

Lyttelton Residential Character Area

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Design Guide



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This design guide is subject to review and updates pending Council decisions on suburban intensification, expected December 2025.



Whakaraupō (Lyttelton Harbour) and Lyttelton township. ChristchurchNZ

What are the Lyttelton Character Areas?

Two residential areas in Lyttelton are identified in the Christchurch District Plan (District Plan) as Character Areas.

A Character Area has special qualities that make it distinctive and appealing, resulting in an interesting and memorable area. The distinctiveness is created through the combination of the character and heritage values of houses and their surroundings.

Further, the Lyttelton Character Areas are also influenced by the historic and contemporary relationship of Ngāi Tahu with the area and its landscape, identified as Ngā Tūranga Tūpuna. The Ngā Tūranga Tūpuna¹ overlay encompasses the Character Area, and Lyttelton Township more widely.

The purpose of a Character Area is to make sure that the special qualities are identified, retained or enhanced, when people choose to redevelop their property. Changes that are not complementary to the character and heritage values of Lyttelton can affect the values of the area for residents and visitors.

Lyttelton's Significance

Whakaraupō (Lyttelton Harbour) is a cultural landscape with a long and rich history of Ngāi Tahu land use and occupancy, and strong tradition of mahinga kai. Ngāi Tahu have lived and fished in the harbour for generations. The bays, coast and lands of Whakaraupō are part of the history and identity of Ngāi Tahu. Numerous pā, kāinga, mahinga kai areas, wāhi taonga and wāhi tapu sites hold the stories of Ngāi Tahu migration, settlement and resource use.²

It is within this cultural and geographic setting that Lyttelton has developed as an idiosyncratic port town of heritage importance, giving it a strong sense of place and identity. Houses within the Character Area, and more widely within Lyttelton, range from very modest cottages to more substantive and decorative residences, reflecting the social standing and the importance of the position held by their owners or occupants within the hierarchy of the Port enterprises and town's activities.

Today Lyttelton displays individuality and innovation. Being part of the community is valued, with very direct connections between the street and private space.

¹ Christchurch District Plan, Chapter 9 Natural and Cultural Heritage, 9.5.2.2.2 Policy Ngā Tūranga Tūpuna.

² Excerpt of the Cultural Impact Assessment: An assessment of potential effects of the Port Lyttelton Plan and Lyttelton Port Recovery Plan on Ngāi Tahu values and interests. Prepared by Dyanna Jolly (Witaskēwin), with Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Wheke (Rāpaki), Te Rūnanga o Koukōurāra and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

What is the role of the Design Guide?

The design guide is to provide an overview of the special qualities of the Lyttelton Character Areas and set out a series of corresponding design principles. This gives direction to developing or altering houses and sections. It is noted that it is not the intention of the guide to seek replica buildings. Rather, innovative and sustainable building and site design, which reflects, acknowledges and complements the character, is encouraged.

The design principles in this guide support and supplement District Plan policies, rules and matters. The design principles also help inform the assessment of development proposals⁺ that require resource consent^{*}, along with the matters of discretion contained in the District Plan.

If you are considering making changes or rebuilding in a Lyttelton Character Area it is advised that you seek urban design and planning advice (pre application advice) from the Council early in the design process.

⁺ Development proposals include demolition or changes to the existing building, changes to the sections or construction of a new building, for example.

^{*} This guidance relates to sections 14.15.23 and 8.7.8 of the District Plan that outlines land use and subdivision rules and matters of discretion, in regard to resource consent. For further District Plan advice please contact Christchurch City Council on (03) 941 8999 and ask for a Duty Planner, or for design assistance ask for an Urban Designer.

