Gold Coast City Landscape Strategy

PART 1

Landscape Character: Guiding the Image of the City
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Explanatory Introduction

On the 30 March 1998, Gold Coast City Council adopted the Landscape Strategy Framework as the preferred policy direction for developing a Citywide Landscape Strategy. The purpose of the Landscape Strategy is to promote an integrated design approach for development works, where design and layout of hard and soft landscape elements and landscape construction is based on clear philosophy and guidance in relation to City image and landscape character, technical requirements information and education.

The Landscape Strategy Framework has three component parts (refer Landscape Strategy Framework diagram)

Part 1 Landscape Character: Guiding the image of the City (Planning Scheme Policy under IPA Planning Scheme)

Part 2 Landscape Works Documentation Manual (Incorporated Code under the IPA Planning Scheme)

Part 3 Information Sheets

Purpose of this Document

This document is Part 1 of the Landscape Strategy and is a Planning Scheme Policy under the new IPA Planning Scheme. As a Planning Scheme Policy it will provide guidance and direction on issues related to landscape character and it’s relevance to the City Image by:

- clarifying the meaning and intention of city image in terms of landscape character and the perception of the landscape in a City wide context;
- assisting in the interpretation of the City Image and Townscape objectives in the Planning Scheme Strategies and the associated Planning Scheme Maps SP11, 12, 13, and 14;
- providing a three dimensional visual articulation and interpretation of the Character Areas identified in the Planning Scheme Map SP10;
- providing assistance in interpretation of the broader landscape character issues associated with individual Local Area Plans; and
- providing general guidance on the landscape character elements that contribute to the character of particular areas within the City.

As a Planning Scheme Policy under the IPA Planning Scheme, it is intended that this document does not regulate development, but provides more information about Council’s discretion, on issues related to landscape character.

The Application of this Document

To assist in the identification of landscape character issues the document can be used by:

- Council officers in assessing landscape character issues associated with development proposals;
- the development industry for guidance on appropriate treatment of landscape character associated with developing a site either at the large scale or a simple building design on an individual site;
- providing guidance to Council Officers on landscape character for public works programs; and
- the public as guidance on what is appropriate landscape character in their particular area.

How to use this document

Almost every development of a site within the City will have some level or degree of impact on the landscape character of a particular area and in some cases the City as a whole.

The following steps will assist in the use of this document:

STEP 1

The Planning Scheme identifies character issues with relation to Domains, Local Area Plans and land use and development. It generally requires that development be complementary to the existing or intended local character or landscape character of an area.

For Strategic guidance on character refer to the Planning Scheme Maps SP10, 11, 12, 13 & 14 and identify the broad character area in which the site is located and identify any major elements in the City Image Maps that may be impacted on by the proposal.

STEP 2

Refer to the Visual Diaries in the Landscape Character: Guiding the Image of the City document, and identify the particular landscape character elements that are important for that area. In some cases such as the beach strip or the river valleys, these visual diaries are quite detailed.

The visual diaries also provide reference to other documents that may assist in identifying character elements related to a particular area.
CITY OF GOLD COAST - LANDSCAPE STRATEGY
FRAMEWORK

PART 1

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
GUIDING THE IMAGE OF THE CITY

PART 2

LANDSCAPE WORKS
DOCUMENTATION
MANUAL

PART 3

INFORMATION SHEETS

This part of the Strategy focuses on more detailed issues related to landscape design and construction for submission of Landscape Plans for approval. It includes the following:
- Guide to submitting Landscape Plans;
- Requirements of Landscape Plans eg Site Analysis, Statement of Landscape Intent, Detailed Landscape Plans;
- Substitution Checklist for Detailed Landscape Plans;
- Design and Construction Issues - Minimum technical standards and requirements (this is not intended to be a "Standard Specification");
- Undesirable Plant List.

The key function of this part of the strategy is to assist developers and Council in the process of connecting individual sites to the existing and future landscape of the City.

This part of the strategy seeks to identify in broad terms the important landscape elements that contribute to the landscape character of the ten (10) character areas and the City image statement identified in the Strategic Plan. It explains the importance of landscape character:
- in contributing to the image of the City;
- by discussing the importance of any particular development site within the context of the City's landscape;
- through visual diaries that articulate in simple terms desired and undesired character for the ten (10) character areas identified in the Strategic Plan.

This component of the Landscape Strategy has been guided by the recommendations and information bases of primarily the Urban Heritage & Character Study, the Nature Conservation Strategy, and Bushfire Strategy.

