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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Gold Coast is committed to protecting areas on the Gold Coast with a particular local identity, natural resource base or development character.

The primary intent of this place analysis is to provide a resource to ensure character elements are appropriately considered in future development decisions at the neighbourhood centres of Mermaid Beach, which form part of the southern Gold Coast strip.
KEY URBAN CHARACTER ELEMENTS

The key character elements and special qualities identified for Mermaid Beach are summarised below.

- Historic influences in the existing settlement structure.
- The centre anchors the historic coastal strip from the north.
- A lack of centre spatial definition and identity.
- Impermeable western street networks.
- The beachside street grid.

- The vehicle dominated highway environment and its visual qualities.
- Long vistas through the highway corridor.
- Annette Kellerman Park and Saintt Johns Park as valuable green spaces in a highly urbanised environment.
- Inconsistent building/street relationships and low levels of footpath activation by buildings.

- The proportion of highway space dedicated to cars.
- The highway as a barrier to walking and cycling.
- The walking and cycling friendly topography.
- Connections to the beach through the beachside street grid.

- Remnant highway tourist strip characteristics.
- Stock of original holiday homes and commercial buildings.
- Connection to Hedges Avenue and the beach.

- The characteristic low scale of the centre and surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Existing commercial building forms that do not contribute positively to public realm function, visual quality and centre identity.
- The quality and level of investment in the beachside neighbourhood.
INTRODUCTION

The Gold Coast’s history, natural setting and distinctive linear form have structured a network of unique places. The coastal strip concentrates all the colour, energy and visual qualities synonymous with the city into a narrow, highly urbanised coastal corridor. While the major tourism and lifestyle destinations of Surfers Paradise, Broadbeach, Burleigh and Coolangatta have largely shaped perceptions of the city, it’s the coastal neighbourhood centres which deliver essential local amenity and offer a community-focused layer of social richness to the city.

Purpose of place analysis

The purpose of this place analysis is to understand the physical and cultural heritage components of local character at the neighbourhood centre of Mermaid Beach, to achieve place-responsive and high quality urban design outcomes. The intent is to provide a resource to inform on decisions on development.

Place analysis objective includes:

- identify landscape, built environment and heritage elements that contribute to the character of the neighbourhood centres
- understand the visual setting and key views
- identify a spatial boundary as the focus of future urban design, public realm and planning strategies.

This place analysis presents a strategic level analysis of elements that influence place character. It should be used as a guide and terms of reference for further more detailed investigations regarding the future shape of the neighbourhood centres. This study does not explore pre-European history or the relationship to place that would have been held by the original peoples.
METHODOLOGY

This place analysis follows a four stage process that looks at the city and local context to prepare a concise summary of place defining urban elements.

STAGE 1
City and suburban context

An analysis of the coastal strip from Broadbeach to Miami to establish an appreciation of centre context and strategic influences on place character.

Three scales of mapping

STAGE 2
Local context

An analysis of the broad range of physical and cultural elements that can influence the shape and character of a place, drawing on site visits, research and City workshops.

STAGE 3
Local elements

An assessment of place analysis elements identifying how they collectively contribute to the function, urban form and character.
CITY CONTEXT

ROLE AND HISTORY OF THE STRIP

NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

Neighbourhood centres are to comprise a mix of small-scale uses and services in response to the specific needs of their immediate neighbourhood. The place analysis of Mermaid reinforces that neighbourhood centres grow and develop place character as a direct response to local need but also historical influences.

Neighbourhood centres are defined as:

- pedestrian-orientated areas with smaller scale concentrations of business, employment, community, cultural, retail and residential uses
- providing a focal point for the local community and support neighbourhood identity and sense of place.

In neighbourhood centres, building form is more intensive than surrounding neighbourhood areas, but provides a sensitive transition to nearby residential areas. Building height complements the surrounding neighbourhood.

THE CENTRAL GOLD COAST STRIP

The activity centre structure identifies the highway strip as a coastal tourism urban strip which responds to the unique linear structure of activity centres and strip commercial which have formed with the growth of the city.

Its role in the city’s history and strong linear structure connecting distinct activity nodes, supports the strip being considered as a ‘place’ in its own right, albeit one that comprises a number of individual centres and highway commercial contexts that will continue to grow and change in response to localised influences.
Figure 1: The Coastal Strip Activity Centre Structure – Pacific Fair to Burleigh Heads
HISTORY

Urban structure

The City of Gold Coast grew from the original coastal resort townships of Southport and Coolangatta. From the 1920s onwards, the area between Coolangatta and Southport has gradually been filled in with a city. The primary catalyst was the construction of the highway which had to overcome early constraints in the form of numerous river and creek crossings. But gradually the highway formed a series of villages which led to weekender localities like Burleigh Heads, Palm Beach and Broadbeach.

The city’s morphology is uniquely characterised by the connection of these early settlements, rather than typical radial growth from a centre or single village. The development was linear, formed in one continuous band alongside the beach. It was also highly automobilised given the city’s rapid grow in the post-war period when private car ownership surged.