Area overview

The key elements that contribute to the Lyttelton's residential Character Areas are:

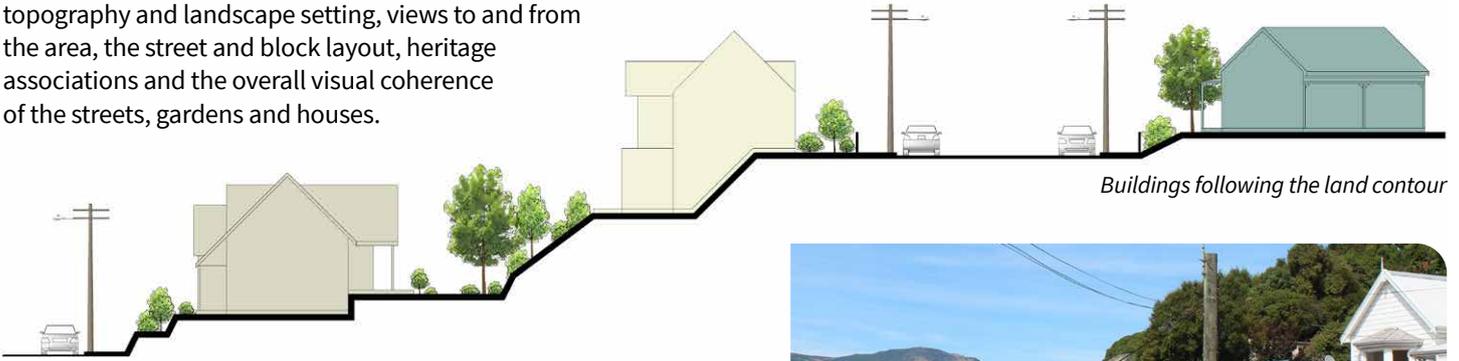
- A large number of buildings from the late 19th Century to the early 20th Century, some of which are of historic significance as recognised by Heritage New Zealand listings and the District Plan schedule.
- Panoramic views of the harbour and the harbour basin from public and private vantage points.
- Standalone buildings, ranging across the landscape in tiers following the contours, interspersed with gardens and greenery.
- Small scale buildings of one or two storeys which have commonalities in style and form, but also have individuality and variety between one property and the next and a high degree of architectural detail.
- Larger scale buildings interspersed on prominent sites.
- Frequent changes in level, with retaining walls, slopes, steps and terraces.
- Generally rectangular lots following the grid alignment of the streets, with irregularities where responding to the landform.
- Use of local red volcanic stone for retaining walls, particularly on street boundaries.
- Small front gardens with low walls and a strong connection to the street.
- Indigenous vegetation interspersed, but concentrated in rear gardens, within the green fingers of the valleys and along watercourses.

Map of Lyttelton's Character Areas



Response to context

The context of the Character Areas are the built and natural environments that makes up Lyttelton. This includes the topography and landscape setting, views to and from the area, the street and block layout, heritage associations and the overall visual coherence of the streets, gardens and houses.



Heritage associations

Heritage and character buildings vary in size from humble cottages to larger houses but display similar styles and forms. Respecting and complementing these valued buildings through sympathetic size, location and design of new development will help to conserve the special character which makes Lyttelton attractive as a place to live and visit.

Design principles:

- Consider options to retain all or parts of heritage and character buildings.
- Ensure heritage values of adjacent or nearby properties are retained, respecting their status, visibility, and access to sunlight.
- Consider the overall qualities of original buildings, such as building form, roof profile, materials, window placements, verandas, decoration and how these qualities might inform the design of new houses.



Reconstructed stone retaining walls, early 20th century houses



A contemporary house within a character context

Responding to the landform and landscape setting

Lyttelton is built on sloping terrain and buildings characteristically hug the hillside. Houses predominantly front onto those streets which run along the contours. Building footprints follow the contour across the site and step up or down from the street. Where streets run up the slope, houses step up from one to the next.

Due to the lie of the land and the setting around the harbour, most sites within the Character Areas can be seen from many angles, either from public places or from other residential properties.

Design principles:

- Avoid extensive levelling or raising of land, align buildings to the contours of the slope.
- Step larger buildings up or down the slope or set them into the slope.
- Design the site to reduce the need for extensive or high retaining walls.
- When designing a new house, extension or alteration to an existing house, study the site from all possible vantage points and envisage how, when finished, it might look from those points.
- Carefully site and screen utility structures such as bin enclosures and water tanks.



