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Note: This final version of the study has been amended to reflect Council Resolution Minute Number CP17.01719.0
# Building Height Study

An Approach to City Image

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Project Overview

Urbis was commissioned by the City of Gold Coast to prepare a study that investigates Gold Coast’s future intentional city shape to inform a citywide building height strategy that incorporates building height guidance, principles, height categories and consequent recommendations to the City Plan.

Document Overview

The Building Height Study is presented in two volumes, summarised below.

**Volume 1:** is a collection of independent studies on the context, capacity, image, identity and ambition of the Gold Coast. It includes findings from a number of working sessions with Council stakeholders, and is used as the basis to inform Volume 2.

**Volume 2:** proposes a high level building height strategy with citywide principles and height guidance. This is also supported by recommendations for strategy implementation in the City Plan.
Project Methodology

The Building Height Study has been prepared through a three stage process which focuses on:

Stage 1: Three individual theme-based studies focusing on the global significance and context of the city’s baseline conditions, future challenges and City Plan directions of the future intentional city shape.

Stage 2: Working sessions to synthesise the findings of Stage 1 into a future intentional city shape and citywide building height principles.

Stage 3: Development of a building height strategy for the Gold Coast based on city wide building height principles. Inclusion of City Plan recommendations for implementing high level values and a vision for a future intentional city shape.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned to provide strategic building height guidance for future development within Gold Coast’s designated urban area. The study considers the city’s natural and built environment against its potential future growth in order to identify opportunities for urban change and clarity. As instructed by Council, the study focuses exclusively on the city’s building height and does not investigate nor consider broader planning agendas such as land use, residential density, infrastructure capacity and environmental constraints.
Executive Summary

The following study provides a measured and strategic citywide approach for determining building height, based on city shape values and building height principles. The study highlights the significance of natural features, and the importance of citywide legibility, amenity and connectivity, to shape and define the city’s urban form. Findings from the study support a need to define and articulate the city’s iconic skylines, and a need to enhance building height in activity centres and within transit nodes and corridors. Finally, the study encourages maintaining natural features, in particular the city’s headlands, beaches, coves, canals and the Broadwater. By aligning appropriate building heights to maximise amenity while upholding the landscape character of each natural setting is central to the building height strategy.

In summary, this study has been informed by an understanding of current City Plan policies and through detailed analysis into city capacity, image, identify and growth relevant to the Gold Coast. It identifies Gold Coast’s city shape values to determine a set of overarching citywide building height principles and a strategic building height guidance. High-level recommendations for implementing this building height strategy into City Plan have also been proposed.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Volume 2 proposes a building height strategy based on key insights and emerging directions established in background studies presented in Volume 1. The building height strategy is underpinned by a set of citywide principles and a framework that values city’s legibility, amenity, and connectivity. Recommendations for implementing the building height strategy to City Plan are proposed in the concluding section of this report.
1.1 Purpose of this Study

The Gold Coast is Australia’s largest non-capital city and is famous for its iconic tall building skyline, golden beaches, world heritage hinterland and world-class surf breaks. However, the city is currently undergoing a period of significant transformation fuelled by population growth, and the on-going investment in infrastructure and facilities needed to accommodate this. In order to retain its competitive advantage, the city needs to accommodate this expected population increase of 320,000 by 2036 in a manner that retains the city’s enviable lifestyle, protects its world-class environment and supports investment in public infrastructure.

The purpose of this study is to:

» Identify a vision, direction and strategic guidance (in the form of citywide principles) to inform the future intentional city shape with particular regard for building heights;

» Propose recommendations for implementing the building height strategy in City Plan.

A number of interconnected studies (listed in the diagram below) are being undertaken, and when synthesised these studies will better inform a future intentional city shape to guide growth and development at the Gold Coast.

FIGURE 1: Relationship of Interconnected Studies
1.2 Document Structure

The diagram below is an overview of the contents covered in Volume 1 and 2.

**FIGURE 2:** Document Structure Diagram

BACKGROUND STUDIES - UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

Four independent background studies synthesised to identify emerging principles and directions for a building height strategy.

- **VOLUME 01**
  - CITY CAPACITY

- **VOLUME 02**
  - CITY IMAGE AND IDENTITY
  - CITY FORM AND GROWTH
  - CITY SHAPE PROJECTIONS

THIS REPORT

CITYWIDE BUILDING HEIGHT PRINCIPLES

Eight principles that underpin all decision-making in regards to building height across the city.

- **1. ICONIC SKYLINE**
- **2. GREEN FRAME**
- **3. VISUAL BREAKS**
- **4. BEACH CITY**
- **5. A CENTRAL PARK**
- **6. A WATER PLAYGROUND**
- **7. INLAND CENTRES**
- **8. AN URBAN LADDER**

CITYWIDE BUILDING HEIGHT GUIDANCE

Three significant citywide themes to guide building height allocation across the city.

- **LEGIBILITY**
- **AMENITY**
- **CONNECTIVITY**

CITY PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of recommendations to implement citywide Building Height Principles and Strategy into future City Plan policy.
1.3 Study Area

The study area considers the urban footprint of the Gold Coast as depicted in City Plan Strategic Framework Map 1: Designated Urban Area. City Plan zoning designations of urban uses have been used to define the boundary for the study area (refer Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Study Area Map
GROWTH MANAGEMENT

It is estimated that the population of the Gold Coast will grow by 320,000 people over the next 20 years. As the second most populous local government area in Australia, and the most populous non-capital city, the implications of this projected growth on the urban form of the city must be considered. City Plan provides that a large proportion of this growth will be accommodated through infill and redevelopment in urban areas. Understanding the form this development will take, especially in relation to height is essential to ensure the liveability of the Gold Coast.