The coastal strip

By the early 1950s, the coastal strip’s structure had largely been created and sustained as a place distinctively different from other cities in Australia. The highway became the primary access to the coast and a strong movement emerged. Commercial businesses focused on the highway frontages - all competing for visual exposure and passing trade - and formed a strip or ribbon development that is still evident today.

Running parallel to the beach, it is an important character area of the Gold Coast. Neon signs, motels, hotels, leisure attractions and shops line the highway from Southport to Coolangatta. It is symbolic of the primary period of growth of this part of the Gold Coast when, in the wake of post war austerity, the motor car became in itself a symbol of affluence and personal freedom.

In the corridor between Mermaid Beach and Miami there is still remnant evidence of its car-based tourism heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. In the surrounding neighbourhoods, there remains a valuable stock of the original holiday homes dating from the 1950s.

Both at the scale of the highway corridor and neighbourhood centre, these historic influences and the strip’s traditional visual qualities are worthy of referencing in future urban renewal. It is truly a unique story of urbanism worth celebrating.
DEFINING CHARACTER PRECINCTS OF THE STRIP

This analysis identifies character precincts at a strategic level along the coast strip to identify possible influences of character.

1 BROADBEACH
- A principal centre offering the full range of commercial and tourism functions.
- High-rise development comprising tourist accommodation and apartments.

2 PACIFIC FAIR
- Part of the Broadbeach centre, a regional shopping centre and tourist destination in its own right.
- G:link station on the Gold Coast Highway.

3 GOLD COAST HIGHWAY STRIP COMMERCIAL
- Wide range of mixed commercial and retail businesses.
- Wide range of building forms and commercial typologies predominantly one and two storey.
- Characteristic signage ‘clutter’ and inconsistent streetscapes and built form relationships to highway.
- Remnant uses such as motels, leisure attractions and retail buildings reference its former role as a tourism strip.

4 MERMAID BEACH CENTRE
- Low scale mixed commercial and retail businesses focusing predominantly on food/beverage.
- Anchors the highway commercial strip.
- Remnant commercial buildings from 1960s or early 1970s.

5 MERMAID BEACH & NOBBY BEACH NEIGHBOURHOODS
- Low and medium density housing and tourism accommodation.
- Hedges Avenue beachfront well known as ‘Millionaires’ Row’.

6 GOLD COAST HIGHWAY MIXED ACCOMMODATION
- A mix of motels, new and old houses, apartments and short term accommodation.
- Three-storey ‘resort’ tourist accommodation.
- No intensive commercial uses.

7 NOBBY BEACH NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE
- Low scale high street style mixed retail/commercial centre accessed by a highway service road access.
- ‘Santorini’ mixed use development at the foot of North Nobby.

8 MAGIC MOUNTAIN APARTMENTS & MIAMI STATE HIGH SCHOOL
- Both uses integrated with the headland topography.
- Former theme park now apartments and holiday units.
- Miami High sign on local heritage register.

9 COMMERCIAL, LIGHT INDUSTRY AND GATED ACCOMMODATION
- Mixed commercial and low impact industrial uses.
- Chamonix and Nobby Holiday Village ‘gated’ accommodation and caravan park.

10 MIAMI RESIDENTIAL AND ACCOMMODATION
- Broad mix of low scale detached houses, older unit blocks and new apartment buildings.
- Ocean Beach Tourist Park at the foot of South Nobby.
- Beachfront open space along Marine Parade.

11 GOLD COAST HIGHWAY MIAMI
- Broad mix of low scale retail/commercial businesses, motels, detached houses and unit blocks.

12 SOUTH NOBBY HILL RESIDENTIAL
- Detached residential and multi-dwelling buildings on the western slopes of the hill.

13 MIAMI LOCAL CENTRE
- Large format uses - Coles and Aldi, Miami Hotel.
- Mixed use centre - internalised format with poor street relationships.
- Traditional high street retail forms.
- Mix of old and new holiday accommodation.

14 BURLEIGH HEADS ESPLANADE
- Predominantly high density residential development consisting of medium and high-rise apartments.
- Beachfront open space.

15 LOWER GOLD COAST HIGHWAY
- Lower Gold Coast Highway - service road to highway.
- Low and medium-density housing.
- Small cluster of food/beverage and local businesses.

16 BURLEIGH HEADS
- District centre and tourist destination.
Figure 2: The Coastal Strip Character Precincts

Legend
- Generalised commercial activity
- Broadbeach
- Pacific Fair
- Gold Coast Highway Strip Commercial
- Mermaid Beach Centre
- Mermaid Beach & Nobby Neighbourhoods
- Gold Coast Highway Mixed Accommodation
- Nobby Local Centre
- Magic Mountain & Miami State High School
- Commercial & Light Industry
- Miami Residential And Accommodation
- Gold Coast Highway Miami
- South Nobby Hill Residential
- Miami Local Centre
- Burleigh Heads Esplanade
- Lower Gold Coast Highway
- Burleigh Heads
EXTENT OF SUBURBAN ANALYSIS

The area encompasses a walkable catchment of 400 metres focused on existing commercial activity of the centre.
HISTORY OF THE SUBURB

Mermaid Beach captures a relaxed beachside lifestyle with its low scale and expansive beach frontage. Its urban structure reflects the automobile focused era in which it was first planned and developed. The built environment displays successive waves of development from the 1960s to the present. Since the 1980s, the suburb has been synonymous with the ‘millionaires’ row’ that fronts the beach off Hedges Avenue.

