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Position Statement

Purpose-built student accommodation

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1. Policy intent

To support the planning, design and assessment of multi-storey purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) by providing clear, outcomes-based guidance that ensures design quality, supports functionality, and promotes positive health and wellbeing for students.

2. Accommodation for students in WA

Student accommodation has been provided in Western Australia for decades in a variety of built forms. However, multi-storey PBSA is an emerging development type, and offers many benefits, including convenience, safety, and social interaction for students, making it an attractive and affordable housing option. Beyond meeting student needs, PBSA contribute to vibrant and diverse urban centres, fostering community life and supporting local economies.

Recent growth in this sector has highlighted the need for the State planning policy framework, to provide contemporary guidance for multi-storey PBSA, to avoid delays and variable approval outcomes across the State. More efficient planning processes are important to support the timely delivery of this form of housing. In comparison with other jurisdictions, WA currently has a relatively limited supply of multi storey PBSA.

Clearer policy direction will assist in improving consistency in decision-making, supporting investment certainty and facilitating more streamlined approval pathways.

3. Application of this position statement

This position statement provides guidance when planning, designing and assessing multi-storey PBSA proposals across Western Australia. It can also inform the preparation of local planning strategies, local planning scheme provisions and local planning policies.

While the term '**purpose-built student accommodation**' can refer to various student accommodation forms, the policy measures contained within this position statement apply only to multi-storey PBSA.

In assessing a development application:

- i. Multi-storey PBSA proposals not defined as 'Multiple Dwellings' under the Residential Design Codes (R-Codes), both on-campus and off-campus, should be assessed against the policy measures of this position statement, as well as the local planning framework.
- ii. Other built form proposals, such as detached or grouped dwelling(s), will primarily be guided by the relevant provisions in the R-Codes, as considered appropriate by the decision maker.

The position statement may also assist decision makers in determining a development application where the local planning framework does not provide specific guidance on PBSA. In view of the diverse characteristics of urban areas across Western Australia, discretion may be required when applying the policy measures within this position statement or from the R Codes when assessing PBSA.

4. Policy objectives

The policy objectives of this position statement are to:

- a. elevate consideration of multi-storey PBSA in strategic planning.
- b. ensure multi-storey PBSA are appropriately located, high-quality, respond to local character (current and future) and are designed to deliver safe and functional living environments that actively support student health and wellbeing.
- c. provide clear, outcomes-based planning guidance for decision-makers by identifying the desired design quality outcomes to ensure consistent and efficient assessment of multi-storey PBSA proposals.

5. Policy measures

5.1 Strategic planning

5.1.1 Local Planning Strategies

Where higher educational institutions exist within or adjacent to a local government area, a local planning strategy should consider, evaluate and provide for future multi-storey PBSA by incorporating a dedicated section within the Community, Urban Growth and Settlement section of the local planning strategy that details:

- a. existing and proposed supply of student accommodation, including the identification of any specific sites and/ or locations, where appropriate
- b. medium to long-term demand for student accommodation along with associated targets (engage with educational institutions and PBSA providers)
- c. an analysis of the gaps in the provision of student accommodation
- d. opportunities and constraints to facilitate future provision of multi-storey PBSA
- e. implications for the local planning scheme or other local government planning instruments to facilitate supply, where appropriate.

The level of detail required in a local planning strategy should reflect the significance of PBSA to the local community and economy.

5.2 Statutory planning

5.2.1 Local Planning Schemes

Local planning schemes should align with the local planning strategy, to facilitate the streamlined delivery of multi-storey PBSA. When considering zoning, PBSA may be located within higher density residential zones, mixed use and commercial/centre type zones, in line with the local strategic planning framework (section 5.1).

5.2.2 Land use definition

While PBSA is designed around student needs and can be provided in a variety of built forms, multi-storey PBSA offers modern, well-located accommodation, with a mix of self-contained and shared living options. Developments include shared amenities and communal spaces that foster social interaction and a sense of community. These developments may be located off-campus and open to students from any institution, or on-campus where accommodation is guided by an education provider's masterplan and closely integrated with campus life.