Historic cottages - 45 and 47 Canterbury Street



Houses on varying scales but compatible forms and architectural detailing



The landscape setting, including tī kōuka, other native planting, and characteristic stone walls



House located at street edge, decorative porch with semi-private space

Site design

Balance of house and garden size

Most of the original quarter acre sections within the Character Area have been subdivided longitudinally or crosswise. This has occurred in a somewhat random manner creating considerable variation in lot sizes along the street. This in turn has caused variation in house sizes, although smaller sites generally have a higher site coverage. Larger sites often have two storey houses set in generous sized gardens.

Vegetation in private gardens is an important component of the Character Areas. Houses are generally located close to the street creating a perimeter block effect of buildings which provides for open space and gardens, including larger vegetation, within the centre of the block. These open areas and the gardens at the front of houses play a part in determining the character of Lyttelton as they can be seen between buildings and from a distance due to the topography. The rear gardens provide a backdrop of greenery to the houses and include indigenous species such as tī kōuka (Cabbage tree) and South Island Kowhai, while the front gardens provide interest and separation from the street.

Given the Lyttelton terrain, development pattern and intent of the Ngā Tūranga Tūpuna overlay, storm water management should also be considered in the site development.

Design principles:

- Allow space for garden planting around the house.
- Retain existing mature trees and shrubs within gardens and on sloping banks.
- Use steeper parts of the site for tree planting and amenity purposes.
- Consider the use of indigenous plant species.
- Incorporate measures to manage stormwater run-off including limiting the area of paving on the site.



Tightly knit houses built close to the street



Gable ends and windows oriented to both street fronts.

House setbacks and orientation

Most house sites are rectangular, with their side boundaries perpendicular to the street. Almost without exception, houses are aligned parallel with their side and front boundaries. In contrast, there is considerable variation in the distance houses are set back from the street. While many sites include a small front garden, some houses, particularly on corners, are built right up to the street and others are set well back.

This provides a varied interplay between buildings and the street and a constantly changing and informal street view when moving along the street.

Design principles:

- Align houses square on to the street.
- Orientate house entrances, windows and porches to face the street.
- Design houses on corner sites to have a good interface with both streets.
- Take into account the land contours, views, orientation and the impact of the new development on neighbours when deciding where to locate the house on the site.
- Consider how the new building will sit with the buildings on either side.
- Larger two storey houses may appear overly dominant if they are set too close to the street.



A low hedge, and low fences with planting behind define the street edge, contributing to street amenity



A small scale garage that ties in with the adjacent houses, with visibility maintained between the house and street

Street amenity

Many properties have small attractive front gardens, with occasional larger gardens between the house and the street. Gardens on sites which slope up from the street are very visible in the streetscape.

Street boundary treatments are a significant feature of the Lyttelton Character Areas. Most notable are the red volcanic stone walls which are used as retaining walls and boundary walls. Low hedges, picket and wire fences are also common, often in combination with a stone wall. These treatments allow good visibility between the houses and streets, and an attractive street edge.

Design principles:

- Particularly on sloped or retained sites, allow the house to be seen against a foreground of garden planting.
- Where the boundary runs down a slope or the site is elevated above the road, consider stepping retaining walls, terracing the land or planted slopes to avoid high walls.
- Ensure views to and from houses are maintained. Design front fencing to a maximum height of 1m.
- Consider the use of traditional stone walls, picket or wire fences or planted boundaries.

For further guidance refer to the [Building a Fence Design Guide](#) available on the [Christchurch City Council](#) website.

Access, parking and garaging

Due to the sloping terrain, accommodating vehicles on site can be difficult and in some cases may not be possible. To avoid detracting from the appearance of the Character Area, garaging, parking and manoeuvring space should be unobtrusive and less obvious or separate from, the house.