History

Mermaid Beach takes its name from the cutter HMS Mermaid in which John Oxley, Surveyor General of New South Wales, discovered the nearby Tweed and Brisbane Rivers in 1823. The Queensland Minister for Lands approved the name Mermaid Beach on 11 September 1946.

Settlement of the wider area dates from the late 1800s, with land used mainly for timber–getting and later sand mining which ceased in the 1950s.

The first estates of Mermaid Beach were surveyed in the 1920s but rapid growth of holiday homes and tourist accommodation did not occur until the 1950s with the lifting of post–World War II building restrictions. There are numerous original holiday homes scattered through the suburb to this day.

When World War II ended in 1945, service personnel awaiting discharge from the Watercraft Workshops, Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from Bulimba Brisbane, established the AEME Surf Life Saving Club. A few seasons later it was renamed the Mermaid Beach AEME Surf Life Saving Club.

By the 1960s, the tourism and commercial strip development along the highway had formed in response to increased car ownership and the burgeoning movement economy of a linear city.

The strip became characterised by motels, shops, tourist attractions and all the visual trappings of this urbanism – neon signs, exotic nomenclature, themed architecture and the clutter of advertising signage – as well as retail and service commercial businesses.

The existing buildings on the corner of the highway and Alfred Street are excellent examples of the architectural and construction qualities of 1960s holiday and commercial buildings (see section 07).

Development of the ‘loops and cul-de-sacs’ and canal estates immediately to the west commenced in the 1970s and by the 1980s were fully established as we know them today.

The 1980s also saw the rise of the self–contained ‘resorts’ such as Diamond Beach Resort and Turtle Beach Resort which took advantage of the large sites on the western edge of the highway.

Through the 1980s to the present, Mermaid’s beach access, central location and residential amenity have seen it become one of the most desirable suburbs on the coast. It has maintained a scale that readily distinguishes it from the highly urbanised centres north and south. Hedges Avenue is now one of the most well known and expensive strips of property in the city.

A broad mix of retail and commercial businesses remains today as an almost unbroken strip from Tamborine Street to Peerless Avenue.

The neighbourhood centre

An identifiable neighbourhood centre at Mermaid Beach never really formed, in the most part because of its period of development which was automobile–focused.

Drive-by business appears to have prevailed over a local community catchment in terms of its influence on urban structure. The strip had already taken form by the time a significant local community appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s west of the highway.

Key heritage elements

The significant heritage elements and characteristics of Mermaid Beach which offer a window into its past and include:

- the highway and simple beachside street grid
- the strip commercial form and visual character of this type of tourism development
- the remnant commercial buildings on the corner of Alfred Street
- remnant holiday homes and accommodation buildings.
What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

- Remnant highway tourist strip character
- Remnant stock of original holiday homes
- Beach access afforded by the traditional grid structure
- Remnant commercial buildings on the corner of Alfred Street and Hedges Avenue
- This neighbourhood centre acts as a focus for the local community

Images courtesy of City of Gold Coast Local Studies Library
TOPOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Flat, low-lying and devoid of any prominent natural features or significant vegetation, there is little to identify Mermaid Beach as an place of special or unique character in terms of its topographic or landscape character. But, this flat landscape is ideal for walking and cycling.

TOPOGRAPHY

The neighbourhood centre sits approximately 400 metres from the beach on low flat terrain characteristic of the coastal plain.

Areas west of the highway were originally occupied by swamps and lowland forest communities prior to draining and development for canal estates and associated waterways.

East of the highway would have commenced a transitional zone from swamps and lowland forests to coastal dunal systems, foredunes and the beach. The original foredune structure is still evident with the subtle rise in elevation in the east-west streets as you near Hedges Avenue. This remnant landform feature generally prevents ocean views from all the east-west residential street corridors.

LANDSCAPE AND OPEN SPACE

Water

Water is a significant landscape element of the wider area in the form of canals and the ocean, but in the flat landscape visual connection is obscured by buildings and vegetation.

Open Spaces and Parks

Open spaces are limited to:

- the beach
- Annette Kellerman Park and the adjacent Mermaid Beach Bowls Club
- Saint Johns Park.

Neither park is highly embellished in terms of landscape design or recreation facilities. Saint John park is visually cut off to the highway by the Mermaid Beach Community Centre.

Detached housing and unit/apartment development of Hedges Avenue has direct frontage to the beach so linear beachfront open spaces such as Broadbeach or Miami are absent.

Hedges Avenue functions as a popular walking and cycling route for both recreation and active transport commuters in the absence of these spaces.
Figure 5: Mermaid Beach Topography, Landscape Character and Open Space

Legend
- Existing Neighbourhood Centre Zone
- Open Space
- Flood (100 year ARI)
- Canal

The highway vista to Broadbeach afforded by a wide street and the flat topography

Remnant Melaleucas in Annette Kellerman Park (see page over)

Mermaid beachfront with its direct residential frontage
Vegetation

No significant areas of natural remnant native vegetation exist.

