

# Large buildings in lower density living zones

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## A Design Guide

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# LARGE BUILDINGS IN LOWER DENSITY LIVING ZONES

## Introduction

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This guide is intended to provide owners, designers and developers with a checklist of considerations when proposing a larger than average building in a lower density living zone.

**Part One** of the guide describes the essential physical design elements of suburban residential areas. **Part Two** identifies matters to be considered when proposing a large building in such an area.

Reference should be made to the Christchurch City Plan which contains objectives, policies and rules relating to new developments and extensions.

It is advisable to discuss proposals at an early stage with Planners and Urban Designers at the City Council so that design solutions can be arrived at before detailed plans are drawn up.

## Part One: The Nature of Living Zones

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Living zones have a distinct character which is created by a number of factors.

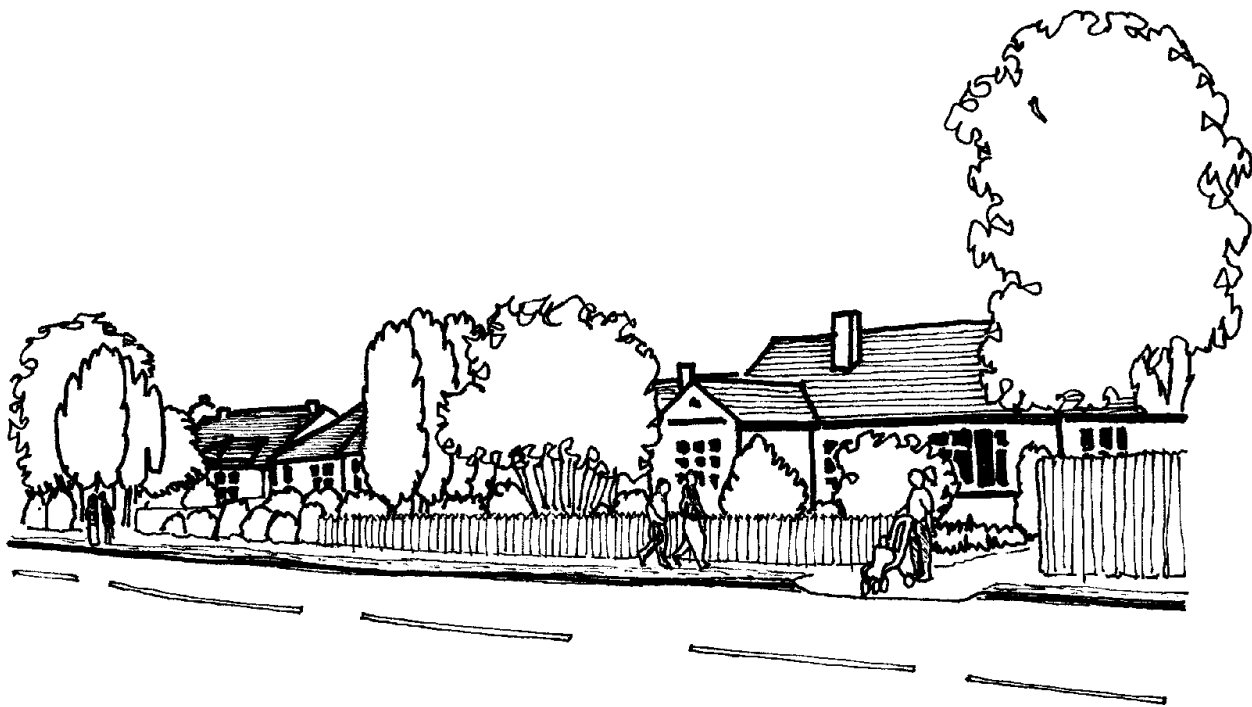
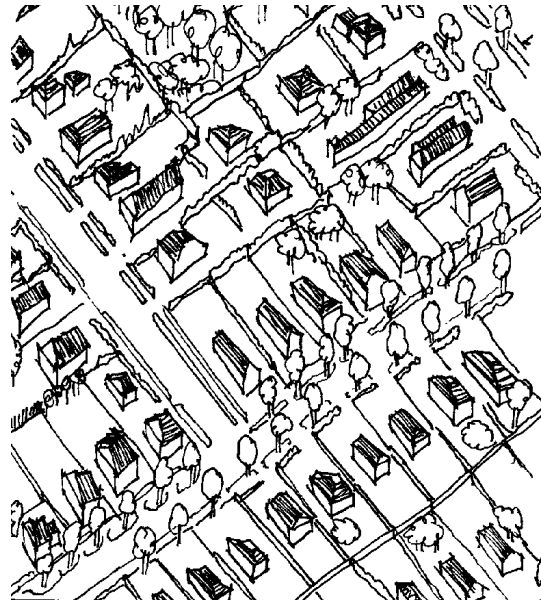
They are made up of small modules which combine to create a **domestic scale**.

