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How urban places take shape

HASS Geography – Environmental Change and Management Year 10 (Australian Curriculum v9)

This five-lesson unit develops students' understanding of the built environment and how human decisions shape place, population change and urban systems. Students explore how Australia's urban places are planned and designed, why land use, movement and public space matter, and how planning frameworks influence the sustainability and liveability of cities.

Through structured learning, collaborative design work and critical reflection, students apply spatial reasoning, systems thinking and critical analysis as they take on the role of urban designers and planners. They balance environmental, social and economic considerations, analyse trade-offs and impacts, and draw on place-based and policy evidence to inform their decisions.

The unit progresses from planning and designing an urban place (Lesson 1) to explaining and justifying that design (Lesson 2), followed by analysis of real-world systems and planning frameworks (Lessons 3 and 4), culminating in a planning proposal (Lesson 5).

Definitions

***Accessibility** refers to how easily people can reach places, services and opportunities, such as schools, shops, transport, parks and jobs. It considers distance, transport options, safety, cost and the needs of different users. High accessibility improves liveability by making it easier for people to move around and participate in daily life.*

***Built environment** refers to the human-made spaces and infrastructure that support urban life, including buildings, streets, utilities and public spaces. It reflects how societies plan, design and organise the places where people live, work and interact. It includes physical places such as homes, buildings, streets and open areas, as well as essential infrastructure.*

***Infrastructure** refers to the physical assets and networks that support how urban places function, including transport networks (walking, cycling, roads and public transport), utilities (water, electricity and sewerage), digital networks, waste systems and community facilities. Infrastructure provides the essential foundations that enable urban systems to operate.*

***Sustainable development** describes development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves balancing environmental, social and economic considerations to support long-term wellbeing and quality of life.*

***Urban systems** are the networks and services that support urban life, such as transport, housing, water, energy, food supply, waste and green spaces. These systems include infrastructure but also involve people, flows and decision-making, and they interact to shape how urban places function and change over time.*

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Context of unit	This unit focuses on how urban places develop in response to population change, movement and settlement patterns. Students explore urbanisation as a key influence on decision-making within the built environment and examine how planning and design choices shape the way urban places function and support quality of life. Through this lesson sequence, students will: • explain the causes and impacts of urbanisation and how population change influences the development of the built environment • develop and evaluate a response to an urban design and planning challenge by proposing and reflecting on decisions that support sustainable development, liveability and the functioning of urban systems.
Curriculum content and skills covered	This unit aligns with the following content descriptions from the Australian Curriculum ACARA V9 Geography Year 10. • **The human induced changes that challenge the sustainability of places and environments** (AC9HG10K01) • **The environmental world views of people and their implications for environmental management** (AC9HG10K02) • **Causes and effects of a change in an identified environment at a local, national or global scale, and strategies to manage sustainability** (AC9HG10K04) • **Developing geographical questions** Students apply geographical inquiry by developing questions, analysing spatial information, identifying patterns, drawing conclusions and proposing informed responses to urban challenges (AC9HG10S01, AC9HG10S02, AC9HG10S03, AC9HG10S04, AC9HG10S05)
Success criteria	Students demonstrate success when they can: • use spatial reasoning to logically place land uses and explain locations using place-based evidence (maps, local examples, or planning documents) • explain urban systems and interconnections, showing how transport, housing, services, utilities and green space influence each other and how planning frameworks shape these relationships • apply sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) and liveability principles to justify planning and design choices for present and future needs

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	• use geographical inquiry and language to communicate decisions clearly, drawing on evidence from real places and relevant policy and planning resources (e.g. Regional Plans) • reflect on design and policy choices, identifying trade-offs, impacts and areas for improvement, and linking outcomes to planning frameworks and community needs.
Unit overview	This unit is delivered across five lessons and aligns with the Geography topic *Environmental Change and Management*. Students examine how urban places develop in response to population change and planning decisions. Students explore how design, zoning, land use and urban systems shape liveability, sustainability and the functioning of cities. Through collaborative design, analysis of spatial information and reflection, students apply geographical reasoning to understand how planning frameworks influence real urban environments. The unit concludes with an assessment task in which students propose, justify and evaluate a response to a real urban challenge using evidence and sustainability principles.