The visual character of the core commercial area along the highway is dominated by the built form and hardscape surfaces of footpaths and wide road carriageway.

Vegetation in and around the centre is generally limited to:

• informal mix of native and exotic trees in parks
• Norfolk pines in St Johns Park, Seabeach and Seaside Avenues and Alfred Street
• vegetation within Annette Kellerman Park and Saint Johns Park
• isolated sections of street planting of varied species along the highway
• informal mix of street planting in the east-west streets
• a broad variety of garden planting and trees of private development, holiday apartments or motels visible from the public realm.

In a flat topographic setting, the Norfolk pines are a significant visual element.

What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

Annette Kellerman Park and Saint Johns Park
The walking and cycling friendly topography
Glimpses of Norfolk pines
VIEWS AND VISUAL SETTING

The flat terrain, lack of visual focal points and the aesthetic qualities of both the built environment and public realm do not support a strong sense of place in the neighbourhood centre. It’s not so much a place that you arrive at as it is a place you pass through - but this is the strip’s underpinning and unique historic origins. What developed was a visual language of highway signage and exotic nomenclature that emerged to compete for passing trade.

VISUAL CONTEXT AND KEY VIEWS

The centre lacks visual focal points and there is generally an absence of any significant views that greatly enhance local character. Visually there is little to support a genuine sense of place in the existing environment.

The flat landscape

In a broader context, water frames the area with both canals and the ocean in close proximity, but the flat landscape does not support high levels of visual connection.

The flat terrain does however offer long views along the highway corridor which include vistas to Broadbeach high-rise development and distant views to North Nobby.

The built environment

The built form presents an inconsistent edge and facade quality to the highway. There are opportunities through future urban design strategies to reference the historic tourist strip urban iconography (motel and themed tourist facility signage, colour, architectural extravagance etc.) in the framing buildings.

The existing low-density and low-scale development establishes a strong - and contextually important - contrast to the high-rise environments of Broadbeach and much of Burleigh Heads and it’s Esplanade.

Saint Johns Park provides a distinctive northern edge for the centre but the Mermaid Community Centre and it’s associated car park prevent a strong visual connection to the park from the highway.

Generally there is little visual relief or interest in the urban environment and the centre lacks visual identity. An analysis of the arrival experiences demonstrates this challenge (see page over).

Key views and vistas

There are key views and elements that future development can build upon to establish a place of good urban design quality. These include:

• Annette Kellerman Park highway frontage offers important relief and variation to the homogeneous character of highway strip commercial development (View 1);

• While ocean views are hindered by the flat terrain, easterly views along all the east-west residential beachside streets are ‘open’ rather than being terminated by beachfront development (View 2);

• Views north along the highway to the Broadbeach skyline offer positional context and visual interest (View 3); and

• Views from all of the east-west beachside streets to the hinterland ranges (View 4).

What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

Remnant visual qualities of the tourist strip
Long vistas through the highway corridor
Hinterland views along ‘beachside’ streets
Annette Kellerman Park breaks the continuous urban highway edge
Figure 6: Key Views

1. Annette Kellerman Park frontage to the highway

2. ‘Open end’ easterly views along all beachside grid streets (Alfred Street shown)

3. View to the Broadbeach skyline from the Gold Coast Highway

4. Hinterland range westerly views along beachside grid streets (Seabeach and Seaside Avenues shown)
ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE

An analysis of arriving at the neighbourhood centre from the highway, Markeri Street and Alfred Street highlights:

- the absence of a sense of arrival experience or visual expression of the centre as a distinctive place - it’s a place that you drive, cycle or walk past without perceiving a unique quality
- the diverse character and visual quality of the built form and the inconsistent manner in which buildings address and frame the streets and public realm;
- as a result of the above, a lack of visual containment within the core of the centre which would enhance a sense of place forming;
- there is little visual relief or interest in the ‘hardscape’ urban environment;
- an absence of consistent public realm qualities and character that support the perception of a cohesive ‘place’; and
- the strong visual presence of Broadbeach when travelling north.

Gold Coast Highway entering from the north

Gold Coast Highway entering from the south
The arrival view from Markeri Street

The Alfred Street arrival

Figure 7: Arrival Experiences (Image source: Google Street View)
URBAN STRUCTURE

Mermaid's urban structure is quintessentially the Gold Coast, complete with strip commerce, nearby canals and a simple street grid connecting people to the beach. The highway is one of the most historically significant structural and character elements of the city. It underpins the linear city form and sustains the extraordinary urban environment that is the coastal strip.

HISTORIC INFLUENCES

The city’s urban growth historically could be described as the connection of places rather than radiating sprawl from an original settlement.

By the 1950s, the highway connected the separate resort settlements of Southport and Surfers Paradise, Burleigh, and Coolangatta and fuelled linear expansion along its axis as the city’s population grew. It opened up land for the development of new coastal suburbs which required access to local services and convenience goods.

The strip

By the 1960s, a strong movement economy was forming along the highway from Surfers Paradise to Burleigh and strip commercial - motels, leisure attractions, shops, holiday lettings - clustered along its edges.

