

SUBMISSION: **CITY OF WEST** **TORRENS** **HISTORIC AREA** **AND CHARACTER** **AREA OVERLAY** **CODE** **AMENDMENT**



RAIA SA CHAPTER

Submission date: 30 June 2026

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with around 14,000 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

PURPOSE

- This submission is made by the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to provide input on the [City of West Torrens Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment](#).
- At the time of this submission the SA Chapter President is Kirstie Coultas, and the Chief Executive Officer is Cameron Bruhn.

CONTACT DETAILS

Australian Institute of Architects
ABN 72 000 023 012

South Australian Chapter
L2, 15 Leigh Street
Adelaide SA 5000

+61 08 8402 5900

policy@architecture.com.au

Contact

Name: Kirstie Coultas | Chapter President (SA)
Email: sa@architecture.com.au

CITY OF WEST TORRENS HISTORIC AREA AND CHARACTER AREA OVERLAY CODE AMENDMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the City of West Torrens Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment.

The Institute supports the overall intent of the Code Amendment and commends the City of West Torrens for undertaking a comprehensive, evidence-based review of its Historic Area and Character Area Overlays. The proposed updates to area statements, overlay boundaries and Representative Buildings demonstrate a considered approach to improving the effectiveness and clarity of heritage and character protection within the Planning and Design Code. The Institute also recognises the significant body of historical research, thematic analysis and community engagement that underpins the amendment.

The Institute considers that well-conceived heritage policy plays an essential role in creating liveable, distinctive and resilient communities. Historic places and neighbourhood character contribute to cultural identity, community wellbeing and economic prosperity, while providing opportunities for adaptive reuse and more sustainable patterns of urban development. Protecting these qualities should not be viewed as restricting change, but rather as guiding change in ways that respect and reinforce the values that make places significant.

The Institute encourages the continued evolution of the Planning and Design Code through evidence-based policy, high-quality design outcomes and clear guidance for applicants and decision-makers. Contemporary architecture has an important role to play in historic settings when it is responsive to context, demonstrates design excellence and contributes positively to the ongoing story of a place.

The Institute supports the Code Amendment subject to the recommendations outlined in this submission.

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Architects is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia, representing more than 14,000 members nationally and over 900 members in South Australia. The Institute exists to advance architecture for the benefit of the community and advocates for high-quality built environments that are sustainable, inclusive and enduring.

The Institute has a longstanding interest in planning policy, heritage conservation and design quality. Our members include architects with expertise across heritage conservation, adaptive reuse, urban design, residential architecture, planning and development assessment. This breadth of professional knowledge provides a practical understanding of how planning policy influences both the protection of heritage values and the delivery of well-designed contemporary development.

The Institute supports planning frameworks that provide certainty, are founded on robust evidence and enable good design outcomes. In the context of heritage and character protection, this means recognising the significance of historic places and neighbourhoods while ensuring planning policy continues to accommodate thoughtful architectural responses that enable communities to evolve over time.

The City of West Torrens has undertaken a substantial review of its Historic Area and Character Area Overlays, drawing upon updated thematic analysis, previous heritage surveys, development assessment experience and community feedback. The Institute commends Council for this work and supports the objective of strengthening the clarity, consistency and effectiveness of the Planning and Design Code as it applies to heritage and neighbourhood character.

This submission focuses on the strategic planning principles that underpin successful heritage policy rather than commenting on individual properties or specific boundary amendments. In doing so, it seeks to support the City of West Torrens in implementing planning policies that protect local heritage and character while continuing to foster high-quality architecture and sustainable urban renewal.

THE INSTITUTE'S POSITION

The Australian Institute of Architects supports the City of West Torrens Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment and considers it a positive step towards strengthening the clarity, consistency and effectiveness of heritage and character policy within the Planning and Design Code.

The Institute supports the continued refinement of Historic Area and Character Area Statements where informed by robust historical research, thematic analysis and professional assessment. Clear, evidence-based policy assists applicants, architects, planning professionals and decision-makers to better understand the defining characteristics of a place and promotes more consistent development outcomes. The proposed amendment reflects these objectives by updating area statements, refining overlay boundaries where justified and reviewing Representative Buildings to more accurately reflect the historic and architectural qualities of individual neighbourhoods.