In assessing multi-storey PBSA, decision makers have been required to determine the most appropriate land use definition for this form of accommodation. Proposals have been assessed under a variety of existing local planning scheme definitions, or considered as a 'Residential Building', or as a 'use not listed'.

However, to remove ambiguity and to provide greater certainty, a new interim land use definition is proposed:

Purpose-built student accommodation

means a purpose-built facility whose predominant purpose is to accommodate students while studying at a tertiary education facility, and staff of a tertiary education facility or visiting staff to a tertiary education facility:

- (a) that is designed and managed to facilitate the predominant purpose;
- (b) that typically provides students with a principal place of residence for 3 months or more; and
- (c) that may have shared facilities, such as a communal living room, kitchen and amenities.

5.3 Development assessment

The outcomes-based approach outlined in this section, is intended to guide the planning, design and assessment of multi-storey PBSA for development assessment. They inform landowners, proponents, designers, operators and decision makers of the outcomes that should be achieved, rather than prescribing specific criteria.

It should be noted that the R-Codes prescribe standards for permanent residential development. Multi-storey PBSA sits outside this framework because it provides accommodation for temporary occupants, the building configuration

provides shared communal facilities, and the accommodation may not be self-contained. Consequently, multi-storey PBSA does not meet the 'multiple dwellings' definition.

While the following section outlines assessment guidance for built form and management, proposals also need to address the relevant Local Planning Scheme and Local Planning Policy provisions that pertain to the specific site.

The following outcomes have been drawn from some of the design principles under State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment (SPP 7.0), ensuring good design is leveraged to deliver measurable results for PBSA. Other outcomes in this section, reflect specific design or functional aspects of multi-storey PBSA development proposals.

The following section is structured to distinguish between:

Outcomes - the high-level outcomes that should be met; and

Achieving the outcomes - provides examples of how to achieve the outcome, either through the information submitted with the application, through design features or through measures outlined in an operational management plan.

5.3.1 Location

Outcomes

1. The development is located within a walkable catchment of a tertiary educational institution/campus; or
2. Is integrated into an Activity Centre (District Centre or larger) or mixed-use precinct, within a walkable catchment of a high frequency public transport route to a tertiary educational institution/campus; and
3. Is located with access to a range of commercial, retail, entertainment and social facilities.

Achieving the outcomes

The development should demonstrate:

- a. The distance to and accessibility of the nearest tertiary institution/campus; and
- b. The availability, route frequency and walkable access to public transport services; and
- c. The presence of active transport infrastructure, including footpaths, cycling routes and end of trip facilities; and
- d. the proximity to essential community, retail, recreational and health services.

5.3.2 Context and character

Outcomes

1. The design is contextually responsive to the existing and intended future character of the locality and, where appropriate, demonstrates cultural awareness that integrates the values of Country.
2. The design contributes positively to the public realm.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. The design should demonstrate how the built form, and public realm will support and positively contribute to the existing and intended future character and streetscape quality through a detailed context and character study.
- b. The detailed context and character study should be commensurate with the scale of development and, where appropriate, shaped by culturally responsive and meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners to inform a sensitive, site-specific response to its setting, existing landscape and topography.
- c. An operational management plan should be submitted that sets out how the development will be managed and operated to avoid adverse impacts on surrounding properties (e.g., noise, waste, tenancy arrivals/ departures, managing complaints).

5.3.3 Landscape quality

Outcomes

1. The design supports the retention of significant existing vegetation and the provision of deep soil zones that sustain large-scale canopy trees.
2. Sustainable landscaping is integrated as 'essential infrastructure' to increase the urban tree canopy, mitigate urban heat, and support local biodiversity.
3. High-quality outdoor landscaped environments are created that provide respite, foster social interaction, and enhance the daily life of residents.
4. The design integrates a holistic approach to Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) to manage stormwater and improve local groundwater recharge.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. On site tree retention should inform the proposed design, wherever possible.
- b. A landscape plan is provided that enhances tree canopy cover consistent with Perth and Peel Urban Greening Strategy, where applicable), prioritising endemic and drought-tolerant species to optimise solar access, reduce localised heat island effects and support local biodiversity.