Assessing broader land use patterns it appears that the study area, which focuses on the main western connector Meraki Street, is the end of the intensive or continuous commercial strip development from the north. The land use mix south of this location noticeably changes to greater residential and short stay accommodation types.

SETTLEMENT FORM

Urban structure

This history is the antecedent to the neighbourhood centre’s structure which is fundamentally characterised by:

- a regional road corridor - the highway - as a north-south movement spine parallel to the beach
- development intensity and non-residential uses are focused along the highway
- significantly different street structures east and west of the highway due to the age of development (beachside is older) and the topographic contexts (the west was coastal lowlands and swamp)
- a beachside block structure that directly connects the highway to the beach.

Development intensity and form

The suburbs of Mermaid and Mermaid Waters are historically low scale and predominately detach dwellings although beachside areas have steadily developed with increased residential density since the 1980s.

At a broad scale the built environment has a level of homogeneity in development intensity, particularly height and massing of buildings. The commercial strip and neighbourhood centre are differentiated in terms of use but not expressed physically in the built form.

Open space

Open space - particularly beachfront linear parkland like Broadbeach or Burleigh boasts - is absent as a strong structuring element of the centre. Annette Kellerman and Saint Johns Parks are disconnected and have not shaped settlement structure.
Figure 9: The change in predominate land uses along the highway at Mermaid Beach

Figure 10: Strip commercial on the western-edge of the highway

**Legend**

- Low Density/ Detached Residential
- Medium Density/ Multi Unit Residential
- Holiday Apartments/ Motels
- Mixed Use
- Commercial/ Retail
- Park & Community Uses

**What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?**

- The historic pattern of growth and settlement structure
- The centre anchors a continuous commercial strip from Broadbeach
- The strong east - west grid on the beachside
- Direct beachfront development
- View the centre as a gateway to the north
- Strong views to the hinterland ridgeline
ACCESS AND MOVEMENT

The movement networks are structured around the Gold Coast Highway and Markeri Street. The residential street patterns reflect two distinct development waves - the early grid networks of the beachside, and the characteristic loops and culs-de-sac of 1970s estate development.

ROAD NETWORK

The road network is characterised by:

- the structuring influence of the highway connecting major centres north and south;
- the strong east-west grid network on the beachside connecting the highway directly to the beach;
- grid roads north of Sportsman Avenue which were part of the original estate development; and
- loops roads and culs-de-sac of the western canal estates which are connected to the Highway by a single east west minor arterial, Markeri Street.

Public transport

Current bus routes utilise the Gold Coast Highway. The accessibility and walkable scale of the beachside negates the need for routes to the east.

Mermaid Waters is serviced by both the highway routes and services along Sunshine Boulevard. The road structure of the canal development greatly reduces the effectiveness of services and convenience for users.

Car parking

Car parking in the neighbourhood centre includes:

- informal on-street parking in residential streets
- formalised parallel and angle parking on the highway and eastern end of Markeri Street
- off-street surface car parking in some commercial developments
- basement parking in the larger holiday apartment developments.

On-street parking is a dominant visual characteristic of the highway and the centre.

ACTIVE NETWORKS

Pedestrian and cycle movement

There are clearly high levels of east-west pedestrian/cycle permeability east of the highway. Hedges Avenue and the mid-block lanes offer additional north-south connectivity.

Neighbourhoods west of the highway are challenging and inconvenient for pedestrians and cyclist due to the canals, the road network structure and the poor levels of connectivity through to the highway.

The highway, with safety fencing along its median strip, establishes a barrier for informal road crossings in response to the high traffic volumes. Formalised crossings at controlled intersections have considerable separation:

- Markeri Street intersection to Heron Street intersection is 550 metres.
- Markeri Street intersection to Venice Street intersection is 370 metres.

The beach and the centre is unwalkable for the majority of Mermaid Waters residential areas west of the main north-south canal due to a combination of the above factors.

Pedestrian and cycle environments

The ratio of active travel space to total road width is low. Generally, the centre has poor quality active transport environments which impact on user comfort, safety and convenience. A comprehensive active transport strategy is required addressing:

- navigation and wayfinding
- footpath and pedestrian path safety and shade
- dedicated cycleways
- public transport integration.
Figure 11: Mermaid Beach Access and Movement

What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

- Pedestrian connection to the beach and mid-block lanes on the beachside
- The beach and Hedges Avenue active movement opportunities

Legend
- Gold Coast Highway
- Western Distributor
- Local access streets with informal on street parking
- Formalised angle parking
- Neighbourhood Centre Zone
- Bus stop locations
- Signalised intersections and pedestrian crossings
- Off-street car parking
- Open Space and Community Uses
- Formalised parallel parking
- Pedestrian barriers/fence
- Driveway entrances
- Major Pedestrian/cycle connections
LAND USE AND LOT STRUCTURE

In terms of land use activity and lot sizes, Mermaid comprises quite homogeneous precincts. They are arranged in a clear linear structure that has been influenced by topography and historical development patterns.

