in building design generally produces a harmonious street scene which when combined with landscape elements people find comfortable.
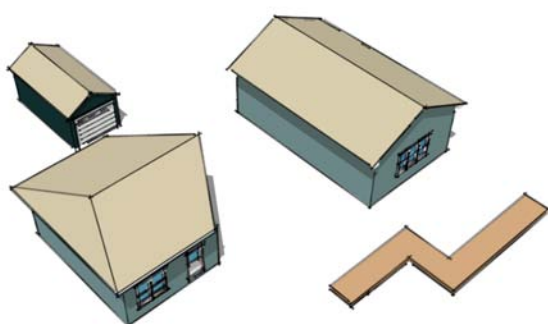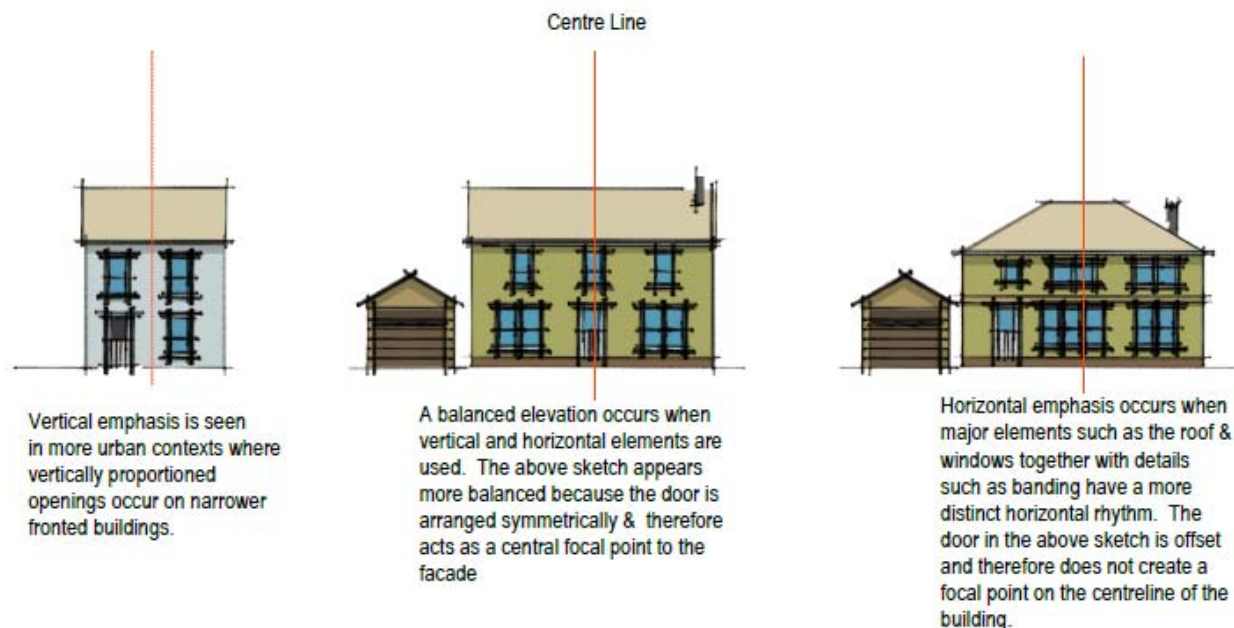
Simple forms of building of relative proportion and scale can be combined to achieve generous floorspace and coherent building design.