The Institute considers heritage conservation to be an integral component of good urban planning rather than a constraint upon it. Heritage places and established neighbourhoods contribute significantly to the identity, liveability and economic resilience of communities. They embody the cultural, architectural and social history of a place while providing continuity within an evolving urban environment. Their conservation should therefore be recognised as an investment in long-term community value.

Importantly, conserving heritage and neighbourhood character does not require places to remain static. Successful planning policy should facilitate carefully considered change that responds respectfully to the significance of a place while accommodating contemporary needs. The Institute supports planning frameworks that encourage innovative, high-quality architecture capable of enriching historic environments without diminishing their heritage values. Contemporary additions should be distinguishable from historic fabric, reflect the architectural aspirations of their own time and contribute positively to the ongoing evolution of the built environment. This approach is consistent with the principles of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, which recognises that places of cultural significance may continue to change, provided that change is guided by a sound understanding of their heritage values.

The Institute also recognises that heritage conservation makes an important contribution to environmental sustainability. Retaining and adapting existing buildings conserves embodied carbon, reduces demolition waste and supports the efficient use of existing infrastructure. Adaptive reuse, where appropriate, enables historic buildings to remain relevant and economically viable while preserving the distinctive character that contributes to community identity. Heritage policy should therefore be understood not only as cultural policy but also as an important component of sustainable urban development.

The Institute further acknowledges that heritage values continue to evolve. While nineteenth and early twentieth century places remain an important part of South Australia's built heritage, increasing recognition is being given to post-war architecture, landscapes and neighbourhood planning. The inclusion and refinement of Character Area Statements for post-war neighbourhoods within this Code Amendment appropriately reflects this evolving understanding and demonstrates the value of periodically reviewing planning policy to ensure it continues to represent the diversity of the State's architectural heritage.

Finally, the Institute supports planning policy that provides certainty through objective, evidence-based assessment. Regular review of Historic Area and Character Area Statements, informed by contemporary heritage practice and ongoing monitoring of development outcomes, will assist in maintaining community confidence in the Planning and Design Code while ensuring heritage and character policies remain relevant, transparent and effective.

STRATEGIC COMMENTARY

Supporting Better Heritage Outcomes through Clearer Area Statements

The Institute supports the proposed refinement of the Historic Area and Character Area Statements. These statements are fundamental to the consistent operation of the Planning and Design Code, providing applicants, architects and decision-makers with a shared understanding of the characteristics that contribute to the significance of each area.

The proposed amendments improve the clarity of the statements by strengthening their description of historic development patterns, architectural character, streetscape qualities and public realm attributes. More comprehensive and clearly articulated

statements will assist in achieving consistent planning outcomes while reducing ambiguity during development assessment. The Institute supports Council's objective of ensuring the statements reflect contemporary heritage understanding and are informed by detailed historical research and practical development assessment experience.

The Institute also supports the evidence-based refinement of Historic Area and Character Area Overlay boundaries and the review of Representative Buildings where supported by robust heritage analysis. Periodic review is an important element of good planning practice, ensuring policy remains responsive to improved historical understanding and changes to the built environment over time.

Contemporary Architecture within Historic Contexts

Historic neighbourhoods are not museums. They are living communities that continue to evolve in response to changing social, economic and environmental needs.

The Institute encourages continued recognition within the Planning and Design Code that high-quality contemporary architecture can make a positive contribution to historic settings when it responds thoughtfully to the defining characteristics of a place. Successful heritage outcomes should not depend upon architectural imitation, but rather on careful consideration of scale, proportion, siting, landscape setting, materiality and the broader streetscape. Well-designed contemporary buildings should be capable of complementing historic places while remaining recognisably of their own time.

Providing clear guidance that emphasises design quality rather than stylistic replication will support innovation while maintaining the integrity and significance of West Torrens' historic neighbourhoods.

Heritage Conservation as Sustainable Development

The Institute welcomes the opportunity this Code Amendment provides to reinforce the relationship between heritage conservation and environmental sustainability.

