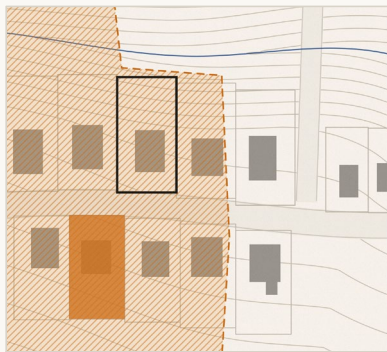


Every box ticked, except one

Three real clients had checked the location, schools, condition and price. What none had fully looked into was the property's future development options.



North West Sydney

EXPECTED

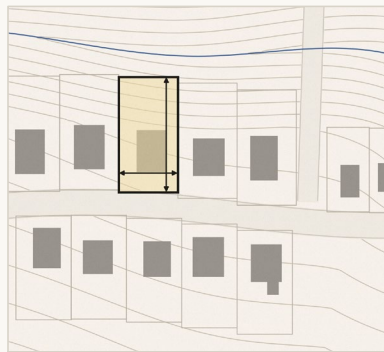
'Knock down and build a dream home'

FOUND

Heritage conservation area: demolition won't be approved.

OUTCOME

Retain, renovate and extend.



Upper North Shore

EXPECTED

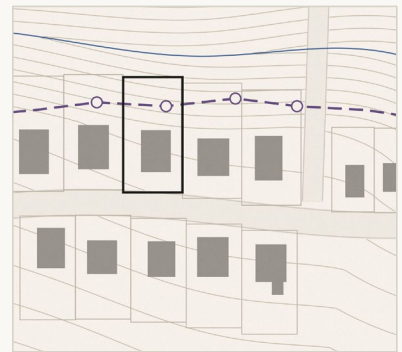
'A duplex may be possible'

FOUND

Frontage 20.7 m, 25 m required; no side-by-side in the HCA.

OUTCOME

The duplex option doesn't work here.



South West Sydney

EXPECTED

'Big backyard, add a granny flat'

FOUND

A sewer main runs diagonally across the backyard.

OUTCOME

About 45 m² is usable, not the 60 m² expected.

All of it was already in the planning certificate, title, survey and council maps.

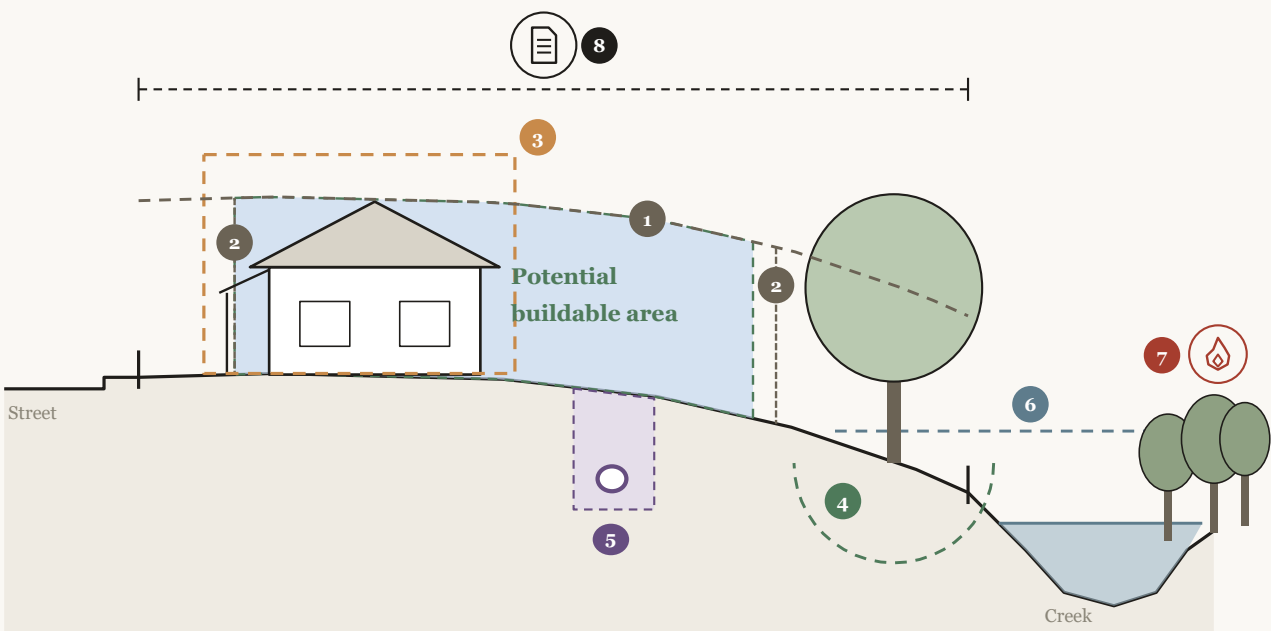
You may not spot these at an inspection, but many can be checked before you make an offer.

