Neighbourhood Activity Centre
Urban Design Guidelines

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION
29 JULY 2013
WHITExEHOUSXING & NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER REVIEW

The Whitehorse Housing and Neighbourhood Character Review involves a reappraisal and updating of the Whitehorse Housing Strategy 2003 and the Neighbourhood Character Study 2003. Elements of both documents are contained in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme.

These documents together set a hierarchy of preferred locations for growth – substantial change, natural change and minimal change – and preferred design objectives and responses to ensure that the desired housing outcome is achieved. Both documents have been reviewed to ensure that they are still relevant and provide appropriate direction for future housing development. The Review will recommend changes to the Whitehorse Planning Scheme that will direct residential development to the most suitable locations, and strengthen protection of neighbourhood character.

The study area for the Review includes all residentially zoned land within the City of Whitehorse, as well as the business zoned land within the Neighbourhood Activity Centres.

The Review has two Stages. **Stage 1** was completed in April/May and involved community consultation to obtain comment on two draft documents, being:

- Draft Neighbourhood Activity Centre (NAC) Urban Design Guidelines
- Draft Neighbourhood Character Study Preferred Character Statements

**Stage 2**, now completed, has three components for your comment:

- A review of the Neighbourhood Character Study that recommends new Precincts and Preferred Character Statements for all residential areas, with Guidelines for residential development within each Neighbourhood Character Precinct.
- Revised Urban Design Guidelines for development in Neighbourhood Activity Centres (NACs) (This document).
- A revised Housing Strategy that utilises information from both the Neighbourhood Character Study and NAC Assessment to provide direction for meeting Whitehorse’s housing needs for the next 20 years, including proposed alterations to the existing designated substantial change, natural change and minimal change areas.

**WHY IS THIS REVIEW NEEDED?**

In the ten years since the Council prepared the current Neighbourhood Character Study and Housing Study, much has changed. Melbourne is now anticipated to grow to a population of around 5.5 million by 2031, with each local Council anticipated to grow in both its population and the number of homes it will accommodate. Council needs to prepare for the change that Whitehorse is likely to experience by influencing where, and in what circumstances, development should occur – and in particular, how it can occur in a way that respects the desired future character of our neighbourhoods.

Melbourne’s population is growing, households on average are getting smaller, and house prices in established areas are becoming less affordable. Not all growth and change can be accommodated on agricultural land kilometres from established areas – nor should it be. As we enter different stages of the lifecycle, our housing needs change, and many of us would rather stay in our local area rather than be forced to live remotely from friends and family. Whitehorse will play its part in providing for these needs.

**THE NEW PLANNING ZONES**

The State Government recently released changes to the existing industrial zones, and new residential and commercial zones. This will enable the desired scale of development to be more effectively identified and future preferred character to be more clearly specified. Councils must define boundaries to apply these new residential zones. The Review will prepare proposals for implementing these new residential zones so that the Whitehorse community gains the maximum benefit from them.
In preparing these Neighbourhood Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines an assessment has considered each NAC to determine the form of development that may be appropriate for the type of centre. The assessment examined factors like availability and proximity to existing facilities, development opportunities and constraints, and the appropriate scale of development. The Draft Neighbourhood Activity Centre (NAC) Urban Design Guidelines, revised as a result of the consultation earlier this year, are now released for comment. The Guidelines aim to both to encourage residential uses that complement existing retail and business functions and to integrate development in the NAC with neighbouring residential precincts.

WHAT DO WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK ON?

We want your feedback on the Draft NAC Urban Design Guidelines and classifications of each NAC in terms of its type, size and locational characteristics, as well as the broad design parameters proposed for the NACs to accommodate future development.

HOW THE NAC URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES WORK

The Guidelines comprise two key parts:

- **Part A**: General NAC Urban Design Guidelines, include general design guidelines that apply to all Neighbourhood Activity Centres throughout the City of Whitehorse. These are provided as generic guidelines as they generally do not vary from centre to centre.

- **Part B**: NAC Built Form Guidelines, which classify each of the NACs into one of five categories and outline specific proposed building heights and setbacks, as well as design objectives and built form guidelines for each category of centre. The justification for the proposed height and setback controls is provided within the design objectives.

HOW WERE THE CENTRES CLASSIFIED?

The NACs are categorised utilising four primary criteria:

1. The width and role of the road on which they are located i.e. whether they are on a standard width road (local or main) or a wide main road. The width of a road is considered to provide a measure of the capacity of the centre to accommodate higher buildings from an urban design perspective.

2. Approximate size of the centre and the range of services. The size and functions of a NAC indicates its role and capacity to accommodate future growth.

