

Clifton Design Guide

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

What is Clifton Character Area?

Clifton is identified in the Christchurch District Plan (District Plan) as a Character Area. It comprises The Spur and the houses of Clifton Bay. It has qualities that make it distinctive and appealing resulting in an attractive and memorable area. The distinctiveness is created through the combination of the character of houses and their surroundings.

The purpose of the Character Area is to ensure the special qualities are identified, retained or enhanced, when people choose to make changes, repair or to or redevelop their property.

The Clifton area has been significantly impacted by the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch Earthquakes with a loss of some of the original houses and other houses undergoing repair.

The role of the Design Guide

To provide an overview of the special qualities of Clifton and a series of corresponding design principles, which give direction to the development or alteration to houses and sections.

The design principles support and supplement District Plan policies, rules and matters. Development proposals⁺ that require resource consent^{*} are informed by the design principles in this guide, and consequently reviewed against the matters in the District Plan. This guide does not cover every contributing design detail.

If you are considering making changes or rebuilding in the Clifton 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 changes to the existing site and building, or construction of a new building, for example.

^{*} 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: Clifton

Clifton has city-wide significance as an intact residential neighbourhood of historic importance for Christchurch containing some of the earliest houses in the city. The area contains The Spur, a subdivision comprehensively designed by Samuel Hurst-Seager, a renowned Christchurch architect between 1902 and 1914. The area has a strong sense of place and identity. The key elements that contribute to the character of Clifton are:

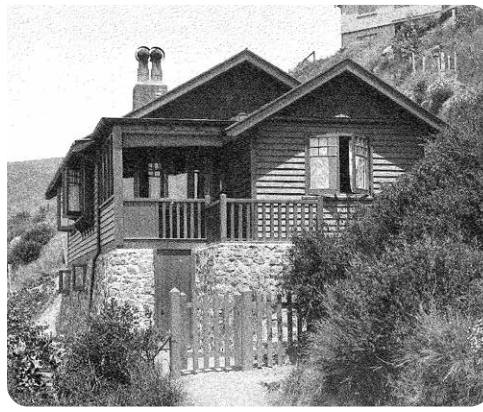
- Two distinct characters with The Spur subdivision containing twelve sections elevated above Sumner and four sections fronting onto Clifton Bay.
- A distinctive layout of The Spur based on the garden suburb model with houses distributed within a shared mature landscape setting.
- A memorable geography on the spur of the hill providing prominent house locations.