DENSITY AND HEIGHT

Tall buildings are strongly associated with the image of the Gold Coast and are characteristic of the coastal strip of the city in particular. The city recognises the importance of tall buildings to the ongoing growth of the city and its image. However, it also recognises that tall buildings make up only 0.05% of all buildings in the city. And that the relationship between density and height is not a linear one. It is possible to deliver urban densities across the city in built forms other than tall and super-tall towers. Over recent years the city has come under increasing pressure to consider the approval of tall buildings in isolated locations across the city including along the southern coastal strip and in flood plain areas. This presents the need for the City to provide strategic guidance for the location of tall buildings.

LIGHT RAIL EXPANSION

In 2014 the Gold Coast opened the first stage of the G:link - the Gold Coast’s light rail system. In its first 12 months, 6.5 million trips were made on the 13 km system which is 15% above forecasts. The light rail system has been a major influence on the city, transforming both travel behaviour and influencing the physical form of the city.

Stage two of the light rail system connecting Broadbeach to Helensvale is currently under construction. This expansion, and the consideration of further stages along the coastal strip south of Broadbeach, will further influence the development and form of the city. This is especially important in considering the height/scale of development in response to significant landscape features such as the coastal headlands and community valued local character of established coastal villages.
CITY IMAGE

The City of Gold Coast, in its Corporate vision, states the aspiration to be a world-class city. In order to compete on the world stage, cities once needed to be the largest and at the centre of the world’s great empires. In today’s world, size is not as important. While business activity and political engagement remain important, other factors such as city image, human capital, information exchange, good public transport, innovation, open space and cultural experience are key strengths to attract and retain world-class talent.

CITY PLAN SUBMISSIONS

During public consultation of the City Plan, submissions were received requesting Council’s reconsideration of building height provisions in locations across the city, generally located along the southern coastal strip, adjacent to the Broadwater, in the Merrimac Carrara Floodplain and within inland centres such as Nerang. Council resolved these submissions with a commitment to consider these height issues in a study.

INTENTIONAL CITY SHAPE

The city has changed significantly over the past 15 years. Over the period 2001-2011, the population of the Gold Coast increased by one-third from 387,102 people to 513,954. This increase in population has physically manifested itself in changes to the city shape. From the expanding high-rise skyline along the coastal strip and continuous growth and development in inland centres, the emerging city shape needs to respond to a different set of drivers than in previous years. Access to amenity, economic activity, transport and the protection of natural landscape character are all important considerations in the future intentional city shape.
The Gold Coast holds some of the country’s most prestigious natural landscapes complemented by a distinct and responsive built form. As a relatively young city, the Gold Coast has rapidly grown to be uniquely positioned as a city of notable size and magnitude in close proximity to pristine beaches and mountain ranges. Moving forward, understanding and celebrating the city’s geographic context, its city shape values, and its opportunities for future growth will position the Gold Coast as a liveable New World City. The following section identifies the city shape values and objectives relevant to citywide building height within the City Plan.
2.1 City Plan: A Future Intentional City Shape

The recent release of City Plan offers a significant amount of work that provides insight into an intentional future shape of the city. This is outlined in three key sections:

» Strategic Intent;
» Strategic Framework; and
» Building Height Overlay.

STRATEGIC INTENT

The strategic intent for the city is described in Section 3.2.1 of the City Plan Strategic Framework:

“The Gold Coast is a world-class city. With the population expected to increase by 320,000 over the next 20 years, the City of Gold Coast builds upon its enviable lifestyle, exceptional economic opportunities, stunning environment and modern infrastructure to leverage this growth to become a prosperous, connected and liveable world-class city.”

The strategic intent for the city identifies four key aspects that contribute to being a world class city:

» Stunning natural features;
» Enviable lifestyle;
» Economic opportunity (centres of activity and business); and
» Modern infrastructure.

FIGURE 4: The image below captures some key city shape values of the Gold Coast. It includes the iconic skyline stretching from Main Beach to Broadbeach, the emerging skyline at Southport, the amenity offer at Broadwater, and elements of a ‘green frame’ with the hinterlands in the distance.
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Strategic Framework Section 3.2.2: City Shape and Urban Transformation, City Plan describes the future intentional city shape as:

“The Gold Coast is a linear city surrounded and penetrated by a green, gold and blue framework. The city’s settlement pattern has been shaped by physical attributes – the coast, waterways and hinterland – and road and rail routes. Growth and development will be concentrated in an integrated network of well serviced urban places.”

This statement is supported by a number of citywide diagrams including:

» A plan series showing the transformation of the city: This series demonstrates urban transformation from its current form as a linear city shape along the coastal strip with isolated inland activity centres, to the expansion along east-west corridors connecting key nodes.

» A series of citywide built form transects: This material depicts both a coastal transect from north to south, as well as transects from the hinterland to the coast. These transects acknowledge the city’s iconic high-rise skyline along the coastal strip, and highlight the prominence of Southport, Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach.

