Suburban Character Area Design Guides

Esplanade Design Guide

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

What is Esplanade Character Area?

Esplanade is identified in the Christchurch District Plan (District Plan) as a Character Area. 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 of the area are identified, retained or enhanced, when people choose to make changes to or redevelop their property.

Over time, there have been some changes to houses and sections within Esplanade, that are not complementary to, and otherwise undermine, the still strongly recognisable character of the area. For example, the construction of garages in front gardens, design of houses with flat roofs or the erection of high fences along the street. These changes can affect the character values of the area for residents and visitors.

The role of the Design Guide

To provide an overview of the special qualities of Esplanade 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 Esplanade 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.*
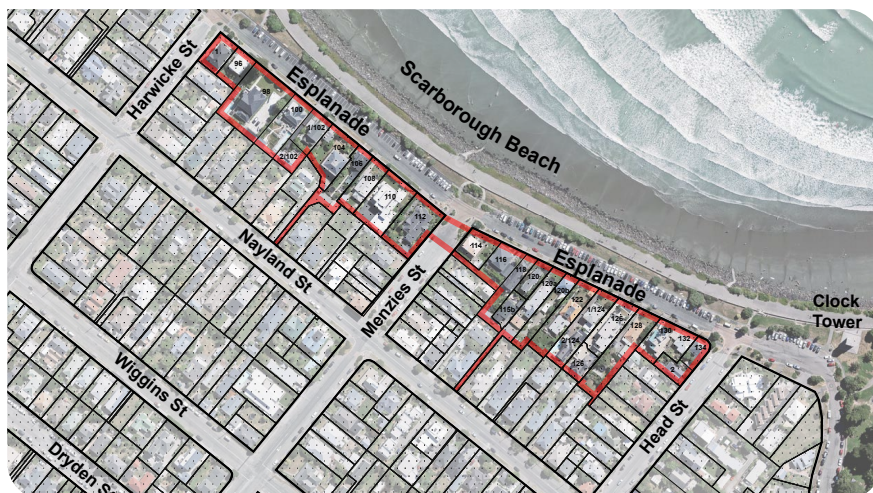
Map of Esplanade Character Area

Area overview: Esplanade

Esplanade has city wide significance as a collection of predominately early 20th century seaside summer houses fronting onto Scarborough Beach. The relationship between the sea, beachfront recreation and residential neighbourhoods is the source of historic and social values unique to Sumner. The two blocks of Esplanade are important because they contain houses that are significant intact examples of their 20th century style. The key elements that contribute to the character of the Esplanade area are:

- The area reflects the historic association of Sumner as a seaside town and recreational destination.
- Relationship of the Esplanade with the beachfront, with the location of houses on one side of the street and the beach, seawall and public gardens on the other.
- Associations with historic and cultural landmarks along the beachfront include the Scarborough Clock Tower and Tuawera/Cave Rock.
- Diversity and range of building styles from the early 20th century through to modern houses.
- Houses frame the curve of the beachfront.
- Majority of houses are two storeys allowing views from houses over the seawall and into the bay.
- Houses are relatively large, with pitched roofs, balconies and large windows facing the beachfront and complex architectural detailing, some of which has been added to over time.

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 Esplanade. 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.

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Two storey houses overlooking the Esplanade and beach.

An example of a house built in early 20th century.

An example of a more contemporary house.