This part of the Strategy consists of a series of information sheets that will provide information on a variety of issues related to landscape within the City. These are not intended to be standards or policy. They are intended to be promotional, educational, user-friendly and have a format of 1-2 pages. Formulation of these information sheets will be an ongoing process, on an as needs basis.
Great cities are memorable. These memories are the bedrock of tourism for places such as Venice, New York and Paris, which all have world-renowned city images. Venice is remembered as a city of water, Paris as a romantic place of boulevards and cafes, and New York as a dazzling place of skyscrapers. How is Gold Coast City remembered by people? Does the image of the city match the expectations of its visitors? Do the residents of the Gold Coast celebrate their city's image?

The great cities of the world have a unique image which is built on a strong combination of great architecture and spectacular landscapes. The landscape of the city is thus critical for the development of a strong city image. This policy focuses on the landscape character of the Gold Coast: how it is and how it could be in the future.

Gold Coast City has a unique character which defies conventional visual assessments based on history and pristine scenery. This character is also much more fluid than in most cities, with ongoing rapid growth and urban transformation. Despite all the man-made changes, the city has a background of interesting and varied geographies and landscapes, which provide cues for future places through their originating sense of place (for example, the rocky points of Burleigh and Currumbin). These landscapes also provide cues for lifestyle and social goals which can be promoted by the city (for example, the casual promenade landscapes of many beachfront villages, which incorporate outdoor dining and a strong recreational focus).

The cultural and ecological landscapes of the city are thus a linking fabric. The character of these landscapes is critical for the image of the Gold Coast, particularly if it is to continue to promote itself as an international tourism destination.

In tourism, image is everything. In real estate, location is everything. This policy has a challenging mandate to assist developers, Council and the community to direct and foster an appropriate landscape in all parts of the city.

The landscape of many areas of Gold Coast City is dominated by people, activity and man-made places, rather than by trees and vegetation. This condition requires innovative approaches to define an ongoing character. Developers need clear cues to assist in determining a desirable landscape in their area and on their site.

This policy aims to assist in promoting and enhancing the elements that contribute to the creation of a great landscape in Gold Coast City; a series of experiences which make each part of the city a vivid and memorable place. The green behind the gold is a significant rallying cry for the creation of a world class city in the Gold Coast. How can this vision be implemented on a day to day basis? This policy identifies the big picture of the city as a whole, and then invites planners and developers to look at the unique character of each part of the city. The policy asks all those involved in the growth of the city to promote this landscape character through appropriate buildings, streetscapes and landscapes.

Landscape character is a slippery thing; it has tended to be poorly defined in planning documents, leading to problems in court. This policy aims to analyse and describe character issues in Gold Coast City in everyday language so that the image of Gold Coast City can be guided clearly. This policy also integrates many other reports containing directions on the city’s landscape, and these are outlined in the list of references.

The landscape character of Gold Coast City is described in this policy in a series of visual diaries. These visual diaries have been developed out of extensive consultations with people from Gold Coast City. By applying these visual diaries to new development in the city, developers can assist the Council in building a memorable city which will attract worldwide tourism and encourage city pride from residents.
1.2 What is the image of Gold Coast City?

City Image is the image of the city which people carry around in their minds. People remember their most vivid experiences: memories of the places which they visit and live in. When cities have a poor image, people can become disoriented and disinterested in their surroundings; visitors take back with them negative impressions and few photographs, and residents feel little pride in the place they live in.

Some of the city memories that people carry with them are urban, some are rural or environmental, and some in between. The character of the landscape is a major contributor to people's impressions about a place.

The character of a landscape could be described as the qualities of everything that we can see outdoors: the visual mix of streets, parks, views and structures as seen by people looking out of buildings, walking or driving through the city. The character of a particular landscape is affected by its particular space, the characteristics of the space, changes over time to a space and by the way a landscape is experienced, either by individuals or as a communal experience (Mongard, 1991, p1).

1.3 Is Gold Coast City enhancing the 'green' behind the 'gold'?

Postcards and tourist brochures are highly revealing about a city's memorable features. They show the images of the city which its people feel will attract visitors and tourists. Throughout Part I of this policy, we have shown a typical selection of the types of images, which are currently being used to market the image and landscape character of Gold Coast City.

What is clearly evident is that these images strongly focus on the "green and the gold" of the city - the excitement of the beachside high-rise resorts, in contrast with the serene and green subtropical scenes of the hinterland.

Unfortunately, large parts of the city are not featured in these tourism images. A quick glance at the Landsat image of the city (see page 5), shows that large areas of Gold Coast City are neither the "gold" nor the "green": they are the growing, more bland landscapes of the suburbs and commercial areas, between the beach strip and the green hills of the hinterland: these could be described as the "brown" areas. These areas are in danger of becoming 'placeless': unidentifiable from many other suburban places throughout Australia. These "brown" areas are the biggest image challenge facing Gold Coast City. More visitors could visit the "green" behind the "gold", however the "brown" parts are a significant physical barrier and image deterrent for exploration and tourism: these areas form a wedge between the green and the gold. Thus, many visitors and residents perceive Gold Coast City as predominantly urban: a narrow perspective on what is a quite spectacular collage of landscapes and experiences.
Most tourists generally stay within the narrow confines of the high-rise strip.