The size of sections and the volume of buildings are the two main determinants of the scale of an area.

In suburban residential areas

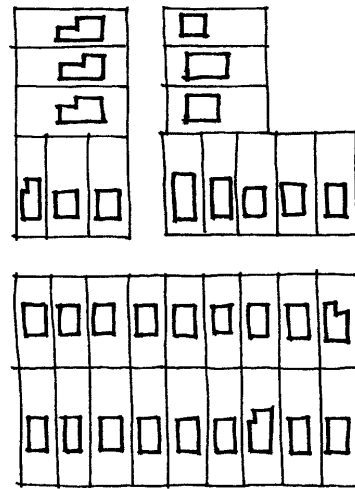
- Section sizes are generally between 500 and 1000 m<sup>2</sup>
- Houses are one or two storeys (5 –8 m) high and have on average between 100 and 250 m<sup>2</sup> internal floor space

Because neighbouring buildings are compatible in terms of scale one does not dominate or overshadow another.

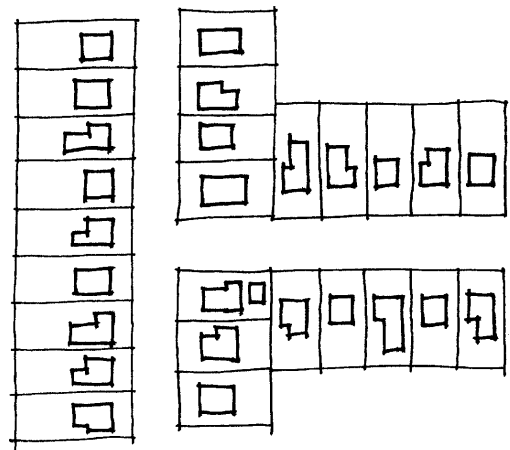


Sections of similar size and shape make up a residential area. This can be described as the **grain** of the area and may be

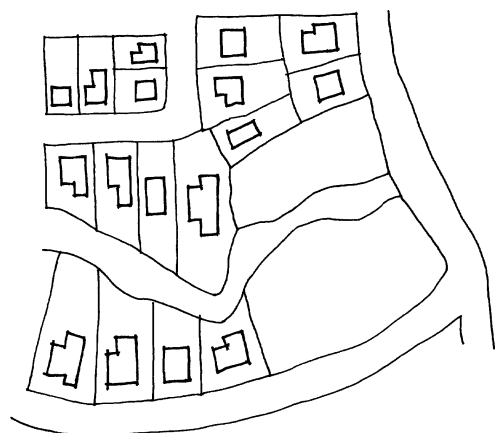
- fine and regular



- or
- larger and regular

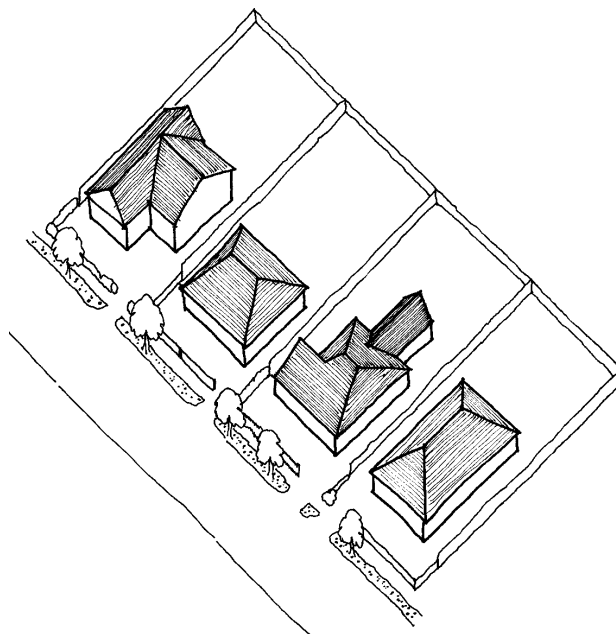


- or
- irregular (alongside a river, on a slope)