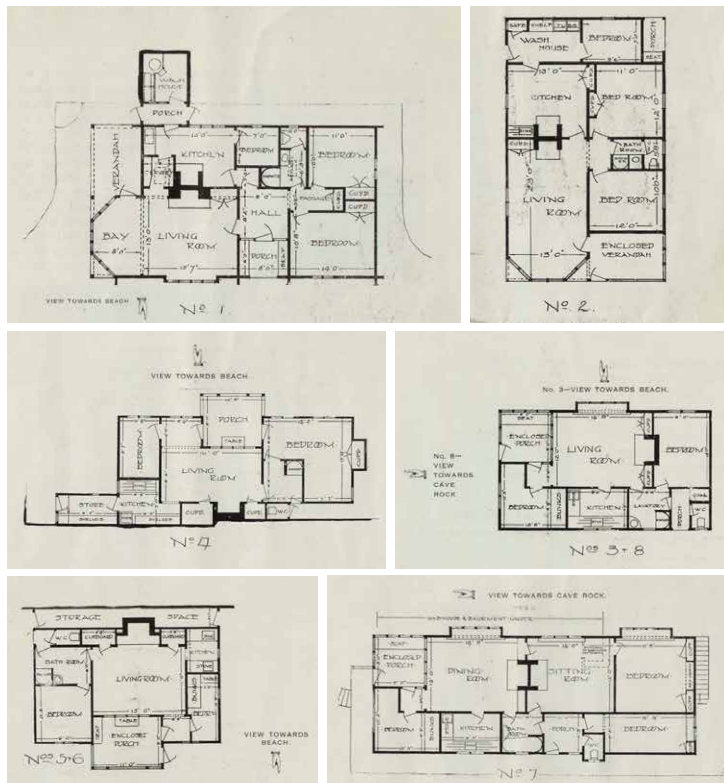
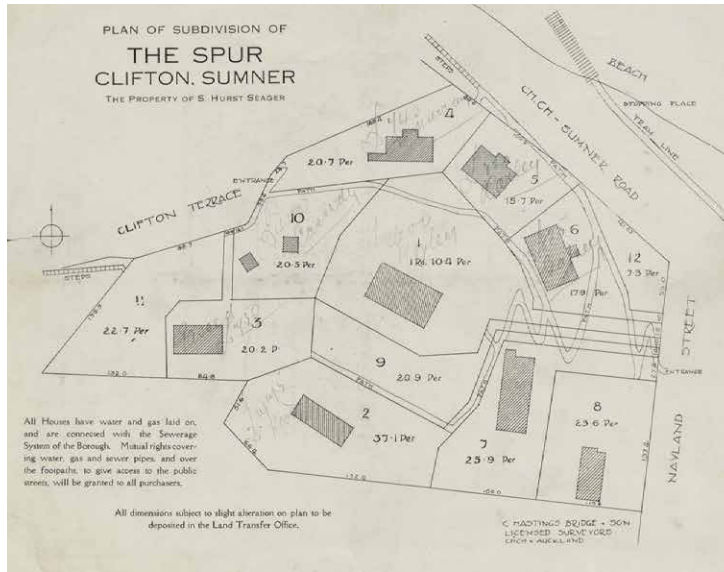
Map of Clifton Character Area – Operative 2 December 2024

- Intact original subdivision with overall spaciousness and consistent pattern of development.
 - Historic importance for Christchurch with number 1 The Spur scheduled as highly significant in the District Plan.
 - A high proportion of original houses with historic significance for Christchurch including early 20th century Arts and Craft style bungalows.
- The size, form and scale of houses, the roof profile within the distinct areas are generally consistent.
 - Architectural detailing contributes to a richness in house design and consistency is established through the location, scale and proportion of windows, porches, roof and eave design and ornamentation.

Designing to the character of the area does not need to be about replicating original houses. Consider how key elements contribute to the character of Clifton. How might they be incorporated into the design so that new houses and the surrounding landscape complement the existing? This will help ensure that the development reinforces the character of the area future generations can appreciate.



Above, left to right: Clifton Bay house; Hurst-Seager bungalow (historic photo shortly after construction); and Hurst-Seager bungalow on The Spur.



Original subdivision plans for the Spur.

Area context

This guidance relates to sections 14.15.23 and 8.6.1 of the District Plan.

The area's context is the neighbourhood environment that makes up Clifton. It includes the street and block layout, the underlying landscape features, heritage associations and the overall visual coherence of the streets, gardens and houses.

Heritage associations

Clifton is an important area for its associations with the early settlement of Sumner. Many of the houses date back to the early 20th century. Respecting these heritage houses through sympathetic scale, size and location of new development will help to retain the special impression that the neighbourhood creates.

Design principles:

- Consider the overall qualities of original houses and how they might inform the design of new houses.

Landscape and natural features

The steep topography is a defining feature for this Character Area. Houses are located on informal terraces distributed around the ridgeline of The Spur, and along its base.

Houses sit comfortably in the landscape and are located on building platforms that are often excavated into the hillside. Houses in the area are generally not elevated or prominent above the slope of the hill.

Established vegetation with mature trees, shrubs and herbaceous vegetation provide a richness of texture and colour, which is a feature of Clifton.