The Strategic Framework also provides the following supporting statements with regards to the varied building height outcomes throughout the city:

**Activity Centres:**

» Intensification in centres, urban neighbourhoods and light rail renewal areas.

» Building height in mixed-use and specialist centres provides legibility and reflects higher intensity of use.

» In neighbourhood centres building height reflects surrounding neighbourhood.

**Suburban Neighbourhoods**

» Low rise suburban neighbourhoods.

**Visual Breaks:**

» Restricting building heights around Burleigh Ridge and Currumbin Hill.

**BUILDING HEIGHT OVERLAY**

In summary, the City Plan identifies building height opportunities in the following locations:

1. Undefined building height along the Light Rail urban renewal area between Main Beach and Broadbeach; and

2. Building height in higher order activity centres such as Helensvale and Coomera and specialist centres such as the Gold Coast Health Precinct and Bond University.

Refer to Building Height Overlay Map in City Plan for further detail.
2.2 City Shape Objectives

A review of building height against the strategic intents and framework of the City Plan encourage four key objectives to guide future city shape directions. These objectives are summarised below.

1. **NATURAL FEATURES**

Celebrate the natural features of the Gold Coast as a unique and defining asset of the city. As a relatively young city in a global context, the city’s natural features offer great opportunity and amenity for shaping a intentional future city form.

2. **AMENITY**

Leverage benefits of amenity assets in three key locations:

- The Coastal Strip;
- The Broadwater; and
- The Central Park

3. **CONNECTIVITY**

Support investment in high frequency public transport (particularly light and heavy rail) to better the city’s connectivity. Also promote east-west connections to link the city’s coastal edge to inland activity centres.

4. **LEGIBILITY**

Enhance overall city legibility with particular focus on a hierarchy of activity centres and the form, function and role of individual activity centres.

2.3 City Shape Values

Understanding and defining the city’s existing city shape values and accommodating future growth around them, is key to creating a distinct city image. Through the findings presented in Volume 1, with particular reference to the working sessions, eight overarching city shape values were identified. These values represent a grouping of significant natural or physical features and are location-specific. They are as follows:

- **Iconic Skylines** : the distinct profile of built form along the coastal edge;
- **A Green Frame** : the significance of hinterlands and islands as a frame for the city;
- **Visual Breaks** : moments of relief, outlook and transition within the built form;
- **A City with Many Beaches** : the city’s many beach settings, each with distinct character and landscape;
- **A Central Park** : a ‘green heart’ for the city;
- **A Water Playground** : a setting that encourages Gold Coast’s recreation lifestyle on the water;
- **Inland Centres** : activity centres as important components of the inland fabric; and
- **An Urban Ladder** : a city that is well connected from strategic and integrated public transport options.
3.0 CITYWIDE BUILDING HEIGHT PRINCIPLES

Through its planning policy and processes, City of Gold Coast is evidently committed to encouraging sustainable growth and investment in a manner that acknowledges the city’s distinct natural environment and the enviable lifestyle that the city provides. The building height strategy identified in this study promotes this ongoing vision and values to provide guidance for a future intentional city shape. This section of the document outlines eight citywide building height principles that encapsulate city shape values and establish the foundations of an approach for future decision-making policy.
3.1 Citywide Building Height Principles

The following eight citywide building height principles provide strategic building height guidance that brings together city shape values with opportunities for growth. A brief intent of each principle is described below.

1 ICONIC SKYLINE
Retain the visual clarity and clustering of height along the coastal edge as the city’s defining built form.

2 GREEN FRAME
Maintain the visual prominence of the hinterland ranges, foothills, ridge-lines, and surrounding islands as a green frame forming a distinctive visual backdrop to the city.

3 VISUAL BREAKS
Enhance the definition of distinct urban neighbourhoods by maintaining and celebrating visual breaks in the built form as created by natural features of the city.

4 BEACH CITY
Building height along the coastal edge recognises and responds to the unique natural setting of the many different beach environments.

5 A CENTRAL PARK
Clearly define the boundary between urban and green, allowing development to realise the potential of a large scale open space whilst reflecting overall citywide legibility.

6 WATER PLAYGROUND
Building heights realise the visual amenity and recreational potential of the Broadwater, whilst generally maintaining the intimate scale of canals and inland waterways.

7 INLAND CENTRES
Reinforce citywide prominence of activity centres whilst responding to the local landscape character.

8 URBAN LADDER
Building height supports transport investment and economic growth, whilst also enhancing the city’s legibility.

The structure of each principle described in the following section includes the following components:

- **PRINCIPLE**: City shape intent
- **CITY SHAPE VALUE STATEMENT**: Key values of the city
- **CITY SHAPE VALUE**: Urban component or geographical feature encompassing principle
- **SUPPORTING BUILDING HEIGHT GUIDANCE**: A summary of the key outcomes being sought in response to this principle
ICONIC SKYLINE

PRINCIPLE 1

Retain the visual clarity and clustering of height along the coastal edge as a key feature of the city’s built form.

City Shape Value Statement

The iconic skyline is defined as the area of Southport CBD, the high-rise strip between Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach and Coolangatta acting as a bookend.