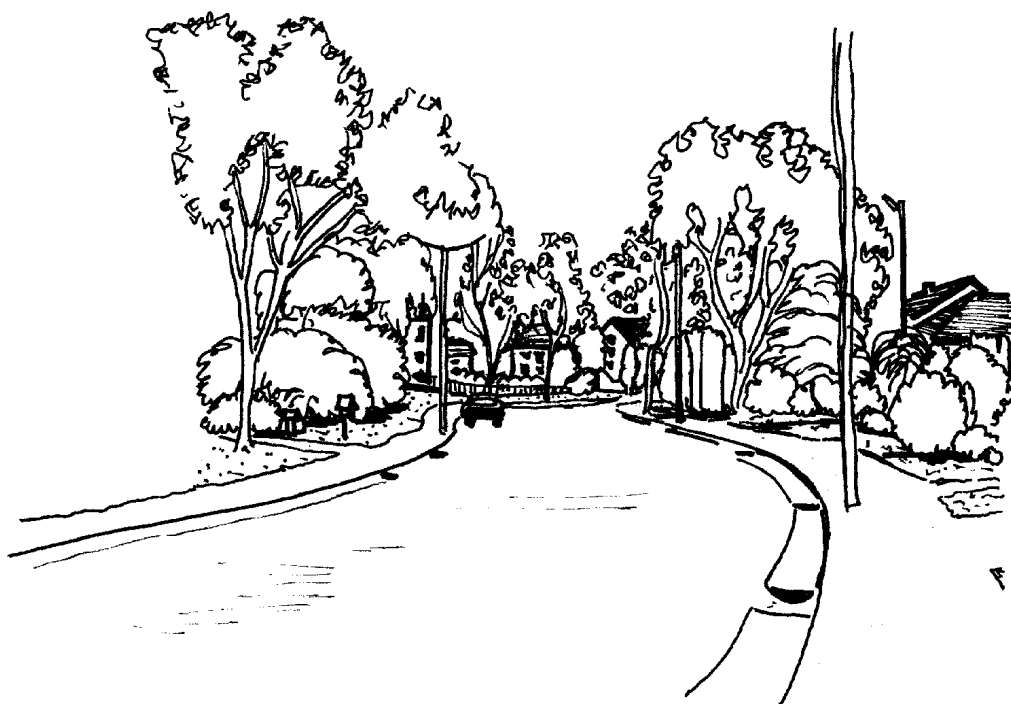
The position of buildings on the section is consistent

- houses tend to be centrally located between the side boundaries
- neighbouring properties are set back a similar distance from the road
- buildings are usually square on to the street.



Buildings tend to occupy a standard proportion of their site, generally between 20 and 35%.

In many residential areas the profusion of trees and shrubs is a distinctive feature.



Within these given common features there are a variety of house styles, shapes, material, colours.

## Part Two: Matters to consider when proposing a large building

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Large buildings, such as big private houses, care homes, hostels and other multiple occupancy residences can be successfully integrated in residential areas providing they

- **respect** the street scene and
- **respect** the surrounding properties.

Therefore it is vital to consider the **context**, as described in Part One of this guide, when contemplating the development of a larger than average building in a living zone.

The following questions can act as a checklist when developing the design.

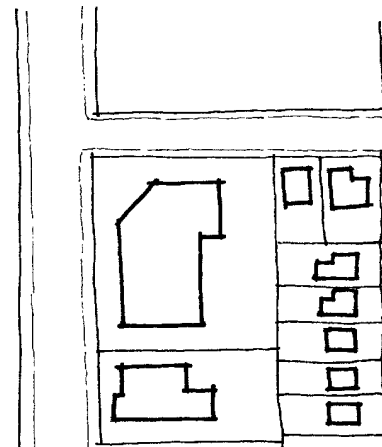
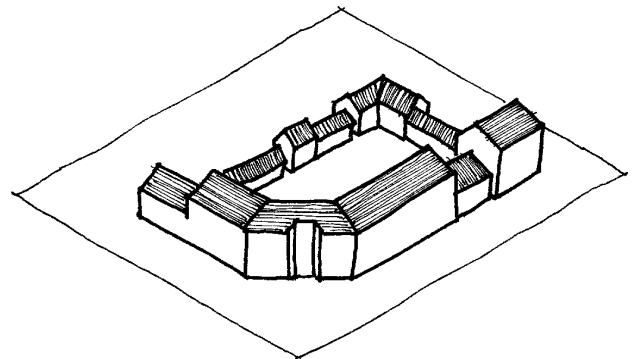
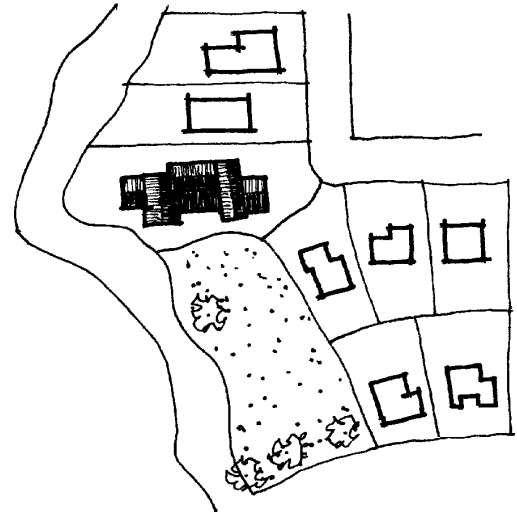
### 1. What size and shape of building is appropriate in this location?

