

## Enhancing Liveability through Urban Design

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Introduction: Ranking cities on liveability.

Melbourne was crowned the world's best city in 2026 by **Time Out** ([Time Out Melbourne - Events, Attractions & What's on in Melbourne](#)) through a survey of 24 000 people on 44 different criteria ranging from food, nightlife, affordability, culture to "overall city vibe". While the result may be subjective, cities which rate high in such surveys are said to be very "liveable," but what makes a city "liveable" and how do we plan to build liveable neighbourhoods and cities?

The **Oxford Economics Global Cities Index** ranks the world's largest cities based on five key dimensions: economic, human capital, quality of life, environment and governance ([Oxford Economics Global Cities Index](#)). With a greater emphasis on economic vitality, environmental sustainability and quality of life, the Global Cities Index perhaps represents a more objective measure of a city's vibrancy, but does that mean the city is more liveable? Incidentally, New York is currently ranked number one, followed by London and Paris.

The above may have little relevance to the average Australian going about their daily lives, but if we want to plan to build more liveable cities and neighbourhoods, a good place to start is by looking at urban design.

Planning policies to support liveability.

**Liveable Neighbourhoods** ([Liveable neighbourhoods](#)) is an operational policy guiding the structure and planning for greenfield and large infill sites. Originally introduced in Western Australia in 1997, its aim was to facilitate the development of sustainable communities for new urban areas in Perth and regional country centres in the state by adopting the following strategies:

1. Create walkable neighbourhoods clustered around town centres of compatible mixed uses to reduce car dependency.
2. Designing walkability for all users, including those with disabilities.
3. Foster a sense of community and strong local identity.
4. Create an interconnected network of streets to facilitate safe walking, cycling and driving.
5. Support efficient public transport systems.
6. Facilitate mixed-use urban development to support employment and leisure opportunities.
7. Provide a variety of lot sizes and housing types.
8. Ensure high quality parks and green spaces are well integrated.
9. Protect local heritage and water systems.



The anticipated outcomes of adopting a **Liveable Neighbourhood** policy include:

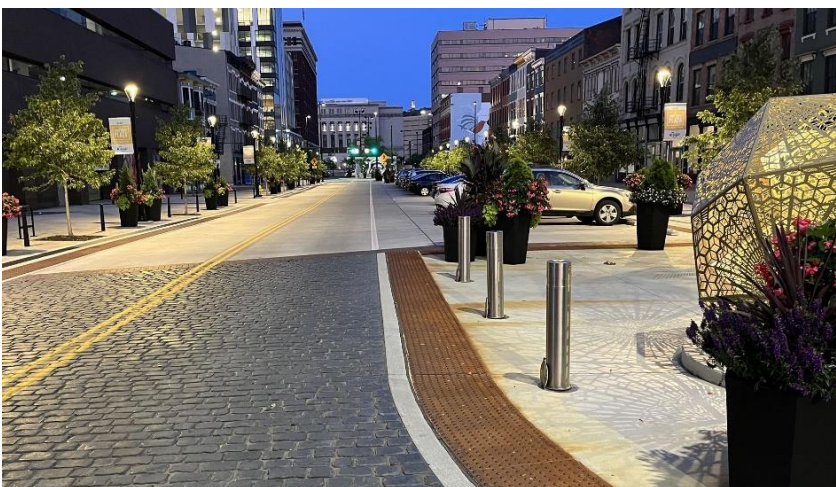
- 1.Reduced car dependence, encourage walking, cycling or public transport use as viable alternatives.
- 2.Improved health and wellbeing, reducing social isolation through communal public spaces.
- 3.Enhancing sustainability by using land more efficiently and integrating good design to better manage stormwater.
- 4.Economic vibrancy through creating an urban hub supporting local jobs and small business.

The **Liveable Neighbourhood** concept has since become a national reference document and other Australian states have implemented similar liveable frameworks under varying names (e.g. “15-Minute Neighbourhoods” in NSW, “Liveable Communities” in Queensland).

#### Further enhancing liveability through crime prevention

The **Economist Intelligence Unit** (EIU) uses five broad categories to rank cities on liveability ([Global Liveability Index 2024 - Economist Intelligence Unit](#)). Not surprisingly, “stability” is one of the core categories and considers petty crime, prevalence of violent crime, terror threat and the threat of civil unrest. But is it possible to use the principles of urban design in crime prevention?

**Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design** (CPTED [ICA home page](#)) is a multi-disciplinary approach using strategies to reduce victimisation, deter potential offender decisions that precede criminal acts, and to build a sense of community and empowerment so that residents feel safe and gain control of their neighbourhood. It is an international non-profit association founded in Calgary, Canada in 1996, and supports local organisations, practitioners and communities which use CPTED principles to create safer communities. Membership includes planners, architects, developers, police, security professionals, academics and other interested parties.