- c. Landscape design is developed in parallel with the building design to provide a hierarchy of functional outdoor spaces, including integrated shade, seating, and varied planting.
- d. Evidence of site-wide WSUD is provided, including the use of permeable treatments, features such as rain gardens, and bioswales to reduce runoff and enhance biodiversity.
- e. Submission of an Arboriculture Assessment and Deep Soil Area calculations and diagram to ensure the provision of sufficient, unencumbered, soil volumes to support both existing and future tree canopy.

5.3.4 Built form and scale

Outcomes

1. The development embodies good urban design, as guided by the design principles in State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment.
2. Context-responsive bulk, mass and height, and high-quality layout and amenity is achieved, consistent with the local planning framework.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. Informed by a context and character study, the bulk, mass and height should respond to adjacent and nearby built form (existing and

intended), topography, street pattern, and views, vistas and landmarks, reinforcing local identity.

- b. The design should demonstrate how the building's siting and public realm interface respond to solar orientation, enhance the pedestrian environment at street level, and provide compatible transitions to neighbouring properties and existing access networks.
- c. Building layout should balance passive surveillance, internal amenity, and solar access, overshadowing/solar analysis and CPTED principles.

5.3.5 Functionality and build quality

Outcomes

1. The design delivers functional, high-quality private living spaces, with optimised access to natural light and effective ventilation.
2. Well-designed communal facilities are achieved that support social interaction, a sense of community and comfortable day-to-day living.
3. The development provides a diverse mix of accommodation types, that are responsive to market demand and the local context.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. Accommodation is designed for everyday utility, ensuring adequate space for sleeping, study, and storage, with functional bathroom and kitchen layouts, where applicable.

- b. Habitable rooms are designed to provide access to natural light and ventilation to support student comfort. The design should optimise passive opportunities as the primary response, and not rely solely on mechanical ventilation or artificial lighting except where necessary by specific site constraints.
- c. Building construction and internal layouts minimize noise transfer and disturbance from services, shared spaces, and external vehicle movements.
- d. A variety of accessible shared spaces are integrated within the building to facilitate social interaction and foster a sense of community.
- e. The mix of bedroom types should respond to local market conditions and student demand, providing a range of options that support the long-term viability of the development while meeting the needs of different students.

5.3.6 Sustainability

Outcomes

1. The design delivers high performance environmental outcomes that meet or exceed recognised industry benchmarks.
2. Climate-resilient design is achieved, optimising energy efficiency and occupant comfort through orientation and thermal performance.

3. Integrated waste systems are in place that are easy for residents to use while maximising resource recovery

Achieving the outcomes

- a. Submission of a sustainability strategy, commensurate with the scale of development, that outlines the lifecycle benefits of the chosen sustainability features.
- b. Provision of a Design Report, including thermal modeling or sunlight/ventilation diagrams, demonstrating how building orientation, thermal mass, and natural ventilation are used to maintain comfortable indoor environments.
- c. Submission of a Waste Management Plan that demonstrates how the physical design, including the placement of chutes, sorting rooms, and collection points, encourages residents to separate waste, recyclables and organics with minimal effort.

5.3.7 Amenity

Outcomes

1. The design balances amenity and visual privacy.
2. Communal areas are high-quality, universally accessible, and well-proportioned to meet the diverse social, recreational, and study needs of students, including a range of intimate to large spaces.