Design principles:

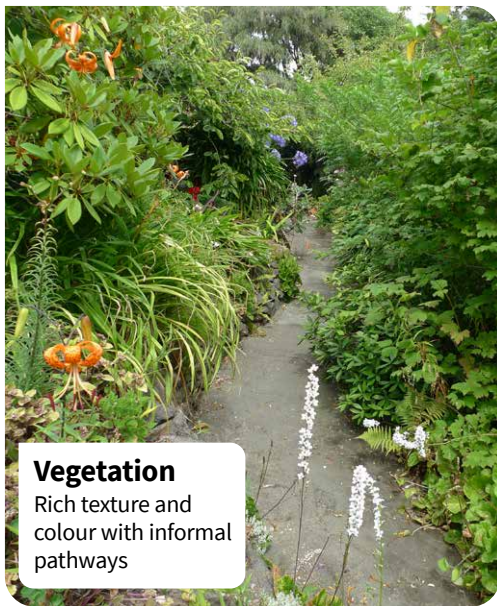
- Align houses to the contour of the landform to reinforce the underlying topography of the area.
- Houses should fit into the landscape and not be prominent or elevated above the slope.
- Retain existing mature vegetation within gardens.

Street and block layout

The original subdivision layout of The Spur within Clifton remains intact. The area has open, cohesive garden landscape layout with little boundary definition.

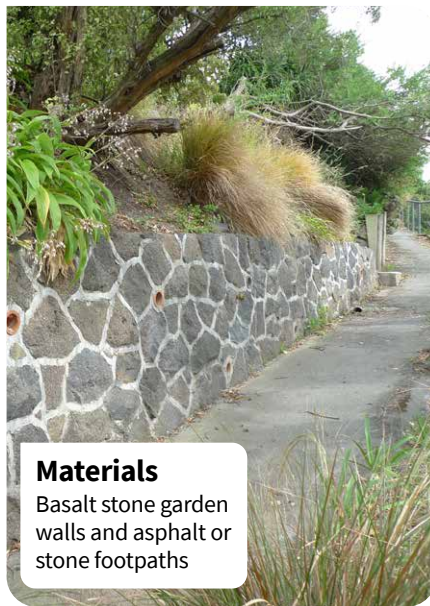
Design principles:

- Retain the existing location of building platforms and layout of houses.



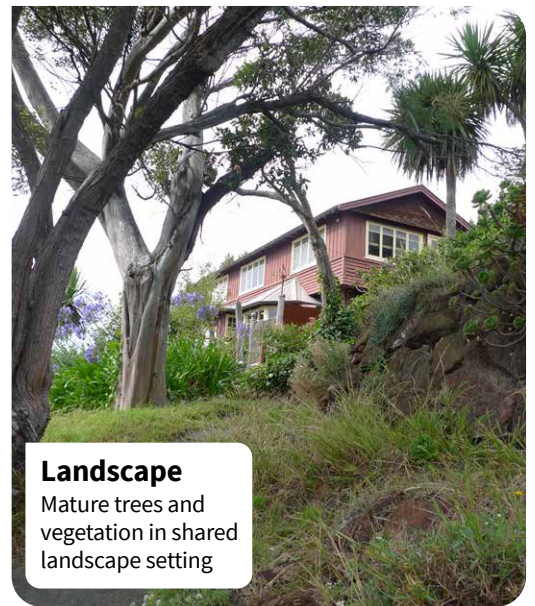
Vegetation

Rich texture and colour with informal pathways



Materials

Basalt stone garden walls and asphalt or stone footpaths



Landscape

Mature trees and vegetation in shared landscape setting

Site design

Balance of house and garden size

A feature of Clifton is the consistent balance between house and garden size. The area has a general spaciousness with generous separation between houses and gardens that contain substantial vegetation.

Design principles:

- Ensure house footprints are generally consistent with the original houses in the Character Area.
- Ensure gardens within The Spur retain their openness and garden suburb appeal.
- Allow space for mature vegetation, especially trees.
- Retain separation distances between houses consistent with the original layout of houses in the Character Area.

House location and orientation

Houses within The Spur are distributed regularly through the subdivision area and are orientated to maximise views over Sumner, the beach and distant views back towards the city centre and Pegasus Bay. Houses on Clifton Bay are more conventional in their orientation towards the street and beachfront.