3. Existing built form height. The existing form of the centre indicates the capacity for accommodating more development. This often correlates with the size of the centre.

4. Location of the NAC in relation to public transport options. The accessibility of the centre adds to its likely future potential to accommodate development. This often correlates with the type of road on which the centre is located.

THE CATEGORIES

The five categorisations are therefore:

- **Category 1A** includes small-medium local service centres, on a standard width road
- **Category 1B** includes large sized centres on a standard width road
- **Category 2A** includes small-medium local service centres on a wide main road
- **Category 2B** includes large sized centres on a wide main road
- **Category 3** includes large, car based centres on a wide main road

HOW WILL THE GUIDELINES BE USED?

The built form guidelines for each category of NAC address issues such as residential interface, adjoining neighbourhood character type, height and setbacks of new development or extensions to the existing buildings.

Once finalised and in the planning scheme, the Guidelines will be used to assess planning applications and advise owners and developers of the preferred form of buildings in these centres.
WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTIVITY CENTRE (NAC)?

NACs are defined as small shopping areas located in the heart of established residential areas, and generally close to existing public transport infrastructure and community facilities.

The City of Whitehorse has identified around 60 NACs that all play an important community role in providing a mix of uses to meet local convenience needs.

NACs are often good places to live close to, because they provide services for local people. Sometimes they are well accessed by public transport; usually they are easy to walk to. If more people could live in or close to NACs, there would be less need to take the car to fetch a carton of milk or a newspaper, more people would walk, and community health and wellbeing would improve.

From a metropolitan perspective, these NACs contribute to the goal of encouraging walking, cycling and local public transport use, as well as developing or enhancing community hubs.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

The strategic direction articulated in Melbourne 2030, the Victorian Government’s blueprint for Melbourne, is for a more compact and intense form of development within activity centres.

As such, many of the NACs throughout the City of Whitehorse have been subject to recent development applications, but in most cases, do not have specific guidelines to guide the appropriate scale and form of development.

The purpose of the guidelines is to provide more definitive guidance regarding the development of land within NACs throughout the City of Whitehorse.

The guidelines will help to encourage more housing, employment and community services in centres that are well serviced by public transport, while ensuring the valued characteristics of traditional low-rise neighbourhoods are protected and reinforced.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDELINES

This document comprises two key parts:

- **Part A**: General NAC Urban Design Guidelines, which apply to all Neighbourhood Activity Centres throughout the City of Whitehorse.
- **Part B**: NAC Built Form Guidelines, which classifies each of the NACs into one of five categories and outlines specific building heights and setbacks for each centre.

WHY HAVEN’T ALL CENTRES BEEN INCLUDED?

This Review does not include centres that are classified as Central Activities Areas, Major Activity Areas and some very small centres.

The Neighbourhood Activity Centre Urban Design Guidelines do not override the direction for centres such as Burwood Village, Mitcham and Blackburn Village which already have specific Structure Plans or Urban Design Frameworks in place.
PART A: GENERAL NAC URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

VISION FOR WHITEHORSE’S NACs

The NACs in Whitehorse will continue to serve a local shopping, commercial and service role, complemented by dwellings that assist in providing for the diversity of housing needs of the municipality. The NACs will incorporate new development that revitalises and responds to the role of the NACs, and respects the built form scale while allowing for some additional floorspace growth where appropriate. New development will respect the character and amenity of surrounding residential areas, and provide a well-designed and thoughtful response to the built form context.

LAND USE & ACTIVITY

Development will be designed to facilitate a lively, attractive and safe local activity centre, and assist in improving its economic viability.

- Encourage upper level residential uses in business zoned areas where the floorspace is of limited value for retail or commercial uses or where development will assist in revitalising the local centre.
- New buildings should be designed to address and provide an active frontage along all public realm interfaces, including streets and other public spaces.
- Provide windows, openings and displays along ground and first floor frontages to provide articulation and visual connection to the street.
- Minimise the extent of ground floor frontages occupied by residential uses.
- Any ground floor residential use or new non-commercial development should be designed to allow for adaptation to a commercial use in the future, for example by provision of adequate floor to ceiling heights, and allowance for future services, signage, pedestrian access, car parking and loading needs.
- Encourage traders to provide outdoor seating and dining and other external activities to activate the edges of buildings. (see also City of Whithorse’s Footpath Trading Guidelines)
- Ensure any new building or modification is designed to enhance the surveillance and security of public spaces, including laneways, and incorporates appropriate lighting treatments.

SITE CONTEXT

New development will be designed to respond to the immediate site environs, role of the centre and enhance the character of the surrounding residential area.