3. Efficient and functional essential services are provided, with deliveries collected securely and safely and appropriate storage fully in place.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. The design should demonstrate that the accommodation balances visual privacy with the opportunity to maximise visual amenity.
- b. The design should demonstrate consideration of window placement, building separation and setback distances, and the relationship between rooms and nearby buildings minimise overlooking to consider reasonable privacy for students and neighbours.
- c. The design should consider the location of, and demonstrate that various communal spaces (e.g., quiet zones, active spaces, indoor/outdoor) are provided, and that any impacts between co-located spaces and accommodation is mitigated.
- d. Measures for the operation and security of common areas, storage facilities, designated collection points for mail/deliveries, and laundry facilities should be detailed in the operational management plan, which may, dependent on scale, include a noise management plan to mitigate acoustic impacts on the surrounding locality.

- e. Storage is provided in a convenient, secure and weather protected location.

5.3.8 Legibility

Outcomes

1. The accommodation's main entrances and movement networks are readily identifiable, providing clear, universally accessible physical and visual links to the public realm.
2. Private and public areas are clearly distinguished, ensuring functional and safe separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Achieving the outcome/s

- a. The development successfully demonstrates how the design provides clear and legible site planning including clearly articulated entrances and intuitive movement for pedestrians, cyclists and other modes of transport.
- b. To ensure safe use and operation, the proposal should reduce reliance on signage and demonstrate how the site layout clearly differentiates private access points (e.g., student parking/servicing) from the public realm.

5.3.9 Community

Outcomes

1. The design and operation facilitate social interaction and support a diverse range of students.

2. Management and operation support the ongoing use and mitigates any adverse effects on the surrounding locality.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. An operational management plan should be submitted to provide evidence of design elements that activate street frontages together with strategies for social engagement, event activation, and community partnerships.
- b. An operational management plan should be submitted that outlines measures for mitigating potential amenity impacts (e.g. noise, waste, traffic, security).

5.3.10 Safety & Wellbeing

Outcomes

1. A high standard of physical safety and security is provided for all students and visitors.
2. The accommodation is resilient and supports students' health and wellbeing, particularly during periods of isolation or restricted movement.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. An operational management plan should be submitted that outlines specific risk mitigation strategies, CPTED analysis, and proposed security measures.

- b. An operational management plan should be submitted that specifies the essential services, remote support, and built form features that support the health and wellbeing of the students.

5.3.11 Movement and access

Outcomes

1. Onsite parking, charging infrastructure and service access are designed to meet operational needs.
2. The development prioritises safe and convenient movement of pedestrians and cyclists, while vehicle and service access is effectively managed to meet operational needs and avoid significant impacts on the local community.
3. Parking provision responds to the specific context of the development, ensuring alignment with demonstrated demand and the availability of alternative transport options.

Achieving the outcomes

- a. Where an evidence based rationale demonstrates that carparking demand can be met through alternative transport options, such as convenient access to public transport, educational facilities, shops or local services, the provision of on-site carparking may not be required, or minimal carparking provision may be supported.

- b. Bicycle parking is provided in a convenient, secure and weather protected location and includes a shared basic repair station.
- c. Electric charging infrastructure is incorporated to support vehicles and other small personal mobility devices.
- d. Servicing access is designed to accommodate vehicles required for building maintenance, deliveries and other operational functions.
- e. Waste collection areas are located and designed to ensure safe, convenient use for students and practical access for waste operators.
- f. Submission of a traffic impact statement (TIS) or traffic impact assessment (TIA) to ensure that any traffic and parking movements generated by the development can be managed.

5.3.12 Adaptive reuse

Outcomes

1. The development incorporates adaptive building design and operational flexibility, enabling it to accommodate future needs where appropriate and practicable

Achieving the outcomes

- a. Design buildings with flexible layouts, adaptable communal areas, and service systems that could be reconfigured or upgraded over time, where appropriate and practical.

- b. Incorporate structural and spatial elements that support future changes in use, technology, or operational needs, where feasible.
- c. Design may facilitate future adaptation and/or, if required, consideration of sustainable disassembly at end of life, enabling components to be reused and reducing demolition waste.
- d. Submission of an operational management plan when the operator proposes temporary tenancy arrangements during shutdown periods to allow for flexible occupancy.