The advantage of CPTED strategies over traditional crime and justice initiatives are that they aim to prevent crime by examining where it happens and why. This is achieved through manipulating physical/architectural environments, neighbourhood based social environments and taking into account cultural and psychological factors.

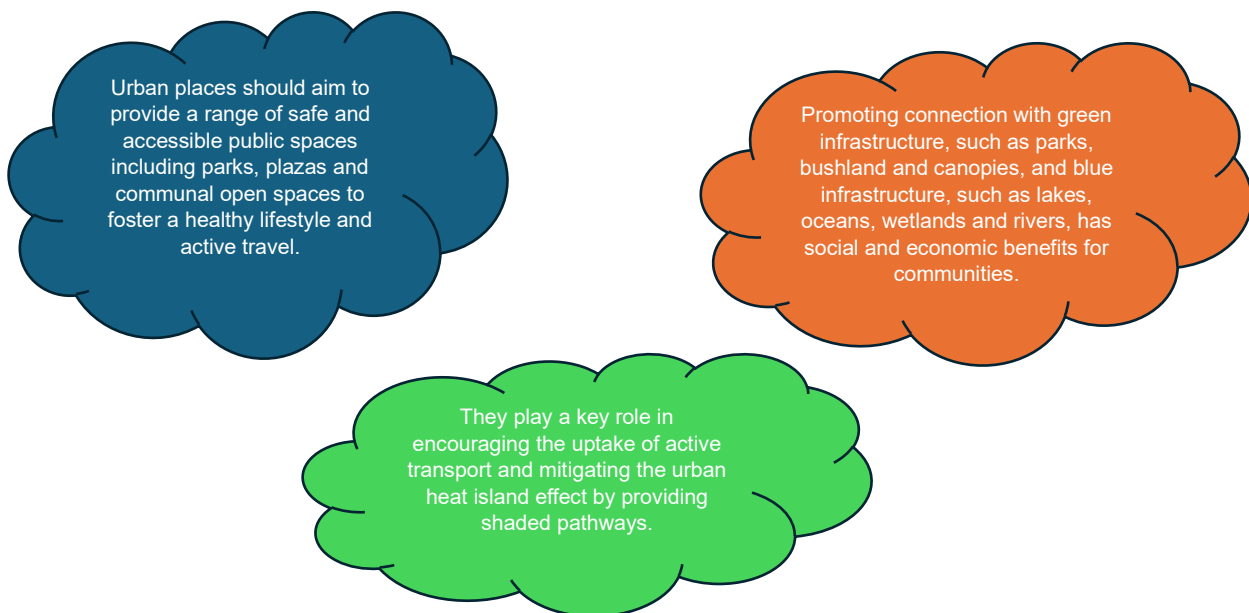
Those who are old enough (we’re talking Generation X here) may remember the **Neighbourhood Watch** “sticker on the letterbox” era of the 1980s, but the program still exists today and has evolved into a model which includes both street-level groups and digital platforms such as social media ([Home - Neighbourhood Watch Australasia](#)). Here are some examples of the digital evolution of the program:

- Community service announcements e.g. Keeping kids safe on-line, to address the growing threat of online child sexual exploitation.
- In NSW and Victoria, many traditional face-to-face meetings have been replaced by **Eyewatch** Facebook pages, allowing for real time safety alerts.
- Detailed information on where to report a crime, including online scams and cybercrimes.

The goal of the **Neighbourhood Watch** program remains the same - to create safer, more connected and inclusive communities by adopting strategies that encourage community participation to build safe and confident communities reducing the fear of crime and increasing feelings of safety. While **Neighbourhood Watch** is a volunteer-led movement, it works closely with state police forces.

### Green spaces to boost liveability.

The National Urban Policy ([National Urban Policy](#)) is a strategic framework for Australian cities, and is one of many documents which link liveability and equity with access to high-quality open green spaces. Here are some excerpts from this policy which highlight the importance of green spaces to healthy living and happiness:



Urban places should aim to provide a range of safe and accessible public spaces including parks, plazas and communal open spaces to foster a healthy lifestyle and active travel.

Promoting connection with green infrastructure, such as parks, bushland and canopies, and blue infrastructure, such as lakes, oceans, wetlands and rivers, has social and economic benefits for communities.

They play a key role in encouraging the uptake of active transport and mitigating the urban heat island effect by providing shaded pathways.

### Conclusion:

Creating liveable cities requires a multidisciplinary approach to effectively integrate safety, connectivity and green spaces into an urban experience for all residents. Urban design which fosters social connection and environmental health helps to build vibrant and resilient neighbourhoods, offering a high standard of living that benefits the entire community.