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 Esplanade. It includes the street and block layout, the underlying landscape features, heritage associations and the overall visual coherence of the streets, gardens and houses.
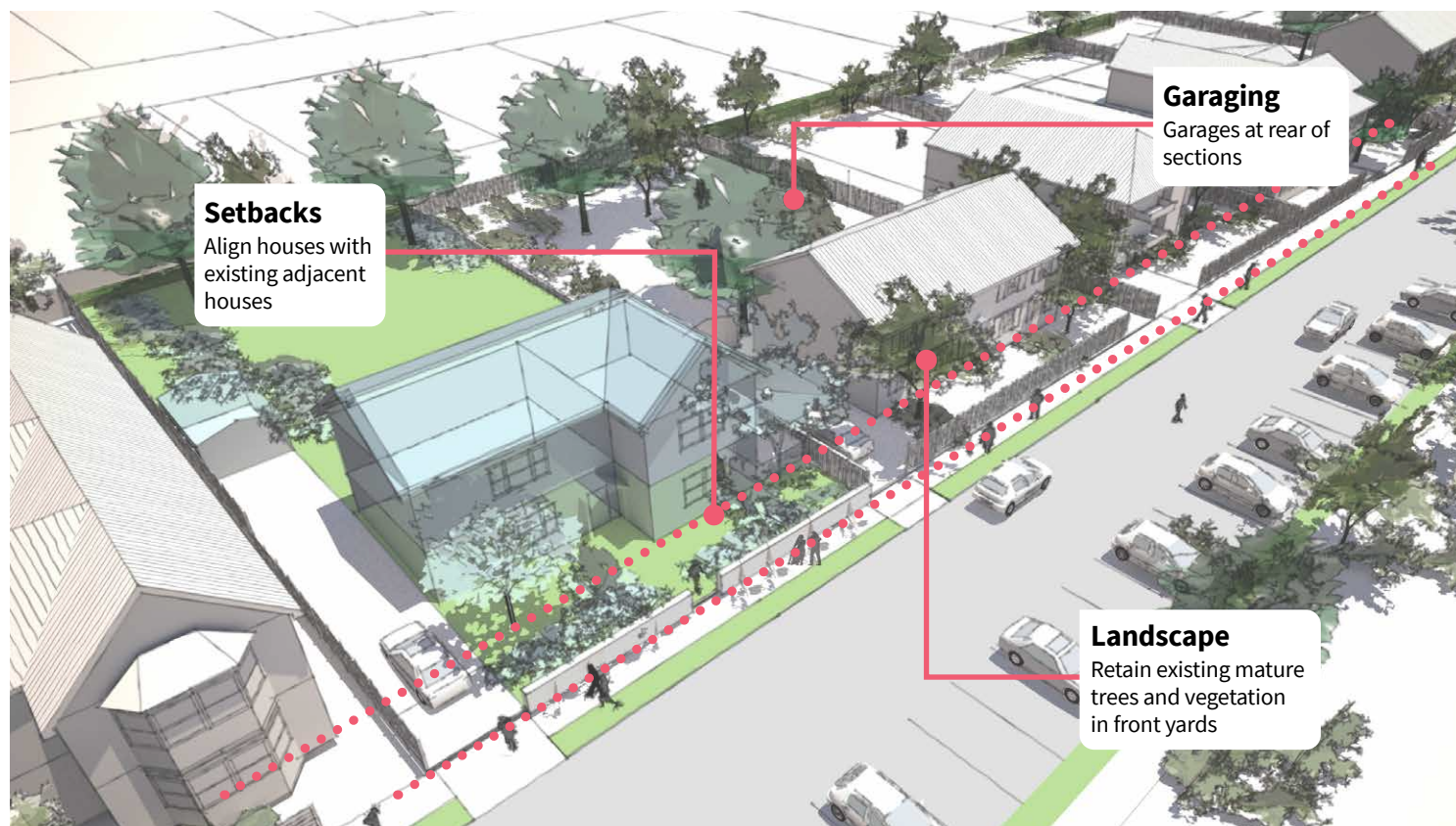
Relationship with adjoining sites and features

The identity and memorability of Esplanade is rooted in its historical and social relationship with the beach, the form and style of houses, and the use of local materials in the landscape. The Scarborough Clock Tower, the sea wall and adjacent gardens and Scarborough Beach provide an important historic setting to the area.

Houses within the Esplanade respond to the curving nature of Scarborough Beach and the Sumner street grid. Houses generally retain, or are consistent with, historic building elements including height and size, roof pitch as well as the presence of balconies and large windows to allow views to the beachfront.

Design principles:

- Align houses to orientate towards the beach and reinforce the curve of the beachfront and street grid.
- Take advantage of views over the seawall from the upper story balconies and windows of houses.
- Reinforce the pitched roofs of existing houses.

Setbacks
Align houses with existing adjacent houses

Garaging
Garages at rear of sections

Landscape
Retain existing mature trees and vegetation in front yards

Site design

House setbacks and boundaries

Houses within Esplanade Character Area are generally located close to the street boundary, with small front gardens. Fences vary along Esplanade from low stone walls and picket fences to larger timber fencing and masonry walls. High walls reduce the visual connection of the houses to the street, but this is partly offset by the balconies and large windows on the first floor of houses.