LAND USE

Existing patterns

The plan opposite maps an analysis of building use or function. There are three clear linear precincts that run parallel to the beach:

- a residential area of predominately low-density residential between the beach and the highway. In recent decades medium density apartment buildings have become more common
- the highway strip which is commercial in land use north of Tamborine Street and to the south is comprised of holiday apartment developments which are increasing mixed with older houses and unit blocks moving towards Nobby Beach
- homogeneous detached housing of canal estates probably dating to the 1970s.

Notably, there is a cluster of large format holiday apartment developments west of the highway which have most likely replaced previous large site highway uses such as car sale yards or caravan parks. These offer broad redevelopment potential in a strategic timeframe.

The sharp transitions exist between detach residential environments and strip commercial or holiday apartment developments.

Annette Kellerman and Saint Johns Parks exist as the only significant and easily accessible open spaces other than the beach.

References to a past era

The broader highway corridor, from the edge of Broadbeach to Nobby Beach centre, still has remnant activities from its original role as a tourism commercial strip which rapidly developed from the 1950s.

These include:

- motels
- mixed-use buildings of traditional coastal form and design
- tourist attractions
- drive-in commercial
- retail shops, eateries and restaurants
- walk-up holiday units and holiday homes.

What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

- The beachside and inland residential neighbourhoods
- The historic, well-defined strip commercial
LOT SIZES

Highway frontage
Existing mixed use and commercially zoned lots fronting the highway are 40-metre deep and vary in width and configuration.

Residential areas
East of the highway on an east-west orientation is a structure of blocks which vary in width from 60 to 80 metres. The blocks, highly fragmented in ownership, comprise two standard lot sizes:
- 14.5-metre frontage by 30 metres deep
- 10-metre frontage by 40 metres deep (including Hedges Avenue beachfront lots).

A number of larger lots are evident and are associated with holiday apartment developments, commercial uses with highway frontage and a retirement development on Sportsman Avenue. North of Sportsman Avenue the grid structure continues on the western side of the highway - this area was obviously developed with the beachside real estate - with typical lot sizes of 10-metre frontage by 40 metres deep.

Canal estate lots west of the highway are typically 600 square metres to 800 square metres with 16 to 20-metre frontages.

Ownership pattern
Generally, the lot structure in residential areas suggests a highly fractured ownership pattern which presents a barrier to significant consolidation of lots.

While many smaller lots still exist on the 40-metre deep highway frontage, there are generally low levels of existing investment or older building stock.

Figure 13: Mermaid Beach Lot Sizes
BUILT FORM AND ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Mermaid Beach has characteristically kept its low-scale and relaxed coastal atmosphere. Much of the development energy and private investment has occurred on the beachside and it has become one of the city’s most desirable lifestyle suburbs. But with new transport investment, there can be a renewed focus on the highway strip where there are broad opportunities for change and re-invention of mixed use built forms.

SCALE AND MASSING

City context
At a city-wide scale, the Mermaid Beach to Miami corridor exists as an important contrast to the adjacent major tourism destinations of Broadbeach and Burleigh Heads. Its characteristic scale and density provides both interest to the city skyline and visual relief and variety to the experience of travelling along the Gold Coast Highway.

Future built form should focus on the value of this skyline character balanced against opportunities to increase centre building heights and massing that would:

- enhance neighbourhood centre identity and sense of place
- support greater local economic activity and employment
- support future infrastructure investment through transit oriented design initiatives.

Neighbourhood centre context
The massing and height diagrams illustrate that single and two storey buildings (commercial and accommodation uses) predominately front the highway with the exception of the cluster of three and four-storey holiday apartment complexes to the south. This low commercial development intensity has minimised the impact of sharp transitions to residential development.

At the broader corridor scale, there is no differentiation in the neighbourhood centre area in terms of height, site cover or massing that:

- frames and defines the public realm
- supports a distinctive identity
- defines a spatial boundary to the centre.
Night Owl Centre
• Car based retail and takeaway centre
• Franchise businesses

Heritage Commercial Buildings on Alfred Ave
• Traditional coastal architectural forms
• Mixed use - retail, commercial

New Development
• 14 storey apartment building on Markeri Street

Traditional Highway commercial
• Mixed retail, commercial and restaurant businesses
• High street format

Commercial Buildings
• Stand-alone mixed commercial and retail

Legend
- Low Density/ Detached Residential
- Medium Density/ Multi Unit Residential
- Holiday Apartments/ Motels
- Mixed Use
- Commercial/ Retail
- Community Use
- Open Space
What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

- Original beach house stock
- Intensity and mix of commercial and residential areas
- Remnant strip commercial buildings and motels
- High levels of investment of beachside development
STREET LIFE AND ACTIVATION

The centre has a low level of retail or commercial street activation. Footpaths that are activated are separated by non-active frontages or the highway.

A critical mass of concentrated shopping, food and beverage outlets and commercial uses is not present and there is limited night time activation. The Night Owl centre with its drive-in/out format pushes a number of high street activators off the street.

There are a number of challenges to activating the centre’s streets, including:

- the vehicle dominance of the space
- traffic volumes, the width of the highway and the pedestrian barrier means there is no relationship between opposite footpaths - visually or physically
- public realm quality
- existing building formats and building-footpath relationships
- narrow footpaths in some locations.