Design principles:

- Keep garages as small as possible, especially if by necessity, they are located at the street front.
- Where possible locate garages behind the front edge or to the side of houses. Coordinate garage and house design in terms of form, materials and colour.
- Avoid large span garage doors by visually dividing into bays or separate into smaller garages.
- Design driveways to be discreet and consider courtyards for dual garden/car parking use. Break up large areas of hard surface with paving designs or strategic planting.
- Screen garages, parking and driveways with planting.
- Where a garage door is located at the front of the house, ensure there are also doors and windows facing onto the street, to maintain interaction between the house and the street.



A collection of houses, simple in form, steeper gable roofs, verandas, entry porches, dormer and bay windows.

Building design

Scale, bulk and form

The size and height of a house are key factors in determining what impact the building will have on its immediate surroundings. Although houses within the Character Areas vary in size, a common characteristic is that they are domestic in scale, even when large in size.

Houses in the Character Areas are generally quite simple in shape, with either a steep symmetrically pitched roof or a shallower pitch hipped roof. Smaller shapes like lean-to roofs, verandas, entry porches, dormer and bay windows are often added to these main shapes. Buildings in the Character Areas don't usually have a wide street frontage. Many have their gable end facing the street.

Here and there buildings and features exist which detract from the quality of the Character Areas. These building and features shouldn't be used to justify more of the same.

Design principles:

- Design houses to be similar in size and proportion to existing houses.
- Reflect the smaller scale of surrounding buildings by dividing larger buildings into a series of smaller components; incorporating steps in the plan of the building; using different roof shapes, such as double gables, or dividing the building into visually separate units by using different treatments or colours for cladding.
- Where a new building is wide in proportion to its height, consider breaking it up into more vertically proportioned pieces.

- Avoid large blank elevations, dominant roofs, large expanses of the same design or finish, including unduly repetitive buildings
- Use pitched or hipped roofs consistent with existing buildings in the area. The use of roofs which are pitched at 30 degrees and steeper, is encouraged. This may mean dividing a large roof into smaller modules.
- Mono-pitch, shallow pitch and flat roofs can be successfully absorbed in the townscape providing they are smaller adjuncts to the main roof form.
- Consider building in the roof space or adding an attic storey to a two storey building to keep its height more in keeping with lower buildings around it.



Some of the variations in building and roof form, with symmetry in the location of doors and windows, of the Lyttelton Character Area



Oxford Street – weatherboard cottages, with symmetry in windows and entry ways, but variety in roof form and colour

Architectural detailing

Buildings in the Character Areas have been influenced by the architectural styles of the time. Horizontal weatherboards are the most common wall cladding and corrugated metal is the predominant roof material. Although painted masonry, stained or natural timber and brick finished buildings exist, they are not characteristic of the area. Windows are not overly large and are usually taller than they are wide. The variety of colours in use for building exteriors and roofs is an important contribution to the street and wider townscape character.

Design principles:

- Maintain the richness and texture of detailing in older properties through retention of original features.
- Ensure additions and alterations to existing houses are compatible with the overall proportions and detailing of the original house.
- Use features such as verandas, porches, dormer and bay windows to add depth and shadow to a surface to create visual interest.
- Choose traditional materials, such as weatherboard cladding and corrugated metal roofing. Small accents of different materials can be successfully incorporated.
- Consider how you might reflect contemporary mana whenua values, such as through imagery and detailing.
- Plaster finishes can be successful, providing they have features that add depth to the façade such as shadow boards, deep reveals, window surrounds or textured finish.
- Pay attention to the sizes, symmetry and proportions of window openings and their placement, or grouping, including in relation to neighbouring buildings.
- Divide larger expanses of glazing with glazing bars, mullions etc.
- Recess windows into the wall and accentuate this depth with a surrounding trim or facings.
- If aluminium joinery is proposed, choose profiles that mimic the depth and surrounds that wooden joinery provides.
- Strong bright colours should be used sparingly and are characteristically confined to trims and other small areas.