- The form and scale of the frontage of new buildings should respond to the prevailing commercial nature of the NAC at ground level, while respecting the adjoining and proximate residential character at upper level and other interfaces.
- Design new buildings to respond to the surrounding building scale while allowing for growth in accordance with the on-going role of the centre.
- Development should not exceed the maximum building heights identified for the centre. (Refer to the Built Form Guidelines covering the various categories of NACs in the following section)
- Provide ground and upper level setbacks to reduce impacts on adjoining residential properties, and maintain a pedestrian scale of development at the building facades. (Refer to the Built Form Guidelines covering the various categories of NACs in the following Part B)
- New development should take into consideration existing topography, landscape elements and demonstrate sensitivity to local viewlines, vistas and streetscape character.
- Minimise the visual impact of new development when viewed from surrounding residential streets and dwellings.

DETAILED BUILDING DESIGN

The detailed design of buildings will provide a high quality and visually interesting interface with the streetscape (including internal streets within larger centres) and the surrounding residential area, ensuring issues of amenity, functionality, adaptability and accessibility are addressed.

Design Detail

- New buildings should demonstrate a high standard of good design that complements the existing centre and surrounds.
- The design detail and architectural features of new buildings should reflect the particular qualities of sensitive areas adjoining the centre (such as areas with significant vegetation, heritage significance or special neighbourhood character).
- Utilise materials, colours and finishes that complement the appearance and character of the existing centre and local area.
PART A: GENERAL NAC URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES CONTINUED

- Provide windows, openings and displays along ground and first floor frontages, and balconies and terraces at upper levels where possible, to provide articulation and visual connection to the street, increase opportunities for passive surveillance, and improve visual and functional connection with the street, any adjacent parks and public open space.
- Building facades should be articulated to create a fine grain (narrow frontage) presentation to the street, particularly on larger sites.
- All visible building facades should be well articulated with variations in surface texture, colours and materials.
- Use robust high quality materials and detailing to ensure that buildings remain attractive and functional over time.
- Minimise the use of reflective or tinted glazing which hides the presence of activity within the lower level interfaces of buildings.
- Provide new dwellings with adequate access to daylight and sunlight, with the provision of suitable and functional private outdoor space.
- Integrate landscape design with the overall site, layout and building design.

Services
- Incorporate waste and recycling areas within secure, dedicated enclosures that are designed as an integral part of the building fabric.
- Screen air conditioning services, antennas and other utilities from public view using roof structures/architectural elements.
- Locate service spaces (storerooms, toilets and lifts) as well as garages away from street frontages. Public amenities should be well sign posted for users.

Pedestrian access
- Provide direct, prominent, legible and well sheltered pedestrian entry points into buildings from the street and car parking areas.
- Where possible, design new buildings with the ground floor at street level to avoid the need for ramp or staircase access.
- Ensure building design adheres to the established standards and guidelines regarding the safety and accessibility of all users. Good building design embodies planning for access by people of all mobilities in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).
- On corner sites, locate ground floor residential entry points along the side street rather than from the primary retail frontage.
- Where primary pedestrian access to a property is proposed from a service lane, appropriate lighting and a good level of natural surveillance should be provided.
- Encourage secondary pedestrian access along service lanes where practical and appropriate, particularly where a laneway abuts a car parking area or open space.

Signage
- Signage should complement and be integrated with the design and proportions of the building, not create excessive clutter and allow for clear window space to ensure the ability for passive surveillance from within the development along a street frontage.
- Locate signage on the building (rather than on poles or within the streetscape) where possible, and avoid signage and advertising elements that create visual clutter or restrict pedestrian movement such as A-frames, pole signs, inflatables and bunting.
- See also Clause 22.02 (Visual Amenity and Advertising Signs) of the Whitehorse Planning Scheme.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
- New developments will demonstrate a commitment to the principles of environmentally sustainable design.
- New buildings are to incorporate best practice Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) principles, such as designing for passive solar design, incorporation of green walls and roofs where possible and feasible, and use of sustainable materials. (see Draft Clause 22.18 Environmentally Efficient Design for detailed requirements).
- Encourage the incorporation of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) treatments for the collection and treatment of roof, road, car park and service area runoff.
- Use landscaping to reduce the heat island effect.

PUBLIC REALM INTERFACE
New buildings will create a complementary interface to enhance the public realm surroundings.

Awnings And Weather Protection
- New development should incorporate weather protection for pedestrians along street frontages in the form of verandahs, awnings or canopies over the footpath (NB. Separate Council approval may be required if on Council land).
PART A: GENERAL NAC URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Design verandahs to be cantilevered or supported by only light-weight columns, consistent with the prevailing character of the centre, to reinforce a traditional shopping strip character and avoid privatisation of the public domain.