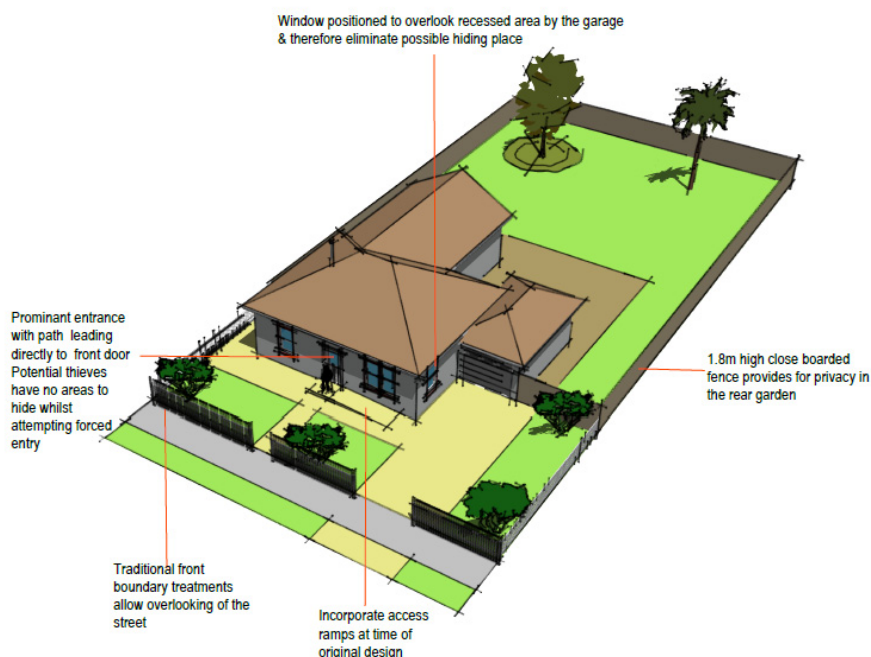Single storey building using the same design principles.

Façade Design

Largely irrespective of architectural 'style' the organisation of building facades often share similar characteristics which help in creating a logical and rhythmic street scene. Generally buildings in more urbanised locations will be organised with a vertical emphasis (in response to narrower sections) in the buildings elevation whilst in suburban and rural areas there is more of a tendency towards balanced or horizontal emphasis. The sketches below illustrate the differences between the three approaches. With the exception of perhaps the area within the plan shown for local shops, the organisation of residential facades should be balanced or horizontal in emphasis.

Vertical emphasis is seen in more urban contexts where vertically proportioned openings occur on narrower fronted buildings.

A balanced elevation occurs when vertical and horizontal elements are used. The above sketch appears more balanced because the door is arranged symmetrically & therefore acts as a central focal point to the facade

Horizontal emphasis occurs when major elements such as the roof & windows together with details such as banding have a more distinct horizontal rhythm. The door in the above sketch is offset and therefore does not create a focal point on the centreline of the building.

Connection – Front doors

Residential properties should create adequate connection to streets and public spaces. This will ensure outcomes that convey a sense of safety, interest, activity, quality, and value. Emphasising the front door within the dwelling frontage, preferably including a canopy or other cover, helps direct visitors. A direct path or connection between the front door and the street should be provided to reinforce this. Clearly defined approaches deny opportunity for thieves to excusably access private parts of a site looking for entry.

Window positioned to overlook recessed area by the garage & therefore eliminate possible hiding place

Prominant entrance with path leading directly to front door Potential thieves have no areas to hide whilst attempting forced entry