The geographic setting of the City of Gold Coast creates many opportunities to capture long views of the city, its beaches and hinterland. The iconic skyline of the coastal strip forms a globally recognisable image and defines, physically, the city’s relationship with its beaches and hinterland. It is valued for its distinctive silhouette and long thin form providing a spectacular backdrop to the beach.

Whether viewed from the hinterland, the beach or coastal headlands, the skyline image is iconic and characteristic of the city. Clustering of height will ensure the iconic skyline continues to emerge while retaining and protecting the qualities that make it special and attractive.

City Shape Value

» Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade), Surfers Paradise, Broadbeach
» Southport CBD
» Coolangatta

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Maintain the iconic skyline form in three existing areas: Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach, Southport CBD and Coolangatta. Define areas of Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach and Southport CBD as the only locations in the City for tallest buildings, and Coolangatta as an area for tall buildings.

2. Establish a clear hierarchy and enhance the individual characteristics of each of the city’s iconic skyline forms to contribute to city legibility by:

   » Maintaining the primacy of the long, thin silhouette from Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach;
   » Supporting the emerging cluster skyline at Southport as the secondary skyline; and
   » Enhancing the opportunity for the Coolangatta skyline to act as the southern gateway / bookend to the city and the tertiary skyline form.

3. Maintain the extent of iconic skyline precincts which take cues from defining natural features, characteristics of place and gateway treatments.

4. Implement clear transitions in height from iconic skyline locations to adjacent precincts as a key characteristic of the city.

5. Where an undefined height limit is applicable for locations outside activity centres, consider a unique set of built form parameters addressing setbacks, building separation and interface with adjoining context.

6. Avoid isolated tower forms that do not form part of a coherent overall skyline, especially outside of the coastal edge.
GREEN FRAME

PRINCIPLE 2

Maintain the visual prominence of the hinterland ranges, foothills, ridge-lines, and surrounding islands as a green frame forming a visual backdrop to the city.

City Shape Value Statement

The Gold Coast is a city framed in green. The hinterland ranges\(^1\), foothills\(^2\), ridges encompass our urban areas and are a defining characteristic of the city. To a lesser extent, landscape character areas of the Spit\(^3\) and surrounding islands also contribute to the green frame.

Only one third of the city is designated for urban development. The remaining consists of the hinterland ranges, foothills and ridges that form the western backdrop to the city are part of the Great Dividing Range - the fourth longest mountain range in the world.

The Gold Coast is the most biologically diverse city in Australia, with over 13,000 hectares of natural areas, including the World Heritage listed rainforests of Springbrook and Lamington, and home to more than 1,300 animal and 1,700 plant species. The intimate juxtaposition of these green elements and the way in which they interface with the urban form of the city is a defining characteristic.

1. The hinterland/Great Dividing range is defined in the Landscape Character Study within the area of Mountains and District Valleys Landscape Character types.
2. Foothills is defined by the Landscape Character Study as areas of hills and upper slopes which extend to the ridges and mountains of the Hinterland.
3. Landscape character at the Spit is defined in the City Plan Strategic Framework Map 4
4. Lowlands is defined by the Landscape Character Study as areas of low flat terrain, mainly close to the coastline and river. This area is located between the high-rise strip and foothills of ridgelines, as viewed in the east west transect of the city.
5. Citywide strategic view corridors are defined in the Council endorsed 27 Citywide Strategic Views Study.
VISUAL BREAKS

PRINCIPLE 3

Define distinct urban neighbourhoods by enhancing visual breaks in the built form as created by natural features of the city.

City Shape Value Statement

The Gold Coast is characterised by a multitude of river corridors, green ridgelines and prominent headlands. These natural features punctuate its linear urban form creating distinctive visual (and physical) breaks between urban areas and create recreational opportunities throughout the city.

Natural features provide definition to the city’s diverse localities and contribute to their unique character.

They also act as visual cues assisting in overall orientation within the city’s urban footprint and protect key view corridors to the city’s distinctive natural setting.

These key natural features are unique to the city image and are important elements that need to be preserved with the emerging city shape.

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Maintain low building height in key visual breaks in the urban form, as defined by significant natural features such as ridgelines, rivers and critical corridors (refer to Strategic Framework Map 4 – Greenspace network).

2. Building heights generally step down towards all headlands to ensure headlands are visible from distant vantage points.

3. Maintain openness along long linear view lines within lowlands1, coastal plains and low hills2 to articulate built form transitions between distinct neighbourhoods.

4. Ensure building heights do not impede existing key strategic views (identified in the Strategic City View document) from coastal headlands back to the hinterland and ridgelines.

5. Ensure no new buildings meet or breach theCurrumbin or Burleigh ridgelines or coastal headlands identified in Strategic Framework Map 4 – Greenspace network.

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1. Lowlands is defined by the Landscape Character Study as areas of low flat terrain, mainly close to the coastline and river. This area is located between the high-rise strip and foothills of ridgelines, as viewed in the east west transect of the city.

2. Coastal plains and low hills is a landscape character type in the Landscape Character Study, defined as areas drained by the five rivers.
PRINCIPLE 4

Building height along the coastal edge respects and responds to the unique natural settings of the many different beach environments.

City Shape Value Statement

The Gold Coast is home to some of the world’s finest beaches, each with unique characteristics and offering a range of lifestyle experiences.