New houses and alterations to existing houses should provide or retain consistent street setbacks and allow good visual connection with the street and beachfront.
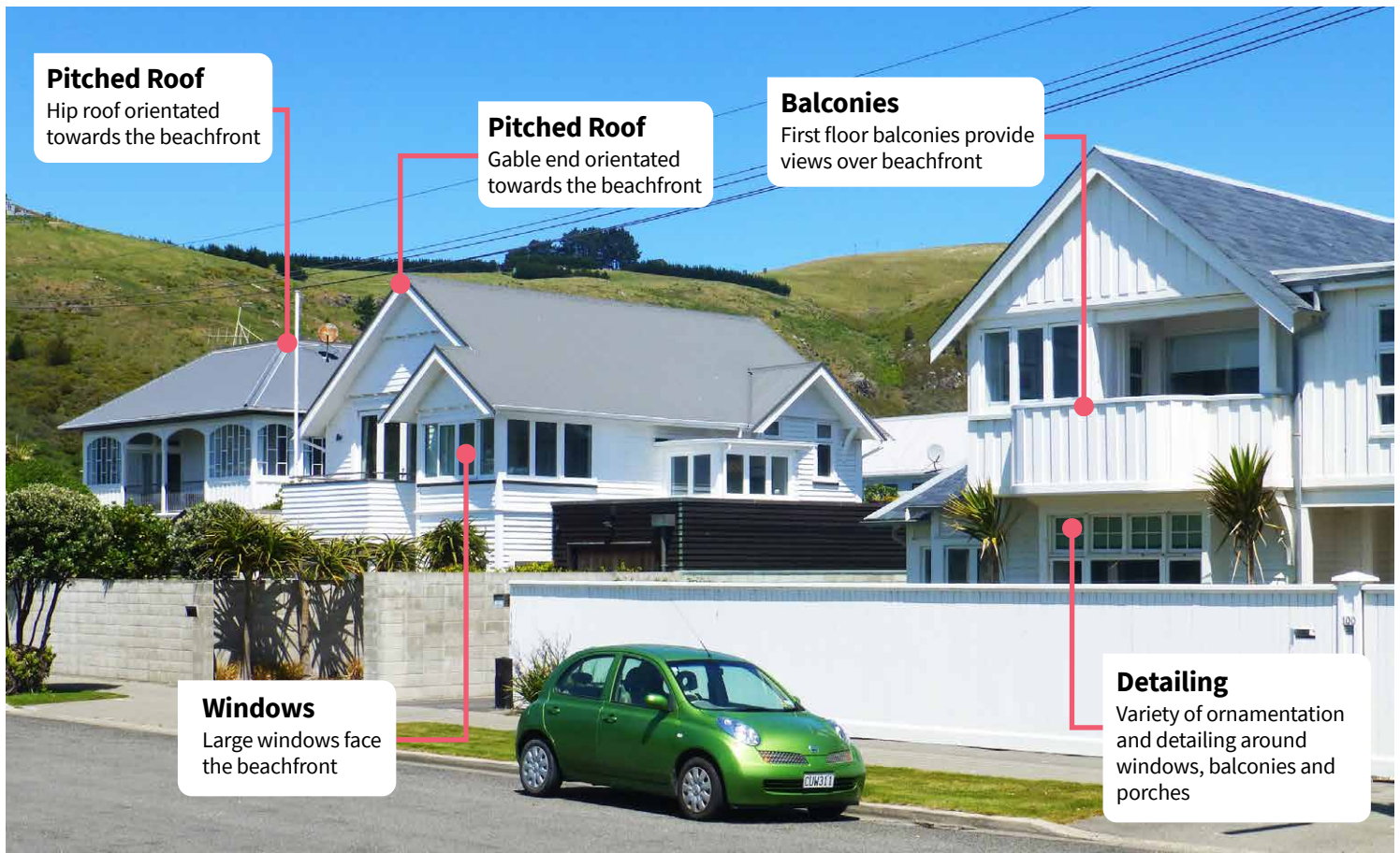
Design principles:

- Align new houses with existing adjacent houses along the Esplanade to support the existing built edge.

- Ensure setbacks are not compromised by additions to existing houses.

- Ensure views to and from houses are established and maintained.

- If fencing the front boundary, choose fencing materials that are complementary to the materials of the house.

- Provide balconies and large windows on the first floor of houses to allow good visual connection to the street and beachfront.

- Use planting to provide a green boundary edge, support the coastal aspect and provide interest with front gardens.

Access parking and garaging

Vehicle garaging and parking in Esplanade Character Area is generally located to the side or rear of houses. This avoids garaging and parking in front gardens which will significantly undermine the character of the area.

Design principles:

- Locate garages behind the front edge of the house to the side or rear of the house.

- Ensure front gardens do not include vehicle parking.

- Separate garages from the main house, especially if the garage will visually dominate the house when viewed from the street.

- Driveways should be discrete and not compromise outdoor living spaces.

- Coordinate garage and house design in terms of form, materials and colour.

- Provide separate pedestrian gates and entries within front fences.

Pitched Roof
Hip roof orientated towards the beachfront

Pitched Roof
Gable end orientated towards the beachfront

Balconies
First floor balconies provide views over beachfront

Windows
Large windows face the beachfront

Detailing
Variety of ornamentation and detailing around windows, balconies and porches

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 viewed from the street and by neighbours, and how successfully it fits with the character of the neighbourhood.

The majority of houses within Esplanade Character Area are two storey stand-alone buildings with pitched roofs and large building footprints.

Design principles:

• New houses should be two storey and consistent with the overall height of existing houses in the Character Area.

• When altering houses, extend towards the rear of the section and building to avoid intruding into the street setbacks.

• Ensure houses in the Character Area have pitched gable or hip roofs that face the beachfront and 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 along the Esplanade have a range of architectural detailing with a richness and texture consistent with the original 20th century architecture along the beachfront. Features include: iron or tile roofs, various weatherboard claddings, various styles of first floor balconies and large windows facing the beach, various styles of dormer windows, decorative detailing to entrances, windows, balconies and façades.

Design principles:

• Original houses should be maintained to retain the richness and texture of detailing including attention to window, entrance and façade design.

• Additions and alterations to existing houses should be compatible with the overall proportions and detailing of the original house.

• New houses should reflect existing houses in terms of the proportions and overall style of the windows, entrance spaces and doorways, façade and roof edge details and materials.

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