Retaining and adapting existing buildings is increasingly recognised as an important component of climate-responsive planning. The conservation and adaptive reuse of existing building stock preserves embodied carbon, reduces construction waste and makes efficient use of established infrastructure while maintaining the distinctive character that contributes to community identity.

While the primary purpose of the Historic Area and Character Area Overlays is the conservation of heritage and neighbourhood character, their ongoing implementation also supports broader objectives relating to sustainability, circular economy principles and resilient urban development. The Institute encourages continued recognition of these complementary outcomes as heritage policy continues to evolve.

Ongoing Stewardship and Continuous Improvement

The Institute recognises that the City of West Torrens has undertaken a significant body of work to review the operation of the Historic Area and Character Area Overlays, informed by previous heritage studies, thematic analysis, development assessment experience and community consultation.

Heritage policy, however, should remain adaptive. As community expectations, conservation practice and architectural understanding continue to evolve, periodic review of Area Statements, Representative Buildings and overlay boundaries will ensure the Planning and Design Code remains accurate, transparent and effective.

The Institute encourages the City of West Torrens to continue collaborating with the architectural profession, heritage specialists and the broader community in future reviews. Such collaboration will help ensure that planning policy continues to balance the conservation of local identity with opportunities for well-designed contemporary development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Australian Institute of Architects recommends that the City of West Torrens:

1. **Adopt** the Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment, recognising that it is supported by a comprehensive evidence base, updated heritage investigations and meaningful community engagement.
2. **Support** the revised Historic Area and Character Area Statements, which provide greater clarity regarding the characteristics and qualities that contribute to the significance of West Torrens' historic neighbourhoods.
3. **Implement** the proposed refinements to overlay boundaries and Representative Buildings where supported by robust historical research, thematic analysis and professional heritage assessment.
4. **Continue** to promote high-quality contemporary architecture that responds respectfully to historic context while remaining identifiable as architecture of its own time.
5. **Recognise** adaptive reuse and the retention of existing buildings as complementary outcomes that contribute to both heritage conservation and broader environmental sustainability objectives.
6. **Undertake** periodic review of Historic Area and Character Area Statements to ensure they continue to reflect evolving heritage knowledge, community values and best-practice conservation principles.
7. **Continue** to recognise the importance of post-war neighbourhoods and architecture as part of South Australia's evolving heritage story through future evidence-based planning policy reviews.

8. **Maintain** ongoing collaboration with the Australian Institute of Architects, heritage professionals and the wider community to ensure heritage policy continues to support both conservation and design excellence.

CONCLUSION

The Australian Institute of Architects supports the City of West Torrens Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment and commends Council for undertaking a comprehensive and evidence-based review of its heritage and character planning framework.

The proposed amendments strengthen the clarity and effectiveness of the Planning and Design Code by improving Historic Area and Character Area Statements, refining overlay boundaries where justified, and ensuring Representative Buildings more accurately reflect the significance and character of West Torrens' established neighbourhoods. These measures will assist applicants, designers, planning professionals and decision-makers to achieve more consistent and informed development outcomes.

The Institute believes that successful heritage policy is founded on an understanding that conserving places of significance and accommodating thoughtful change are complementary objectives. Well-designed contemporary architecture, responsive to its context and informed by an appreciation of local character, has an important role in ensuring historic neighbourhoods remain vibrant, relevant and resilient.

As South Australia's communities continue to evolve, planning policy should continue to recognise heritage as a valuable cultural, environmental and economic asset that contributes to liveability, sustainability and community identity. The Institute welcomes the opportunity to continue working collaboratively with the City of West Torrens and the State Government to support planning policies that promote both heritage stewardship and architectural excellence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Australia ICOMOS. (2013). **The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance.**

City of West Torrens. **Historic Area and Character Area Overlay Code Amendment – Consultation Draft.**

City of West Torrens. **Engagement Plan – Character Area Overlay and Historic Area Overlay Code Amendment.**

Government of South Australia. **Heritage Places Act 1993.**

Government of South Australia. **Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016.**

Government of South Australia. **Planning and Design Code.**

State Planning Commission. **Protecting Heritage and Character – Policies in the Planning and Design Code.**

State Planning Commission. **State Planning Policies.**