Teacher preparation	Lesson 1 pre-work
	• students will work in groups of three to five
	• using the attached *Build a City Activity.pdf*, print one city grid, a corresponding set of land use tiles and a legend for each group
	• cut out the land use tiles and the legend prior to the lesson
	• Blu Tack or glue may be used to secure the tiles in place during the activity.
	Lesson 3 pre-work
	• Ensure student access to the following online resources:
	  ○ Greater Adelaide Regional Plan
	  ○ South Australian Regional Plans
	No preparation is required for Lessons 2, 4 and 5 beyond standard lesson planning.

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Lesson 1 outline	**How urban places take shape (group activity)** See detailed lesson plan and the *Build a City Activity* resource. Students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place as an interconnected system. The focus of this lesson is on applying and implementing planning decisions in response to general needs and constraints, such as accommodating a growing population and ensuring access to transport, services and green space. Students will: • develop and justify a planning response for a new urban area using land use zoning, transport planning, services and spatial reasoning • apply sustainable development considerations to address challenges such as movement, green space, urban heat and resource use • consider how urban systems interact and identify trade-offs, impacts and unintended consequences of their decisions. Explanation, justification and formal reflection on the proposal occur in Lesson 2 as part of an assessed reflection task. **Teacher note** Lessons 1 and 2 may be delivered as a double lesson to allow the activity and reflection to be carried out in one session. Alternatively, separating Lesson 1 and 2 allows for a brief reflection at the end of Lesson 1 – either completed in class or as short homework – to help students prepare for their presentations in Lesson 2. Prompts from the Lesson 1 detailed lesson plan can be used for this exercise. **Optional extension** This activity may be followed by a short sequence of lessons focusing on mapping knowledge and skills, such as BOLTSS, topographic maps and contour interpretation. This extension supports students to consider how landform and relief influence urban design and planning decisions.

Lesson 2 outline	**Reflection and assessment** In this lesson, all groups present their completed urban planning proposal and explain the planning and design decisions developed in Lesson 1. Students demonstrate their understanding of urbanisation, urban systems and sustainable development by justifying their choices, reflecting on trade-offs and considering the impacts of those choices on liveability and quality of life. The reflection prompts introduced in Lesson 1 form the basis for student presentations, peer feedback and reflection. Students will: • explain how their design responds to human needs, the physical landscape and key urban systems • justify planning decisions and respond to feedback using geographical concepts and language • evaluate trade-offs, impacts and areas for improvement, particularly in relation to sustainable development and interconnected systems. Teachers may choose to have the Lesson 1 reflection / homework refined after Lesson 2 and submitted for assessment.
Lesson 3 outline	**Urban systems and decision-making in Australia** Students examine how Australian urban places are planned and managed by analysing urban systems and place-based examples of sustainable development. The lesson builds understanding of why urban planning emerged and how informed decisions shape the form and function of urban places and influence how they respond to growth and change. Students might, for example: • explore how key urban systems operate in Australian urban places, including transport, housing, water, energy, food supply, waste and the environment • understand the emergence of contemporary urban planning as a public health response to poor living conditions during the Industrial Revolution, including overcrowded housing, polluted water and lack of sanitation • consider Aboriginal approaches to caring for Country as an example of long-term, place-based land management • examine examples of planning and design responses that support sustainable development in Adelaide • analyse how urban systems interact to create opportunities, constraints and trade-offs • recognise how urban design and planning decisions influence the form and function of urban places.
Lesson 4 outline	**Analysing South Australia's urban planning system** Students deepen their understanding by exploring how South Australia's planning framework guides real-world urban