WWAA NOTE

When you buy a house, you're also buying its future possibilities. Even if you have no immediate plans to build, it helps to understand what the site may allow.

What you see — and what you don't

At an inspection you see the street, garden, house and character. What you can build, and how much, is shaped by lines you can't see, recorded in documents and maps.



- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Height limit | from existing ground | 5 | Sewer / easement | no building over or near |
| 2 | Setbacks | distance to boundaries | 6 | Flood planning level | FPL; minimum floor level |
| 3 | Heritage area | house and streetscape | 7 | Bushfire (BAL) | stricter rules near bush |
| 4 | Tree protection zone | limits works near roots | 8 | Covenant on title | rules on materials or use |

Illustration © WWAA

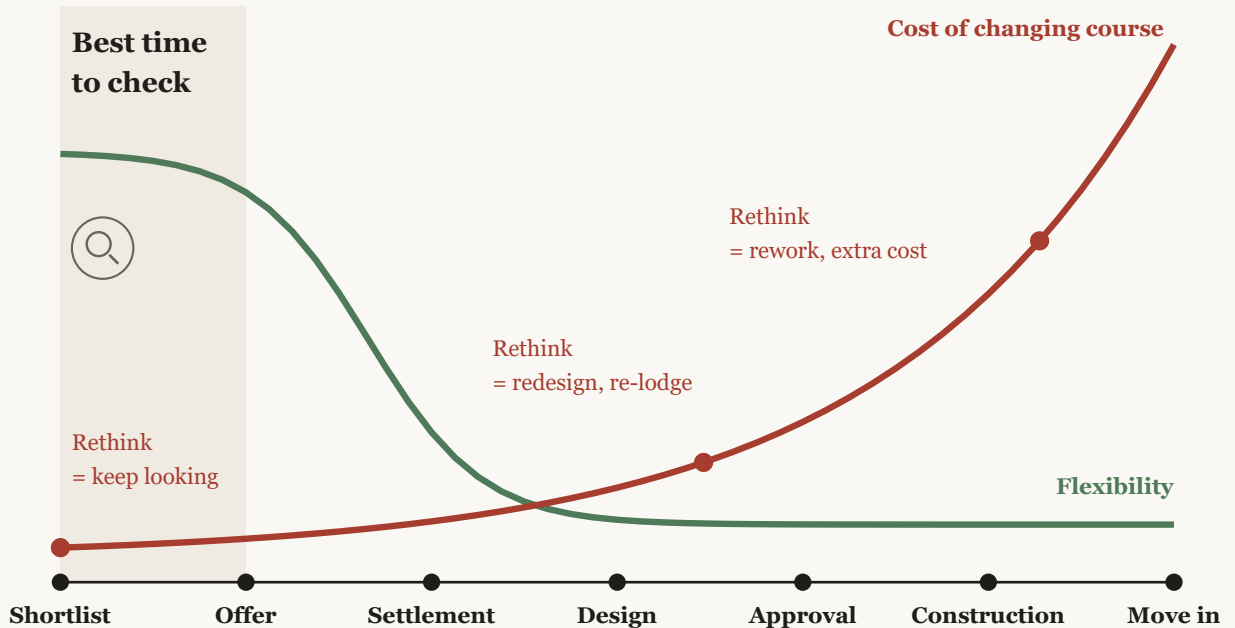
You buy the whole block, but the area available for change may be much smaller than it appears.

WWAA NOTE

Most limits can be screened before you buy: LEP and DCP controls, heritage and flood maps, sewer diagram and title. Unresolved matters then go to the relevant specialist.

Much is decided the day you buy

Before you buy, it's relatively easy to change your plans — or choose another property. Once you've purchased, changes during design, approval or construction can cost significantly more time and money.