Figure 16: Mermaid Beach Active Street Frontages

Legend

- **Active**: Narrow retail frontages, food and beverage (e.g. boutique retail, outdoor dining, takeaways)
- **Semi-Active**: Larger commercial frontages and service uses (e.g. banks, real estate, medical services)
- **Non-Active**: No activation of footpath (e.g. Residential, blank walls, car parking)
Activated footpath on the corner of Alfred Street (above) and on the western side of the highway (left)

Figure 17: Mermaid Beach day-time and night-time activation

Activated footpath on the corner of Alfred Street (above) and on the western side of the highway (left)
BUILDING TYPOLOGIES AND CHARACTER

The highway

Focusing on highway frontage development, there is a wide range of building forms, architectural characters and building ages. Overall, the built environment’s quality reflects low levels of change and investment in recent decades.

In terms of character, the diversity of form and inconsistency in public realm interfaces and street appeal does not support a high-quality urban environment or a memorable identity.

The cluster of older buildings on the Alfred Avenue corner which have been well maintained and present active edges to the street are a notable exception. They are a recognisable landmark along this of the highway.

In a broader highway context, remnant buildings and uses of the strip’s historic tourism role are present in the form of motels, traditional high street format shops, restaurants and accommodation units.

The beachside neighbourhood

There is a wide variety of detached houses and apartment or unit blocks from the 1960s to the present. The investment levels in new houses and apartment buildings reflects the high property prices of Mermaid Beach.

Mermaid Beach has an important stock of original beach holiday houses or ‘beach shacks’ which characterise the suburb. Architectural details of these buildings are referenced in many new homes.

Western neighbourhoods

There is a wide variety of detached houses typical of 1970s to 1980s ‘brick and tile’ dwelling forms. Many have been renovated and some redevelopment of waterfront blocks has occurred in more recent times.
Commercial and Retail Buildings

Mixed commercial on the western highway edge and Markeri Street

Traditional coastal building forms near the corner of Alfred Avenue
Holiday Accommodation and Motels

Motels and short stay apartments on the eastern highway edge

Holiday apartment complexes on the western highway edge
Apartments and Houses

Original beach house stock and holiday units

TriCare facility on Sportsman Ave

Unit block, circa 1980s

More recent homes and apartments
PUBLIC REALM

With the exception of the beach and isolated parks, Mermaid Beach’s public realm is essentially its streets. The focus of street life is the highway where commercial activity is concentrated, but here the visual and pedestrian experience is inextricably linked to the challenging qualities of the built form and the dominance of cars.

PUBLIC REALM STRUCTURE

The neighbourhood centre’s public realm comprises:

- Annette Kellerman Park and Saint Johns Park
- the beach, which is physically separated from the centre (approximately 400 metres)
- the streets, which are the fundamental structuring element of Mermaid Beach.

PUBLIC REALM QUALITY

Open space

Annette Kellerman Park fronts the highway and offers some relief to the continuous strip commercial character of the highway. It is informal in design and offers public toilets, shelters, BBQ and play equipment. Mermaid Beach Bowls Club is access through the park.

Saint Johns Park, on the edge of the centre’s 400-metre walking catchment, offers an important green link between the highway and Hedges Avenue. But, the Mermaid Beach Community Centre and car park essentially cuts off visual and legible physical access from the highway. As a result it contributes little to the relief of the highway streetscape.

There are no urban open spaces with the exception of the Alfred’s al fresco eating area.

The beach

The beach, separated from the highway by 400 metres, is easily connected to the centre through the regular grid of beachside streets.

The proximity of the beach to the centre offers high levels of amenity for future development so the safety, comfort and convenience of pedestrian connections should be considered, including:

- wayfinding elements
- shaded footpaths
- safe and convenient highway crossings.

Hedges Avenue

Hedges Avenue has become a very popular recreational and exercise walking and cycling route and is well known to the broader Gold Coast community.

The existing public realm does not establish an intuitive connection between the neighbourhood centre and Hedges Avenue. Wayfinding elements in the centre combined with streetscape improvements could establish a strong physical relationship to this popular route.

Streetscapes

The core area of the neighbourhood centre is generally a vehicle dominated space characterised by:

- the dominance of street carriageway and hardscape surfaces
- high traffic volumes and the pervasiveness of car parking
- varying building quality and disparate building relationships to streets and footpaths
- low levels of retail activation
- absence of consistent streetscape planting and furnishings.

There are positive aspects of the centre which public realm improvements can build upon in the future, including:

- sections of activated footpaths
- strong connections to the beach through the residential streets
- long views to the Broadbeach skyline and south towards North Nobby
- a wide highway corridor offering opportunities for a greater focus on pedestrian environments and cycleways.
Figure 18: A selection of highway streetscape conditions in the centre

Existing streetscape enhancements on the Alfred Street Corner

The Alfred courtyard - a popular al fresco setting

Annette Kellerman Park highway frontage provides relief to the urban streetscape character

Narrow footpaths and wide carriageway of the highway near Seaside Avenue

The highway frontage of the NightOwl centre - narrow footpath, absence of shade and a driveway crossing

One of the challenging street-building relationships
STREET PROFILES

The streetscapes, of which there are only three discernible types, include:

- The Gold Coast Highway:
  - A total reserve of 40 metres generally dominated by carriageway.
  - Varying carriageway, median and footpath widths as it passes through the study area due to the presence of turning lanes.
  - Formal and informal on-street parking.
  - No bike lanes.
  - A car dominant place of which the character is largely dictated by the challenging quality of the built form and inconsistent street relationships.
  - Minimal activation by retail/commercial businesses
  - Absent of any consistent streetscaping that establishes cohesiveness or identity.