**Car parking and vehicular access**
- New development is to provide sufficient car parking for the needs of its occupants and visitors (in accordance with Clause 52.06 of the Whitehorse Planning Scheme) without generating adverse impacts on the pedestrian environment/streetscape and the amenity of nearby residential properties.
- Encourage sites with service lane access to provide all vehicular access to the site from the laneway.
- Locate on-site car parking to the rear of buildings and behind the front building line, or integrate into the building envelope, where possible.
- Provide landscaping to soften the visual impact of hard surfaces and service areas, without compromising the functionality or user safety of car parking and service areas.
- Provide bicycle parking in large and residential developments.

**OFF-SITE IMPACTS**

New development will be designed to minimise potential off-site impacts such as noise (including from services), overlooking, access to sunlight, and light spillage on adjoining residential properties.

- Incorporate noise attenuation measures such as double glazed windows into the building design where considered necessary to protect future occupants from external noise sources.
- Design new buildings and landscape to respect the reasonable expectations of adjoining residential uses to sunlight, privacy and to minimise overlooking to private outdoor spaces.
- Locate areas of a building that will produce noise, light spill or odour away from residential interfaces.
- Utilise vegetation to screen and buffer adjacent residential areas, by incorporating trees or green verges along side and rear boundaries, using vertical and/or roof gardens, where appropriate. (See also City of Whitehorse’s Landscaping Guidelines)

**STREETSCEPES/ PUBLIC REALM**

The public realm will be designed to complement the function of the centre and the character of its surrounding residential area. Design should respond to surrounding public realm and enhance character and amenity.

- **Paved areas**
  - Avoid extensive areas of paved surfaces and car parking located between buildings and the road frontage, particularly for larger scale centres.
  - Incorporate large canopy trees throughout car parking and other public areas for shade and amenity.
  - Use Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) measures to reduce hard surface paved areas.

- **Movement**
  - In major redevelopments of larger centres, provide wayfinding/directional signage to aid legibility and navigation to public transport and other key destinations, and to improve the overall cohesiveness of the centre.
  - Provide adequate street lighting, utilising lighting styles that direct light downwards to illuminate pedestrian pathways and spaces.
  - Enhance visual and physical connections to prominent landmarks, open space/parklands and public transport infrastructure where possible.
  - Provide bicycle parking to encourage cycling.

- **Landscaping treatments**
  - Encourage the retention of mature vegetation and planting of tall canopy trees where possible.
  - Wherever possible, incorporate low maintenance and drought resistant trees and green verges along the streetscape to enhance the scale, soften the appearance of the building, and provide shade to building entrances. Landscape treatments may include tree planting, raised planter beds, and vertical gardens.
  - Planting areas should provide adequate infrastructure and deep root zones to allow plants and trees to thrive.
  - Allow for intended vegetation growth in the public and private realm.
  - Ensure the landscape throughout the centre reflects the preferred neighbourhood character of the surrounding residential area, and draws on the vegetation characteristics within the preferred neighbourhood statements and surrounding streetscapes.
  - Refer to City of Whitehorse Landscape Guidelines for further information.
NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTIVITY CENTRES MAP

1A: small-medium neighbourhood centre on a standard width road
1B: large neighbourhood centre on a standard width road
2A: small-medium neighbourhood centre on a wide main road
2B: large neighbourhood centre on a wide main road
3: large car based centre on a wide main road

* Please refer to NAC Built Form Guidelines for more detail
CATEGORISATION OF CENTRES

The NACs are categorised utilising four primary criteria:

1. The width and role of the road on which they are located i.e. whether they are on a standard width road (local or main) or a wide main road. The width of a road is considered to provide a measure of the capacity of the centre to accommodate higher buildings from an urban design perspective.

2. Approximate size of the centre and the range of services. The size and functions of a centre indicates its role and capacity to accommodate future growth.

3. Existing built form height. The existing form of the centre indicates the capacity for accommodating more development. This often correlates with the size of the centre.

4. Location of the centre in relation to superior public transport options. The accessibility of the centre adds to its likely future potential to accommodate development. This often correlates with the type of road on which the centre is located.

THE CATEGORIES

The five categorisations are therefore:

- **Category 1A**: small-medium local service centres, on a standard width road
- **Category 1B**: large sized centres on a standard width road
- **Category 2A**: small-medium local service centres on a wide main road
- **Category 2B**: large sized centres on a wide main road
- **Category 3**: large, car based centres on a main road

Centre Size

Small-medium centres generally contain less than 30 properties.

Large centres have over 30 properties or one large anchor retailer and several smaller premises.