Bound by over 70km of pure white sand and renowned for its surfing breaks, the beaches create a spectacular setting for the eastern edge of the city. In particular, the southern end of the coastline, features a series of coastal villages with an intimate built form scale and expression responsive to its immediate geography and natural landscape.

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Maintain low building height within the foothills of ridges and headlands to ensure minimal overshadowing to adjacent beaches.
2. Preserve citywide strategic view corridors to and from coastal headlands to the hinterland. This is achieved by keeping building height along view corridors below views to ridgelines.
3. Protect natural beaches and headland coves by ensuring neighbouring building heights do not hinder the legibility of the landscape or create undesirable overshadowing outcomes.
4. Where appropriate, promote slim building forms adjacent to linear coastal strips to leverage beach front amenity, while also minimising overshadowing the beach.

1. Citywide strategic view corridors are defined in the Council endorsed 27 Citywide Strategic Views Study.
A CENTRAL PARK

PRINCIPLE 5

Clearly define the boundary between urban and green, allowing development to realise the potential of a large scale open space whilst reflecting overall citywide legibility.

City Shape Value Statement

Gold Coast Central Park is located in the Merrimac-Carrara Floodplain area. It presents the opportunity for a key public open space asset for the Gold Coast.

The development constraints associated with the city’s central floodplain have identified the opportunity to create a new amenity focus for the city. With over 3,500 hectares of parkland, recreational areas and floodplain, Gold Coast Central Park is an open/green space system which if delivered has the capability to support development at its edge. At ten times the size of Central Park in New York, it has the potential to become the largest urban green space system in the world.

Council’s Green Heart Vision study has identified investigation areas around the core open space areas.

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Support low-medium building height at the outer edge to frame the public open spaces within the Central Park Investigation Areas.

2. Ensure building height in this location does not exceed maximum allowed height for surrounding inland centres.

3. Create a clearly defined urban edge of low-medium rise built form immediately fronting the core parkland areas of the Central Park. Avoid low-medium building height in open space areas that are in isolation from this edge.

4. Review and update the Green Heart Vision Study to reflect current circumstances and the City Plan.

5. Recognise infrastructure constraints for developments in flood prone areas, and acknowledge the opportunity for open space networks.

Locations of Green Heart Investigation Areas are defined in the Council approved Green Heart Vision study.
WATER PLAYGROUND

PRINCIPLE 6

Leverage building height to maximise the visual amenity and recreational potential of the Broadwater, whilst generally maintaining the intimate scale of rivers, canals and inland waterways.

City Shape Value Statement

The experience of the Gold Coast as a water playground is a core value of the city. It is on the doorstep of the Broadwater and has over 400km of canals, which is more than Amsterdam and Venice combined.

With over 270km of navigable waterways and an average annual water temperature of 22 degrees, the City has the best boating and recreational area in the country.

City Shape Value

» Broadwater and surrounding context
» River, canals and inland waterways

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Support taller building height to specific sites in close proximity to Nerang River and the Broadwater, in order to:
   » maximise access to the waterfront; and
   » provide greater opportunities for public open space
2. Where appropriate, maintain intimate scale of rivers, canals and inland waterways with low-rise buildings.
PRINCIPLE 7

Reinforce citywide prominence of activity centres whilst responding to the local landscape character.

City Shape Value Statement

The city is maturing with compact, lively centres that will be supported by great public transport.

An emerging characteristic of the city is the compact, urban scale of the inland centres. Developed around major transport interchanges, centres of activity and often set amongst a sensitive landscape setting, these centres represent a unique scale of development, offering a different experience of the city.

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Locate medium-rise built forms within activity centres to reinforce overall city legibility. Avoid isolated, taller forms either in inland centres or outside of them resulting in the dispersal of height.

2. Retain the profile of the urban transect between the hinterland and the high-rise strip. Maintain a concentrated and consistent medium rise built form at the heart of all inland centres ensuring development does not infringe on local and city wide views toward the hinterland setting.

3. Provide gradual transitions from medium rise building height in activity centre core to surrounding lower building height to reinforce location of activity centres.

4. Maintain a relative hierarchy of building height between centres with the highest order centres maintaining higher built forms.

1. Inland centres are activity centres west of the Gold Coast Highway identified in the Strategic Framework Map 5 (focus areas for economic activity).

2. City Plan Strategic Framework policy position.
Building height supports transport investment and economic growth whilst also enhancing the city’s legibility.

City Shape Value Statement

The Gold Coast is a connected community where transport investment unlocks economic growth and protects our lifestyle.

The Gold Coast is a linear city, shaped by its relationship to spectacular natural setting. Over time, transport investment has connected this city along this linear form. As a result, the two north-south arteries of the city are now the focus for both transit investment and for connecting people to place. As the city continues to grow, the next evolution will see the development of key east-west links becoming increasingly important and part of the city’s legible urban structure.

Supporting Building Height Guidance

1. Provide legibility and activation to public transport corridors and improve walkable catchments by intensifying building height along light rail routes.
2. Support heavy rail infrastructure with mid-rise development at key transit nodes.
3. Provide gradual transitions of building height from activity centres to surrounding context.
4. Promote key east-west linkages that connect the M1 with the coastline, by aligning appropriate building height with transit corridor. Ensure at least one key east-west link to the north, south, and centre of the city is addressed to promote citywide connectivity.
3.2 Towards a Future Intentional City Shape

The eight citywide building height principles (summarised below) have been identified as fundamental building height criteria to inform an intentional city-shape for the Gold Coast. These principles and the city shape values together promote growth and investment with regards for the city’s pristine natural environment and enviable lifestyle. The building height principles have been translated into an application of their locational context on the adjacent plan (refer to Figure 13).