	development. Students will consider how planning policies, regional strategies and governance structures guide decisions around housing, transport, infrastructure, environment and liveability. Students will: • investigate how planning decisions are made, including roles and responsibilities within South Australia's planning system • analyse key state and regional planning documents (e.g. Greater Adelaide Regional Plan) and how they respond to growth, sustainability and liveability needs • examine how planning policies shape land use, housing, transport, infrastructure and environmental outcomes • evaluate strengths, challenges and opportunities for improving planning decisions in South Australia.
Lesson 5 outline	**Assessment: Urban solutions** In this final lesson, students bring together their learning from Lessons 1-4 to complete their major assessment task for the unit. Building on their understanding of urban systems, sustainable development, planning processes and frameworks, students propose and justify a planning response to a real urban challenge and communicate their decisions using geographical concepts and evidence. Students will: • identify a local or regional urban growth challenge, such as population change, land use pressures and sustainability challenges • develop a planning and design proposal that responds to this challenge, including land use, services, transport and infrastructure • apply sustainable development and liveability principles to consider environmental, social and economic impacts • justify planning choices, explaining trade-offs and intended outcomes • communicate their proposal clearly using geographical terminology, maps, data, visuals and spatial representations. **Assessment focus** Students demonstrate their ability to apply geographical inquiry, spatial reasoning and planning knowledge to develop and justify a real-world solution. This task provides summative evidence for the unit, assessing understanding of urban systems, environmental impacts, sustainable development and geographical communication.

Assessment	Assessment opportunities
	• **Observation:** Collaboration, engagement and use of geographical reasoning during design, analysis and planning tasks. • **Product:** Quality of city designs, planning proposals and solutions demonstrating understanding of urban systems, sustainability and policy influences. • **Communication:** Clarity, accuracy and use of geographical concepts in presentations, explanations and visual representations. • **Reflection:** Insights into trade-offs, impacts, decision-making processes and links to planning frameworks.

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Lesson 1 Total time 50 minutes	**Build a City** (group activity) Students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place and justify planning decisions using geographical reasoning and informed recommendations. **Purpose** To make visible the thinking and planning involved in urban design and planning, including decisions about land use and land zoning, transport routes, access to water and utilities, and environmental impacts. **Learning intention** Students will understand how urban places develop as interconnected systems and how urban designers and planners influence liveability, balance sustainable development considerations, and manage trade-offs that affect quality of life.
Introduction 10 minutes	Suggested teacher script *Urban places are interconnected systems made up of transport, utilities, housing, employment, industry, education, recreation and green spaces. Decisions in one part of the system can affect many others.* *Today you will be taking on the role of urban designers and planners.* *Urban designers and planners help decide how cities and towns grow. They make decisions about where homes, schools, parks and services are located, how people move around and how places change over time.* *Urban places are not random. They are shaped by human imagination, decision-making and labour over time. The choices urban designers and planners make influence liveability, balance environmental, social and economic needs and manage trade-offs that affect people's quality of life.*
Instructions	1. In groups of three to five, students use the city grid and land use tiles provided in the *Build a City Activity* resource to develop a planning response 2. Each grid has a corresponding set of land use tiles and legend. 3. Teachers may provide one grid per group or combine multiple grids for a larger shared design.
Activity 30 minutes	Students work collaboratively as urban designers and planners to design an urban place, applying their understanding of urban systems, population change and sustainable development. Teachers may support student thinking by circulating between groups to prompt discussion and displaying selected design and reflection prompts for students to refer to during the activity. **Design and reflection prompts**

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These prompts are intended to guide decision-making, support reasoning about how urban systems interact and align directly with the assessment requirements in Lesson 5.

Students should be encouraged to record or remember their responses, as these will support presentations, peer feedback and written reflection.