The amount of building volume that is appropriate and how that building volume is distributed needs to be considered.

The development may be high and compact, low and spreading or a combination of both.

The appropriate size and scale of building will depend on the location of the proposed site

- On a corner site or one fronting a main road where the building will front a larger space, a substantial building may be appropriate



- On a site which is surrounded by small buildings the building form should be similar to those surrounding it.

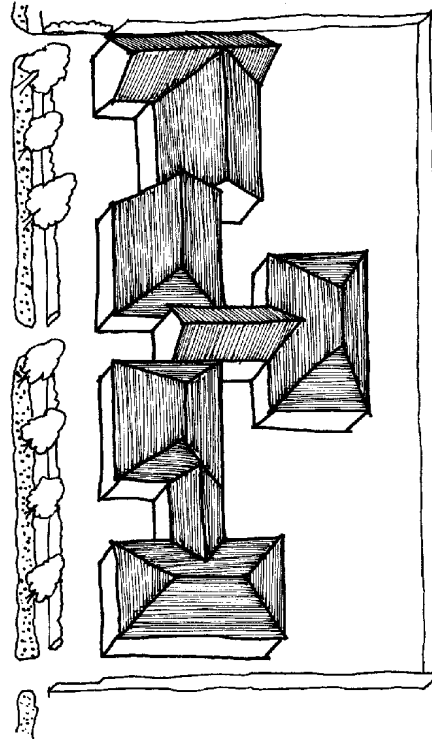
It is usually preferable for the new building to be designed so that it reads as a group of smaller buildings rather than a large single building, thus ensuring that the domestic scale is maintained.

The bulk of the building could be broken up by

- Steps in building height or plan
- Roofs at opposing angles
- Recesses or projections
- Changes in building materials.

The size of the building may be disguised by

- Stepping back an upper floor
- Utilising the roof space.



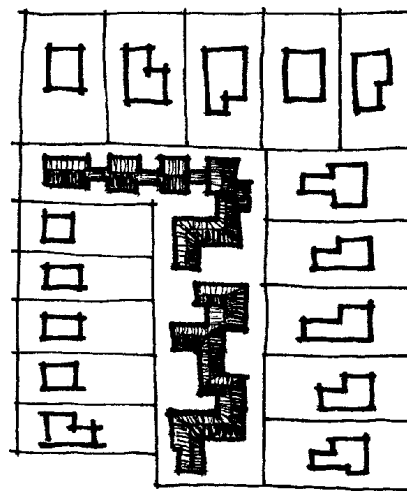
## 2. Is the position of the building on the section important?

If adjoining buildings follow a common building line, it may be important for the new building to be set back the same distance (even if it is greater than the set back distance required in the City Plan).

If existing buildings are all orientated the same way then new buildings should follow this rather than be at discordant angles.

New buildings should be designed to follow the layout pattern or 'grain' of the area.

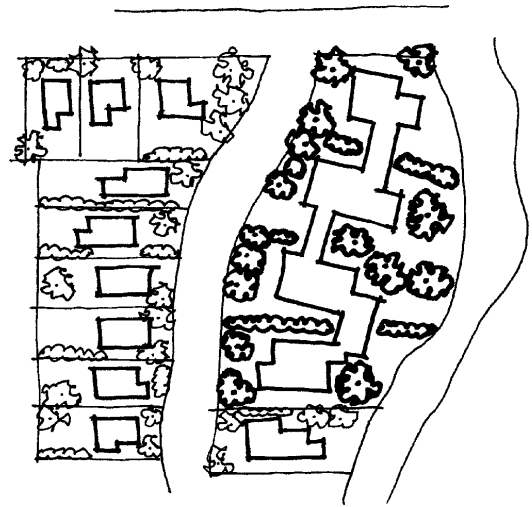
Consideration should be given to whether one building in the centre of the site or a group of buildings spread across the site, would be more appropriate.