1.8m high close boarded fence provides for privacy in the rear garden

Traditional front boundary treatments allow overlooking of the street

Incorporate access ramps at time of original design

Overlooking – Active front room

Maximising the amount of glazing from an active living room (a kitchen, dining room, lounge or family room) on the front elevation helps to reinforce a sense of overlooking and security to and from the street or public space. This again helps ensure a sense of personal safety for all users. Upper floors should also have windows overlooking the space, with elements such as balconies or bay windows to add interest and articulation to the façade.
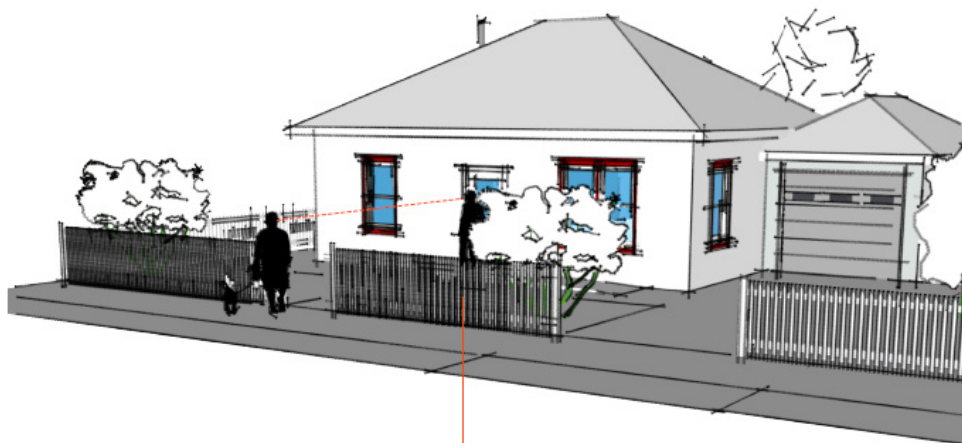
Traditional boundary treatments guarantee a degree of connection between the house and the street. This simple relationship allows for casual overlooking and for the house to be 'connected' to the community
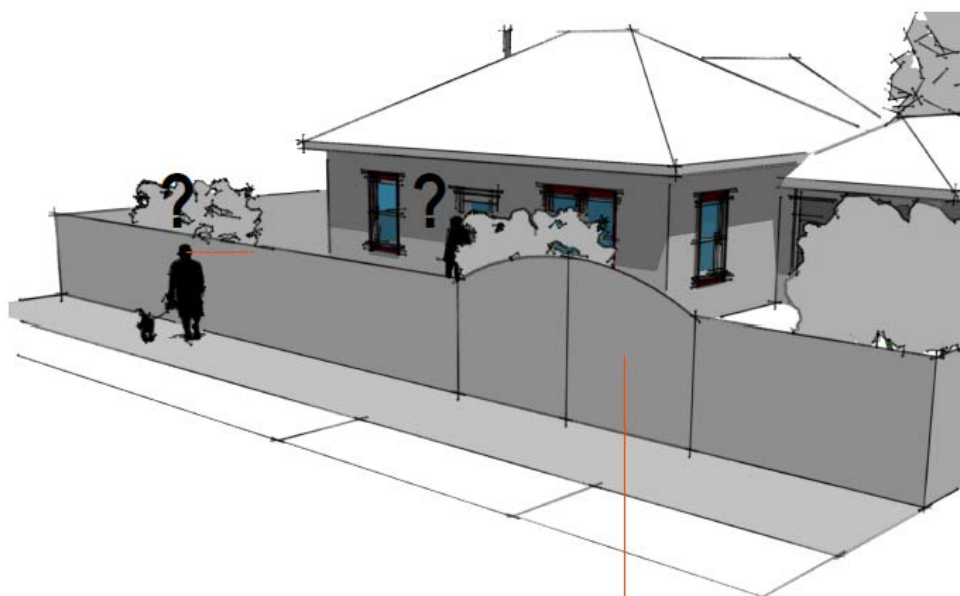
Solid fences create a barrier between the house and the street preventing casual overlooking and therefore 'policing' of the street. Such design measures whilst effective in achieving privacy start to remove the house from its surrounding community. Can also be a target for 'tagging'

Roof Design

Just as the overall massing of buildings should be simply organised into 'additive' elements, the roof design should follow the same organising principles. Generally this will mean that the ridge of the main roof will be parallel with the direction of the street. Gables are often an element which can help reduce the overall scale of large roofs.

Sketch showing a variety of roof types and their inter relationship with one another

Yards and Boundary Definition

Front yard treatments – both "hard" surfaces and green landscaping – play an important role in the attractiveness of a neighbourhood. Planting and fences should contribute to a street, rather than create a hostile barrier, and ensure visitors and passers by feel safe and welcomed, whether arriving by foot or car.