Responding to needs, place and systems

- *What human needs are your design responding to (e.g. housing, access to services, movement, recreation)?*
- *How does your design respond to the physical features or constraints of the map?*
- *How are key urban systems represented and supported, and how do different land uses interact (e.g. transport, housing, industry, green space)?*
- *What problem or challenge is your design responding to (e.g. congestion, access to services, heat, growth)?*

Justifying decisions

- *Why have you located different land uses where you have?*
- *How do transport and movement decisions influence land use, or vice versa?*
- *How accessible and connected is your design for different users?*
- *Are your decisions practical and realistic for the size and needs of the population?*

Evaluating trade-offs and impacts

- *What trade-offs or constraints did you have to manage?*
- *How do your decisions balance environmental, social and economic considerations?*
- *What impacts might your design have on liveability, urban heat, emissions or water use?*
- *What challenges might emerge over time as the place grows or changes?*

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Reflection and sharing 10 minutes	Pair each group with another group in the room. In Round A, one group takes on the role of presenters and briefly shares their design, explaining: • the key features of their urban place • the rationale behind major design and planning decisions • any trade-offs or constraints they managed. The paired group acts as the audience. They are expected to: • listen carefully • ask thoughtful questions about the design and decisions • identify strengths or potential areas for improvement. After 3–5 minutes, the teacher signals for groups to swap roles. **Purpose** This structured peer exchange ensures all students actively explain, question and reflect on design and planning decisions before the formal presentation in Lesson 2 and assessment in Lesson 5.
Assessment task	Teachers may choose to assign a short, written reflection as homework at the end of Lesson 1 to support preparation for presentations in Lesson 2. Prompts from the Lesson 1 detailed lesson plan can be used for this exercise.

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Lesson 2 Total time 50 minutes	**Reflection and assessment - Build a City** (group activity) Students work collaboratively in their groups to present their urban planning proposal to the rest of the class and justify the planning and design decisions developed in Lesson 1. **Purpose** This structured peer exchange ensures all students actively explain, question and reflect on design and planning decisions. **Learning intention** Students will understand how urban places develop as interconnected systems and how urban designers and planners influence liveability, balance sustainable development considerations, and manage trade-offs that affect quality of life. Students will: • use geographical concepts and language to justify design and planning decisions and respond to feedback • explain how their design responds to human needs, the physical landscape and key urban systems • evaluate trade-offs and impacts of their decisions, particularly in relation to sustainable development, liveability and interconnected urban systems • identify areas for improvement based on reflection and peer feedback.
	Teacher note (optional delivery model) Teachers may structure presentations as a trade expo-style activity to provide an authentic audience and increase engagement. At the beginning of the lesson, each group sets up their work at a table or designated space around the room. Presenters explain their design and respond to questions. As groups present their designs, student peers are encouraged to ask questions and provide constructive feedback demonstrating their own understanding.
Optional extension / homework	The teacher may choose to use the written reflection from the end of Lesson 1 as an assessable task, to be finalised and submitted after Lesson 2.

Assessment rubric

Criteria	A Excellent achievement	B Good achievement	C Satisfactory achievement	D Partial achievement	E Minimal achievement
Understanding of Urban Systems and Interconnections (AC9HG10K01)	Shows a comprehensive understanding of cities as interconnected systems. Clearly explains how land use, transport, services, accessibility and utilities relate, using precise geographical terminology.	Shows a strong understanding of key urban systems. Explains clear links between major elements using appropriate terminology.	Identifies main city elements and gives basic explanations of how some parts connect. Uses some geographical terminology.	Identifies limited elements of the city. Explanations of connections are unclear or inconsistent. Limited terminology.	Shows little or no understanding of how urban systems function or connect.
Environmental Impacts and Processes (AC9HG10K02)	Clearly explains how planning decisions influence environmental outcomes. Identifies multiple relevant environmental challenges and justifies effective strategies to address them.	Explains key environmental impacts of planning decisions and identifies appropriate challenges. Provides sensible, mostly justified strategies.	Identifies at least one environmental impact and a basic strategy to manage it.	Mentions environmental issues but links to planning decisions are weak. Limited or unclear strategies.	Shows little awareness of environmental impacts or strategies to address them.
Planning for Sustainability and Liveability (AC9HG10K03)	Justifies planning decisions that clearly enhance sustainability and liveability. Explains trade-offs and considers long-term population and environmental needs.	Includes strong sustainability and liveability features and explains most decisions. Identifies relevant trade-offs or future considerations.	Includes some sustainable or liveable features and provides basic reasons. Briefly mentions trade-offs or future needs.	Includes few sustainability or liveability features. Justifications are limited.	Shows minimal consideration of sustainability or liveability.
Geographical Inquiry and Reasoning (AC9HG10S01–AC9HG10S05)	Uses inquiry skills effectively to analyse the design. Draws well-reasoned conclusions and recommendations using clear spatial evidence.	Applies inquiry skills to analyse main features and draws logical conclusions with some supporting evidence.	Describes features of the design and offers simple conclusions with limited evidence.	Provides limited analysis. Conclusions are unclear or unsupported; recommendations are minimal or vague.	Shows little or no inquiry or reasoning.
Communication and Use of Geographical Terminology (AC9HG10S05)	Communicates ideas clearly, logically and confidently in oral or written form. Uses accurate and appropriate geographical terminology consistently.	Communicates ideas clearly and uses relevant terminology correctly in most cases.	Communicates main ideas understandably and uses some terminology, though inconsistently.	Communication lacks clarity at times and uses limited terminology.	Communication is unclear or incomplete, with little or no geographical terminology used.