Citywide Building Height Principles

1. ICONIC SKYLINE
2. GREEN FRAME
3. VISUAL BREAKS
4. BEACH CITY
5. A CENTRAL PARK
6. WATER PLAYGROUND
7. INLAND CENTRES
8. URBAN LADDER

The purpose of the adjacent plan is two-fold:
1. To provide geographical structure to these principles as an example of how building height might relate and respond to context of the overall future intentional city shape; and
2. To inform the development of an overall city-shape plan for the city through the synthesis of the individual findings of the other interconnected studies.
FIGURE 13: An Application of Building Height Principles

BUILDING HEIGHT PRINCIPLES

1. ICONIC SKYLINE
   - Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach
   - Southport CBD
   - Coolangatta

2. GREEN FRAME
   - Hinterland and Islands
   - The Spit

3. VISUAL BREAKS
   - Headlands
   - Ridgelines
   - Urban breaks

4. BEACH CITY
   - Linear coastal strip
   - Natural beach
   - Headland cove

5. A CENTRAL PARK
   - Gold Coast Central Park

6. WATER PLAYGROUND
   - Rivers, canals and inland waterways
   - Broadwater

7. INLAND CENTRES
   - Inland centre

8. URBAN LADDER
   - M1
   - Gold Coast Highway
   - Key east-west links
As well as citywide principles, the building height strategy incorporates a citywide height guidance that is based on three important overarching themes. The themes are legibility, amenity and connectivity, and they consider height allocation from a strategic citywide context. They support height within activity centres and along transit corridors, as well as encouraging height to leverage amenity. This guidance together with the building height principles establish a high-order framework in which to consider building height allocation and a future intentional city shape, once all interconnected studies have been completed.
4.1 Citywide Building Height Guidance

The following building height guidance prioritises three significant city-shaping themes. These themes promote future city growth and investment balanced with the city’s value for its regional setting, natural features and unique lifestyle. These high-order themes enable a citywide approach to building height, and they are as follows:

1. **Legibility**: The intent of this theme is to enhance overall city legibility with reference to the form and function of activity centres.

2. **Amenity**: The intent of this theme is to enforce the following three key locations where height responds to natural amenity - the coastal strip, the Broadwater and Gold Coast Central Park.

3. **Connectivity**: The intent of this theme is to support and leverage investment in high-frequency transit (rail) corridors.
4.2 Height Strategy for Legibility

One of the key objectives of the building height strategy is to define and articulate the physical legibility of the city. This is a key consideration in the context of activity centres and the hierarchy of centres listed below. *(Note: This hierarchy of centres is further defined within City Plan)*

» CBD Centre;
» Principal Centre;
» Specialist Centre;
» Major Centre; and
» District Centre.

Gold Coast centres generally have concentrated height to their core, stepping down towards their periphery to provide a height transition and legibility to their urban form.

In principle, the height strategy for city legibility generally increases in both height and centre hierarchy as it transitions towards the coastline and in northern half of the city.

4.3 Height Strategy to Capture Amenity

Another key objective of the building height strategy is to allow height in locations with access to significant amenity. The Gold Coast benefits from three high-value amenity opportunities:

» The Coastal Strip;
» The Broadwater; and
» Gold Coast Central Park.

While the amenity strategy does not necessarily encourage height in all locations fronting amenity, the three locations above have been identified as opportunities for accommodating height.

In principle, the height strategy for capturing amenity identifies two key urban characters for the Broadwater and coastal strip in response to land form and natural features as described below.

**COASTAL STRIP & COASTAL VILLAGES**

In terms of the Coastal Strip and Broadwater, analysis identifies two key typologies of urban form in these areas, they are:

» **Linear Coastal Strip Development** - located along the beach front and the Gold Coast Highway, these linear coastal strips are suitable for taller building forms; and

» **Coastal Villages** - residential development that is shaped by coastal headlands or other valued landscape features, these villages are more sensitive to taller building forms.

**THE GOLD COAST CENTRAL PARK**

While detailed planning has yet to be undertaken for Gold Coast Central Park, and future investment in transport infrastructure is likely to unlock development potential, a strong identity in terms of built form in the location has been identified in keeping with its flood plain characteristics.
4.4 Height Strategy Aligned with Connectivity

The third key objective of the building height strategy is to encourage height along critical high-frequency transport routes. Building height along key high frequency public transport routes offer the following advantages:

» Provides legibility of the public transport;
» Creates active street frontages along routes, and
» Improves walkable catchments to stations.

The height strategy aligned with connectivity focuses height around fixed infrastructure as both heavy and light rail. An individual strategy for each mode of transport is further explained below. In general, the height strategy is governed by outcomes for city legibility and to capture amenity.

**LIGHT RAIL**

The light rail strategy encourages height along the length of the light rail network as it includes high-frequency services for extended hours and stations are walking distance from one another providing excellent coverage and access.

The connectivity strategy identifies taller building height along the light rail transport corridors where not otherwise specified by the centres or amenity strategies.