Front yard landscaping – To maintain easy visibility between the street and the house, fences should be kept below a maximum height of 1.2m. Taller side fences should stop at or behind the façade of the house, with any gates to side or rear yards also behind the line of the façade. Low front fencing can be extended perpendicular to the street to meet the side fence and/or to fence front yards or paths from driveways. Low fences at the front of the house should cater for overlooking between the house and the street.


Single storey buildings should generally site no less than 1.3 metres from the side boundary inclusive of eaves.

Outdoor Spaces - Private

Private outdoor spaces function best when located to the side (set back from the front elevation) or rear of a house, with the building forming a visual barrier to the street or other public space. Solid fences over 1m high around the sides and rear of a property are appropriate, but not for front gardens. Front boundaries should be defined by fences no higher than 1m to ensure the house still maintains a visual connection to the street.
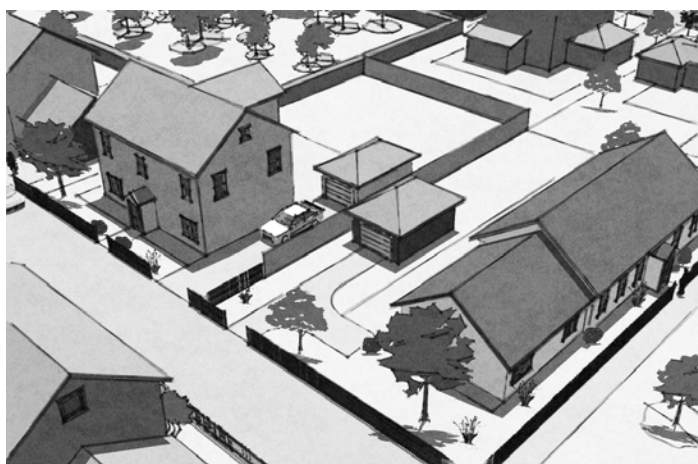
Lower boundary to the front and taller and more solid boundary definition to the side and rear of the house creates a balance between overlooking the street and having private outdoor space.

Garage location

Designing to accommodate garages and parking needs to be considered in light of not only the individual site but the collective impact on the street scene. In comparatively low density environments such as Riverhead garages and parking can easily be accommodated within the section. Location within the section however is still important with the most successful solutions ensuring that the garage door elevation is set back from the house façade (see sketch below). On larger sites, garages can if carefully detailed sometimes be positioned successfully to help define the public and private realm (see sketch).

Garages are located and detailed to be subservient to the street scene

A final consideration with regard to garages is also to consider the width of drive. Modern two car garages can result in very wide drives that have a detrimental effect on the street scene compromising other measures of creating pedestrian scale and enclosure. Generally therefore it is required that drives will be limited to a maximum width of 3.5m where they access on to the highway.

CHECKLIST   ✓/✗

(a)   Have walls, fences and windbreaks on front boundaries been designed in such a manner
       that they reduce physical bulk and allow visual connection with the street?

(b)   Have garages been setback from the front façade of the building and designed to allow
       carparking on site in front of the garage?

(c)   Are front doors clearly visible from the street and is there a living room fronting the street
       with glazed areas to provide passive surveillance?

(d)   Have private fenced outdoor living areas been provided at the rear or side of the dwelling
       and has the building been set back from the side yard at least 1.3m?

(e)   Do houses front the street and or park area rather than an internal private access?

(f)   Does the building design avoid garages taking up more than 35% of the buildings
       combined front elevation and avoid blank frontages with only doors at ground level?

(g)   Is the length of rear vehicle lanes minimized and garage doors off set from the driveway or
       rooflines and/or materials altered to reduce visual impact?

(h)   Has the façade been broken down into base, middle and top sections to reduce the scale
       of the building and have varying secondary elements such as bay windows or projecting
       features and varying roof forms been incorporated to define each house?

(i)   Are any terraced housing blocks limited to 40 metres, does the block run along the
       existing contours post subdivision and does the space between the blocks include a street
       or an area of open space?