Teacher Notes (Optional – for moderation or reporting)

- This task provides opportunities for formative assessment (observation, questioning, peer discussion) and summative assessment (final design, justification, reflection).
- The rubric supports individual accountability through reflection even within a collaborative task.

Optional (Formative) Criterion – Collaboration and Participation *(Use if you wish to assess group process separately rather than for reporting)*

A Leads and supports group decision-making; ensures all voices contribute
B Participates consistently and supports others
C Participates with prompting
D Participation is inconsistent
E Rarely participates or disrupts group work

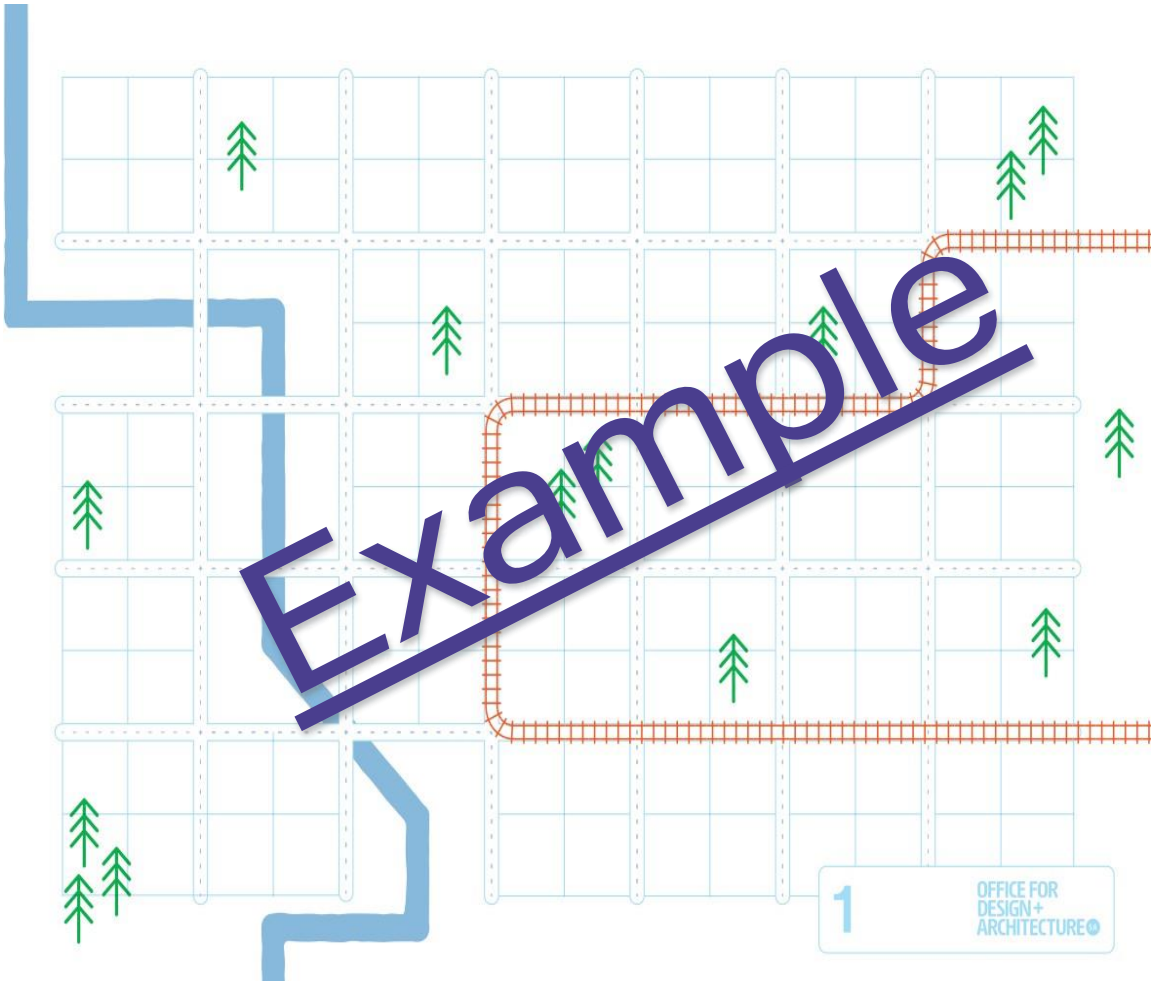
Student-friendly rubric

What is being assessed	A Excellent achievement	B Good achievement	C Satisfactory achievement	D Partial achievement	E Minimal achievement
Understanding how cities work	I clearly explain how my proposal works as a system. I show strong links between land use, transport, services and access, using correct geographical terms. I explain why areas are placed where they are.	I explain how key parts of my proposal connect (e.g. housing, transport, services) and use most geographical terms correctly.	I identify the main parts of my proposal and show some basic connections. I use some geographical terms.	I identify a few features of my proposal, but connections are unclear or not well explained.	I show very limited understanding of how cities work or how parts connect.
Environmental impacts (Human impacts and sustainability)	I clearly explain how my planning choices affect the environment. I identify several environmental challenges and explain how my design helps reduce impacts.	I explain environmental impacts of my proposal and include strategies to reduce problems.	I identify at least one environmental impact and include a simple strategy to manage it.	I mention environmental issues but don't clearly link them to my design.	I show little awareness of environmental impacts or ways to reduce them.