**HEAVY RAIL**

The strategy for heavy rail is focused around nodal opportunities for height to support walking to stations and the provision of services around them.

Further detailed investigations are required to determine the building height strategy around any future heavy rail stations in combination with a legibility strategy.
The following recommendations provide a high-level approach to introducing and implementing the building height strategy to the City Plan. Identifying change and certainty on detailed building height provisions requires further investigation and synthesis of other interconnected studies to determine a consolidated future intentional city shape.
5.1 Intent of Recommendations

The following City Plan recommendations propose a high-level approach to implementing citywide building height values, vision and principles identified in this study. Recommendations have the following strategic aspirations:

» To implement a citywide policy on building height;
» To simplify and streamline guidance on building height, and to clearly articulate acceptable height;
» To introduce a new language and categorisation of building height;
» To establish a simple and outstanding regulatory framework, that has direct intent, relevance and clarity for users within private and public sectors; and
» To balance certainty with flexibility.

The potential success of these recommendations, are dependent on a number of political, social and cultural factors that are external to the scope of this study. These include:

» To embrace change and a new approach if it offers beneficial outcome;
» To aspire for the best approach, and not accept the lowest common denominator;
» To understand that building height and urban design should be considered on their own merit in the assessment process and require separate principles and guidance;
» To protect the city’s natural assets and local built environment, to ensure poor built form outcomes are not permitted; and
» To manage expectations, and ensure there isn’t the assumption that regulation will address all future matters and issues.

5.2 Recommendations Overview

A thorough analysis and detailed understanding of the current City Plan has lead to the following five overarching City Plan recommendations.

» **Recommendation 1**
  How To Implement The Citywide Principles

» **Recommendation 2**
  Introduce New Building Height Categories

» **Recommendation 3**
  Amend and Recalibrate The Building Height Overlay Map

» **Recommendation 4** (future study)
  Review The Building Height Overlay Map

» **Recommendation 5** (future study)
  An Architectural and Urban Design Guide
5.3 Recommendation 1: How To Implement The Citywide Principles

The following recommendation offers an approach to implementing citywide building height principles within City Plan.

1. Omit all existing references to building height in the Strategic Framework
2. Insert the eight citywide principles at s.3.2.2 of the Strategic Framework
3. Insert a new element 3.8.9 (building height) in the Strategic Framework, including:
   » each of the eight citywide principles
   » the city shape value statement for each principle
   » supporting building height guidance for each principle, as required
4. Continue to use height as a level of assessment trigger
5. Remove the 50% exceedance test

**Benefits of Recommendation 1**

Implementation of Recommendation 1 is expected to welcome the following advantages:
» Creates a single, consistent test that applies across the whole city;
» Emphasises the importance of building height and city form;
» Removes duplication;
» Clearly delineates building height (s.3.8.9) from urban design (s.3.8.3); and

5.4 Recommendation 2: Introduce New Building Height Categories

This recommendation proposes the introduction of new and consolidated building height categories (*summarised in Figure 15*). This recommendation requires the following measures:

1. Omit existing building height categories
2. Consider introduction of new zone if necessary
3. Regulate building height in metres only
4. Introduce plain-english names for each height category
5. Insert new building height categories on building height overlay map
6. Insert administrative definitions for each building height category
7. Consequential amendments to align definitions of high rise building height, medium rise building height and low rise building height

**Benefits of Recommendation 2**

Recommendation 2 is expected to welcome the following advantages:
» Simplifies existing classification system;
» Clearly articulates the maximum planned height of buildings;
» Introduces relatable language;
» Complies with mandatory requirements of QPP and existing definitions;
» Aligns with sensible height thresholds, with consideration for the Building Code; and
» Avoids need for supplementary definitions and explanatory notes.
» Does not lead to policy change for partial third storey
The Supertall height category is contained within three key locations that together maintain the existing slender form of the iconic coastal skyline. These locations benefit from the following:

- Access to key amenity with frontage to beaches and the Broadwater
- A closely grouped network of the highest order centres, currently serviced by light rail.

These locations are:

- Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach; and
- Southport (The CBD)

NOTE: Airport constraints limit building height to 335m in this category

Tall building forms are contained at two potential locations as bookends in the city. These locations benefit from the highest order of amenity and together articulate either end of the city’s coastline form.

The High building height category predominantly fronts the coastal edge and Broadwater. This category aims to:

- Maximise waterfront amenity
- Provide height transition from iconic skyline forms, and support citywide legibility
- Creates capacity for more intense activities at the network of inland centres.

Medium rise building forms offer the following:

- Provide urban legibility for higher order ‘Inland Centres’
- Offer a defined transition from skylines along the coastline
- Support activity and growth at the Cultural Precinct

Mid building height is located with the following intentions:

- Support infrastructure along future high-frequency transit corridors
- Promote a ‘Beach City’ response at the southern end of the coastline, predominantly fronting the beach and adjacent to coastal villages
- Activate areas at the edge of Central Park parklands to frame opens space

This height category was established based on efficiencies stipulated in the Building Code of Australia, including lift provisions, fire rating requirements and construction efficiency.

Low built forms occur at southern coastal village centres, adjacent to and on the foothills of coastal headlands and ridgelines. As well as, suburban neighbourhoods and light industry areas.