- Markeri Street:
  - Approx 20-metre wide reserve with varying footpath widths due to staggered lot boundaries (minimum of 3.5 metres).
  - An entry point to the centre accessing the western Mermaid Waters catchment.
  - A mix of built of edges including residential and commercial frontages.
  - Informal on-street parking.
  - Absent of any streetscaping or visual cues that offers a sense of arrival at the neighbourhood centre.

- Residential streets of the beachside residential area:
  - 20-metre wide reserves, varying carriageway widths of nine to 12 metres with 3.5 to 5.5-metre wide footpaths.
  - Hilda, Tamborine and Arthur Streets have slightly meandering carriageways.
  - Informal on-street parking.
  - Generally, informal and scattered street tree planting with a footpath on one side.
  - Absent of any consistent streetscape treatment however they ‘borrow’ character from the private landscaping of addressing housing and apartment developments.

Figure 19: Aerial view comparing the meandering carriageway of Tamborine Street with Alfred Street, a typical linear street
What’s special about Mermaid’s place character?

The beachside residential character

Strong connectivity between the highway and beach

Gold Coast Highway just north of Alfred Street

Markeri Street looking towards the highway

Alfred Street looking towards the beach

Figure 20: Mermaid Beach Streetscapes
History

In terms of place character, identity and function, a recognisable neighbourhood centre at Mermaid Beach never really formed. This is a result of its early automobile-focused period of development as well as the nature of the tourist strip’s movement economy which attracted its characteristic highway businesses competing for exposure and drive-by trade. These businesses captured These historic influences and the strip’s traditional visual qualities are worthy of referencing in future urban renewal. It is truly a unique story of urbanism worth celebrating.

The neighbourhoods

The wider suburb reflects two distinct eras of development: the traditional street grid of the beachside with its remnant original holiday home stock; and the loop roads and cul-de-sacs of the western neighbourhood with its archetypal 1970s and 1980s ‘brick and tile’ houses. The beachside grid affords excellent connectivity between the beach and the highway, but the highway is a pedestrian barrier to movement from the west. This issue is only compounded by the impermeability of the street patterns west of the highway.

The beachside of Mermaid Beach has become a highly desirable lifestyle neighbourhood and there is generally a high level of investment in houses and apartments. The area is synonymous with the ‘millionaires’ row’ of Hedges Avenue.
A key characteristic of the suburb is its comparatively low scale and the contrast this presents at a broader corridor scale.

**The Commercial Area**

Commercial activity is focused on a 250-metre section of highway. Here, the current place character of the centre is dominated by the starkly urbanised highway environment. There is a far greater proportion of space dedicated to cars than to people.

The commercial buildings vary widely in function, visual quality and relationships to street. Overall, the built environment does not support centre identity, commercial performance or pedestrian comfort. The exceptions are the older building stock on the Alfred street corner, which are key character elements, and a strip of active frontage commercial on the western edge of the highway.

Similarly, the public realm’s visual and functional qualities do not support centre identity, commercial performance or pedestrian comfort. This is a car dominated place with little relief in terms of shade, softscapes or visual interest.

**The Community**

There are clubs, parks and open spaces, the beach, a community centre and dining opportunities all near or within the centre. Stronger connections and awareness of local recreation opportunities will greatly enhance local community amenity.
KEY INFLUENCES ON PLACE CHARACTER

Urban Structure

- Historic influences in the existing settlement structure.
- The centre anchors the historic coastal strip from the north.
- A lack of centre spatial definition and identity.
- Impermeable western street networks.
- The beachside street grid.

Legend

Generalised Land Uses
- Mixed Highway
- Commercial
- Mixed Residential
- and Holiday Accommodation
- Low and Medium Density Residential Development
- Open Space & Community Uses

Public Realm

- The vehicle dominated highway environment and its visual qualities.
- Long vistas through the highway corridor.
- Annette Kellerman Park and Saint Johns Park as valuable green spaces in a highly urbanised environment.
- Inconsistent building/street relationships and low levels of footpath activation by buildings.
**Built Form**

- The characteristic low-scale of the centre and surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Existing commercial building forms that do not contribute positively to public realm function, visual quality and centre identity.
- The quality and level of investment in the beachside neighbourhood.

**Access and Movement**

- The proportion of highway space dedicated to cars.
- The highway as a barrier to walking and cycling.
- The walking and cycling friendly topography.
- Connections to the beach through the beachside street grid.

**Heritage and Culture**

- Remnant highway tourist strip characteristics.
- Stock of original holiday homes and commercial buildings.
- Connection to Hedges Avenue and the beach.