Design principles:

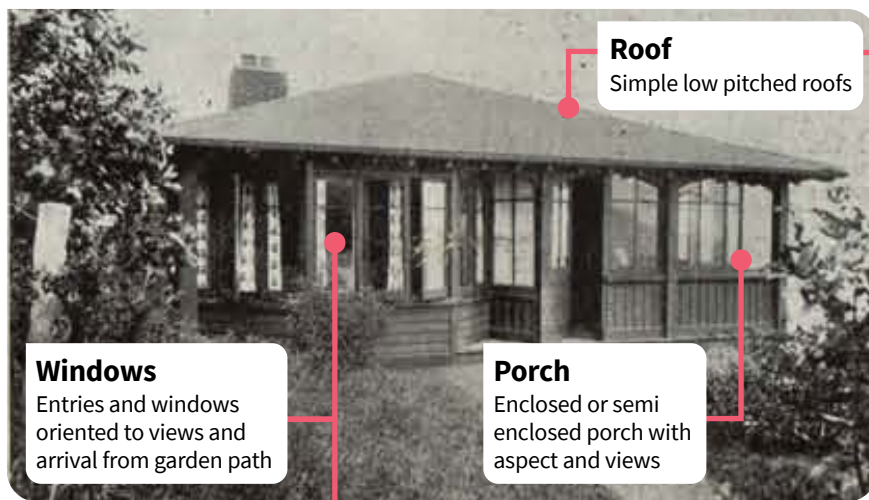
- Orientate houses to take advantage of views and aspect.
- Orientate houses within The Spur to reinforce the original subdivision layout.
- Orientate houses on Clifton Bay to face the street.

Garden detailing

Sections in The Spur have a variety of garden details that contribute to the unity of the landscape. Materials used such as local stone walls, low timber fencing, steel hand railings and narrow asphalt or stone paths are features of the area.

Design principles:

- Low retaining walls or terraces walls should be finished with stone to complement existing.
- Consider materials to paths, fencing and railings such that complement existing and/or original features.
- Retain low boundary fencing along Clifton Bay.



Roof

Simple low pitched roofs

Windows

Entries and windows oriented to views and arrival from garden path

Porch

Enclosed or semi enclosed porch with aspect and views



Detail

High level of detailing and texture through materials

Materials

Typically timber weatherboard, railings, and framing



Building design

Scale and form

The height of a house and its size are key factors in determining what impact the building will have on its immediate surroundings within the Character Area. This includes how it is perceived from within the area and by neighbours, and how successfully it fits with the character of the subdivision.

Houses within The Spur subdivision are small, single storey, stand alone buildings. Some contain basements that have been converted into living spaces. Houses on Clifton Bay are two storey buildings with larger footprints and overall size. All houses have low-pitched hip and gable roofs.

Design principles:

- New houses on The Spur should be single story (above ground level) consistent with original houses.
- New houses on Clifton Bay should be two storey consistent with original houses.
- New houses should be similarly scaled and proportioned to existing houses and have similar sized footprints.
- Additions to existing houses should be consistent with the overall form and scale of the original house.
- Ensure houses in the Character Area have pitched gable or hip roof forms that are consistent with adjacent houses.

Architectural detailing

Architectural detailing is often one of the most noticeable expressions of a Character Area. Details are eye-catching and the style or age of houses can be recognised from them.

Houses within The Spur have specific architectural detailing which are unique but consistent with the arts and crafts houses of the early 1900s.

Detailing such as timber weatherboard cladding and tiled roofing, expansive windows but modest sized windowpanes, arched or flat timber window frames, exposed rafter ends to extended eaves, shingle detailing on gable ends, a variety of detailed entry features and enclosed porches, verandahs with simple ornamentation to columns, are features found throughout the area.

Design principles:

- Maintain existing houses to retain the richness and texture including window, verandah, entrance and façade detailing.
- Additions and alterations should be compatible with the overall proportions and detailing of the original house.
- New houses to reflect existing houses in terms of the proportions and overall style of the window, entrance space and doorway, façade and roof edge details and materials.
- Architectural detailing of the Hurst-Seager bungalows should be recognised in the redevelopment of houses with similar proportions, amount of surface texture and ornamentation used.