Lowest built forms occur predominantly in suburban neighbourhoods and light industry areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REF</th>
<th>HEIGHT IN METERS / DESCRIPTION</th>
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| SUPERTALL - EXCEEDING 140M | The Supertall height category is contained within three key locations that together maintain the existing slender form of the iconic coastal skyline. These locations benefit from the following:
- Access to key amenity with frontage to beaches and the Broadwater
- A closely grouped network of the highest order centres, currently serviced by light rail.
These locations are:
- Main Beach (south of MacArthur Parade) to Broadbeach; and
- Southport (The CBD)
NOTE: Airport constraints limit building height to 335m in this category |
| TALL - UP TO 140M | Tall building forms are contained at two potential locations as bookends in the city. These locations benefit from the highest order of amenity and together articulate either end of the city’s coastline form. |
| HIGH - UP TO 110M | The High building height category predominantly fronts the coastal edge and Broadwater. This category aims to:
- Maximise waterfront amenity
- Provide height transition from iconic skyline forms, and support citywide legibility
- Creates capacity for more intense activities at the network of inland centres. |
| MEDIUM - UP TO 55M | Medium rise building forms offer the following:
- Provide urban legibility for higher order ‘Inland Centres’
- Offer a defined transition from skylines along the coastline
- Support activity and growth at the Cultural Precinct |
| MID - UP TO 33M | Mid building height is located with the following intentions:
- Support infrastructure along future high-frequency transit corridors
- Promote a ‘Beach City’ response at the southern end of the coastline, predominantly fronting the beach and adjacent to coastal villages
- Activate areas at the edge of Central Park parklands to frame opens space
This height category was established based on efficiencies stipulated in the Building Code of Australia, including lift provisions, fire rating requirements and construction efficiency. |
| LOW - UP TO 16M | Low built forms occur at southern coastal village centres, adjacent to and on the foothills of coastal headlands and ridgelines. As well as, suburban neighbourhoods and light industry areas. |
| LOWEST - UP TO 9M | Lowest built forms occur predominantly in suburban neighbourhoods and light industry areas. |
FIGURE 16: Examples of Proposed Building Height Categories

Examples of Supertall (exceeding 140m)

- Soul, Surfers Paradise - 246m (77 storeys)
- Circle on Cavill, Surfers Paradise - 220m north (70 storeys) and 158m south (50 storeys)

Examples of Tall (up to 140m)

- Hilton Surfers Residences Boulevard Tower, Surfers Paradise - 120m (34 storeys)
- The Wave Resort, Broadbeach - 111m (34 storeys)
**Examples of High (up to 110m)**

Mantra Sierra Grand, Broadbeach - 98m (31 storeys)

The Star Gold Coast, Broadbeach - 82m (21 storeys)

**Examples of Medium (up to 55m)**

Kirra Surf Apartments, Kirra - 40m (12 storeys)

Jade Apartments, Surfers Paradise - 55m (15 storeys)

**Examples of Mid (up to 33m)**

Ephraim Island Apartments, Paradise Point - 30m (9 storeys)

Harbour Quays, Biggera Waters - 25m (7 storeys)
Examples of Low (up to 16m)

Varsity Parade Development, Varsity Lakes - up to 16m (3 storeys)

Salacia Waters, Paradise Point - up to 16m (3 storeys)

Examples of Lowest (up to 9m)

Residential Development, Reedy Creek - 6m (2 storeys)

Residential Development, Varsity Lakes - up to 9m (2 storeys)
5.6 Recommendation 3: Amend and Recalibrate The Building Height Overlay Map

Recommendation 3 addresses a new approach and importance for the Building Height Overlay Map described below. Refer to Figure 17 for indicative example of a repositioned map.

1. Make the Building Height Overlay Map the single reference for building height for every property in the city
2. Update the Building Height Overlay Map to reflect Very Low and Low building height categories
3. Amend all zone codes to address building height by reference to overlay (as per existing Medium Density Residential Zone Code)
4. Continue to use building height as level of assessment trigger from code assessment to impact assessment

Benefits of Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3 is expected to welcome the following advantages:

» Clear, single point of reference for planned building height across the city;
» Enhanced readability for laypersons;
» Reduced variation and duplication through zone codes;
» Opportunity for finer grain responses within broad zone designations (by exception only); and
» Strong, simple alignment between levels of assessment and building height.

5.7 Recommendation 4: Review The Building Height Overlay Map (future study required)

Recommendation 4 proposes a review of current overlay maps, and suggests further investigation and co-ordination into establishing an intended building height at specific locations across the city. It requires the following processes:

1. Conduct detailed review and update of Building Height Overlay Map
2. Review to be informed by and give effect to citywide building height principles
3. Review to be informed by other relevant studies

5.8 Recommendation 5: An Architectural and Urban Design Guide (future study required)

Recommendation 5 defines urban design and architecture as a separate agenda from building height. It proposes an architecture and urban design guideline that promotes outstanding built form outcomes and a responsive public realm that aligns with wider strategic visions and a future intentional city shape. The following considerations are recommended:

1. Commission preparation of a city-specific Architectural and Urban Design Guide (or strategy) that can be delivered incrementally in chapters or editions
2. Focus on podium and public realm issues
3. Carefully consider nuances and distinctions in the city, as potential city shaping sites
4. Consider incorporating into City Plan as a new development code or City Plan policy