Another glimpse of the Landsat photograph shows that Gold Coast City is a linear city, hugging the sea and wrapped by a large swathe of green and blue to the north; an intricate series of waterways forms a northern edge to the urban spread of the city. Growth is focused predominantly in the central parts of the city, spreading across the flood plains and upward into the hinterland foothills and valleys.

Gold Coast City’s confidence as a city with character, lies in the high-rise beach strip. As soon as one moves more than a kilometre from the sea, the strength of the city’s image blurs, and one is left with the impression of having departed the city. The “brown” suburban part of the Gold Coast is a difficult landscape to grasp: it has a disparate character, with little to offer either the visiting driver or the walker. Only residents know how to tap its hidden assets, such as the canals and waterways. At night, these “brown” areas are even harder to negotiate; there are few landmarks and differentiating topographies, and a visitor can be lost or disoriented very quickly.

The Pacific Highway cuts a diagonal line across the city, becoming a de facto land-use edge dividing the green from the gold. The arterials leading from the highway to the beach strip subdivide the urban parts of the city into suburban pockets, which are further dispersed by the hidden fabric of the Gold Coast; its many canals. The aerial image shows the extent of these waterways. In reality, the visitor will rarely see much of this: the driving experience of the city is dominated by traffic infrastructure, and the canals lie hidden behind housing. Gold Coast City could unleash a powerful character giving elements in these suburban areas by building up a water-oriented experience through the centre of the city.

Gold Coast City was built in the excitement of the modernist period of the 1960s to the 1980s, with its confident constructions of highways, waterways and high-rise. In the 1990s, the city is responding to post-modern societal changes, with renewed interest in creating a more diverse cultural environment which calls for “local” experiences, whilst at the same time being drawn to the global village and its ‘on-place’ orientated economy. New and renovated public realms in places such as Tedder Avenue in Main Beach, 5th Avenue in Palm Beach, and in traditional centres such as Broadbeach and Surfers Paradise, are some of the outcomes of the search for a local character. The integrating of fast food chains with service stations, late-night convenience shops and bank ATMs have created new nodes along the highways, and displaced and re-oriented the local corner store and convenience strip towards new pursuits such as café society and the leisure industries.

The Brown

In the middle of all this change, suburban growth has continued unchanged, with little evolution in the footprint of development, except for patches of townhouses. The ‘brown’ parts of the city, as opposed to the ‘green’ or the ‘gold’, has thus not substantially contributed to the city’s bigger vision of itself, lying in the background as a static image of modern suburban life. Whilst these areas continue to be the city’s growth zones, there is great opportunity to re-orient them toward the ‘green’ and the ‘gold’. A specific study is required to look at these areas as a whole landscape, rather than as individual enclaves.

The Gold

The gold of Gold Coast City is the vision of sweeping white beaches fringed by pines and pandanus, framed by the linear clusters of high-rise towers which allude to holidays and getaway destination. These high-rise buildings have become an icon, developing into a bigger built form. They are the heart of the fantasy/excitement side of Gold Coast City, focusing on the good life of surf, sun and sand.
Behind the towers lie the older suburbs, which contain an interesting mix of housing, mostly within walking distance of either sea or canal. These areas have become denser over time, and smaller centres have begun to grow out of the strip which clustered along the old highway. A mature, man-made landscape is evident in most of these areas, and most development responds to the lifestyle influences of beach and resort. Little of the natural landscape remains in these areas except for parkland areas and pockets of dunal areas and creek systems. The character of the landscape in these areas is culturally oriented; with the styles of gardens and the popular trees and elements of different periods, combined and integrated to create the 'gold'.

The Green

The green behind the gold of Gold Coast City is a series of rural and rainforest landscapes bounded by the hills, comprising of the edges of the regional scenic rim which converges on Mt. Warning, and also on the ancient volcanic plugs of the district.

The soils of this volcanic heritage, combined with the microclimate created by the valleys, has led to a rich patchwork of dry and wet sclerophyll landscapes in hillier, remnant lands, and a lush pastoral landscape on all the flatter, arable areas.

With the growth of the city, the farmlands have gradually been replaced by the landscape of small lot and hobby farms – a more suburban interpretation of the rural lifestyle. These sought after living areas, such as the Currumbin and Tallebudgera Valleys, are landscapes in transition, and require careful guidance so that the 'green' is not lost behind the 'gold'. The visual diaries in this policy give guidance on strengthening both the 'green' and the 'gold', and give directions for improving the 'brown' character areas.
The "green" and the "gold" of Gold Coast City, as seen from a Landsat image.

The question is; what will be the character of the fast growing suburban areas between the Green and the Gold, and how can this character contribute to the City's image?