Sustainability & liveability (Planning for the future)	My proposal is clearly designed to be sustainable and liveable. I explain trade-offs (e.g. green space vs housing) and think about future population and environmental needs.	My proposal includes strong sustainability and liveability features, with reasons for most decisions.	My proposal includes some sustainable or liveable features with basic reasons.	My proposal includes few sustainability or liveability features and limited explanation.	My proposal shows little consideration of sustainability or liveability.
Geographical thinking and decision-making (Inquiry and reasoning skills)	I ask thoughtful questions, analyse my plan using evidence, and make clear conclusions and recommendations. I explain outcomes and consequences.	I analyse my design and draw logical conclusions with some evidence.	I describe my proposal and make simple conclusions with limited evidence.	My analysis is limited and conclusions are unclear or not supported.	I show little or no analysis or reasoning.
Communication and use of geographical language	I clearly explain my ideas in speaking and/or writing. I use accurate geographical terms confidently and correctly.	I explain my ideas clearly and use most geographical terms correctly.	I communicate my ideas clearly but use geographical terms inconsistently.	My explanations are sometimes unclear and use limited geographical terms.	My explanations are unclear or incomplete, with little or no geographical language.

To achieve an A, I need to clearly explain my planning decisions using accurate geographical terms, show strong understanding of how urban systems connect, justify environmental and sustainability choices, use evidence to support my ideas, and communicate confidently.

Appendix A- Build a City

City grid plan example (there are 6 different plans available)



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Land use tiles and legend (cut out each tile separately, cut train station tile into 4)

Examples of completed activity