### 3. How important are trees and shrubbery in this neighbourhood?

Attention should be paid to the amount of planting and vegetation around. In many areas greenery will be more predominant than buildings. The aim should be to meet or exceed this level on the development site.

As trees and shrubbery can soften the impact and screen new buildings, it is important to retain existing vegetation, even if only a temporary measure while new planting becomes established. Therefore, when designing new large buildings think about maintaining existing greenery.



### 4. What impact will the proposed building have on neighbouring properties?

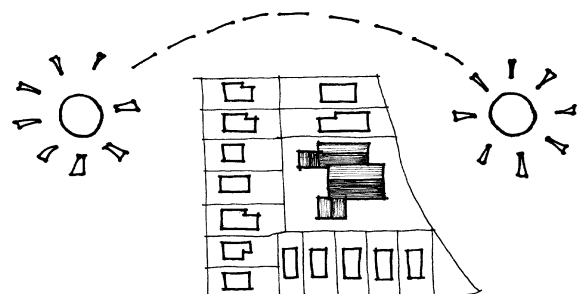
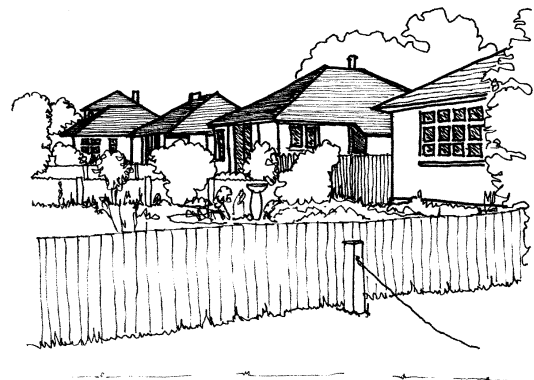
It is vitally important to carefully study surrounding properties, particularly the location of windows and outdoor living spaces. A new large building could reduce privacy, cast shadows, block light, or generally intimidate neighbouring properties if it is not sensitively designed.

Shadow patterns for proposed buildings should be plotted in order to determine the degree to which properties to the south, west and east will be affected by shading.

It may be better to align buildings in a north-south, rather than an east-west direction, to minimise the effect of shading

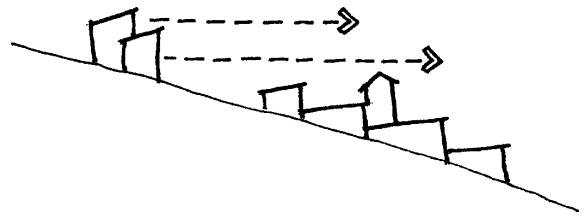
or towards the northern boundary.

The bulk of the building could be concentrated towards the front of the section in line with adjoining properties.





A large building on a sloping site could block views from properties higher up the slope. It may be better to have a building which hugs the ground, or is higher only in limited parts.

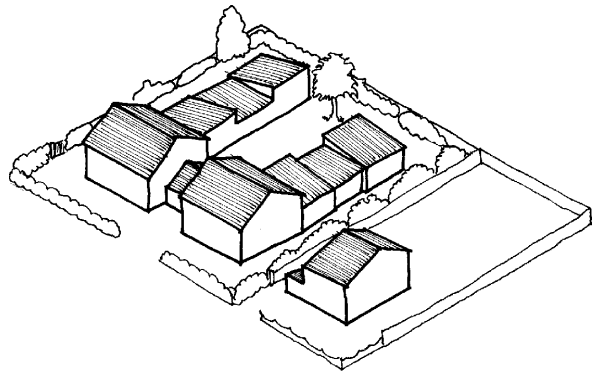


Consider the impact of the roof. It may be that a low pitch roof will make the new building less visible from a neighbour's garden.

The front part of the building may have a steeper pitched roof to suit the street scene, with a lower pitch at the rear.

Window positions may need to be adjusted so that privacy of adjoining properties is maintained.

The use of light colour building materials can help to create a building which is less imposing.



Simple adjustments to the shape of a building and its position on a site can make a considerable difference to the effect of a new building on neighbouring properties.

Finally, as a test, imagine how you would feel if you were a neighbour and the building you are proposing was built next to you.