Adapted from the principle of the MacLeamy Curve: the earlier a problem is found, the cheaper it is to change course.



WHY IT PAYS

A small early investment can head off avoidable risks and reveal genuine potential.

Before you buy: adjust your plans or your offer.

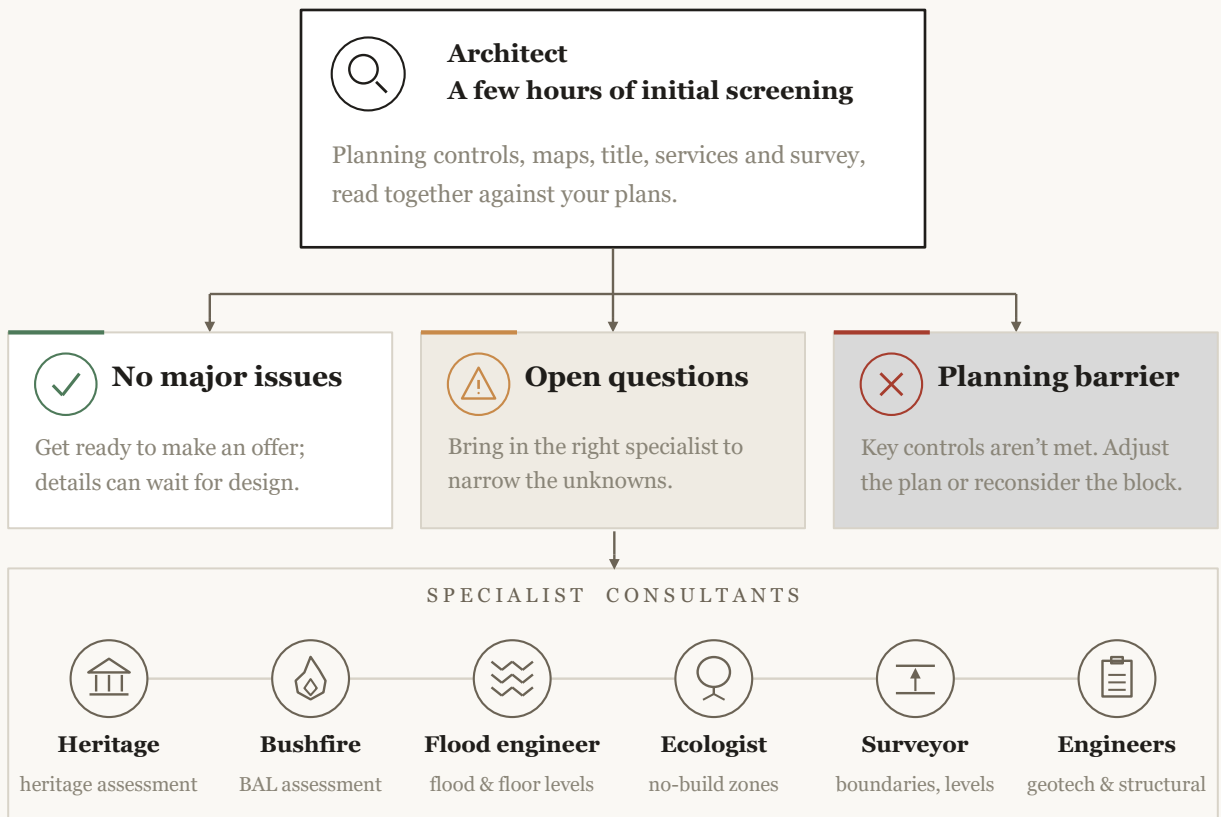
After you buy: redesign, more reports or costly works.

WWAA NOTE

Design can still refine the layout and style after you buy. But the site conditions and controls that govern floor area, approvals and footings are already fixed.

See a GP first. The same goes for land

You wouldn't book an MRI before seeing your GP. Similarly, an architect can review the key site documents before you decide which specialists, if any, need to be involved.



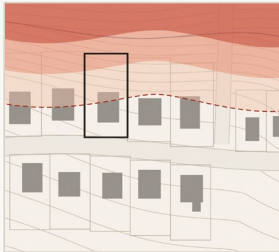
Big picture first, then decide on specialists.

WWAA NOTE

Screening sets the order: which consultants are needed, and when. A bushfire, flood or heritage notation doesn't mean every specialist has to be engaged at once.

Step 1: scan for the key hidden risks

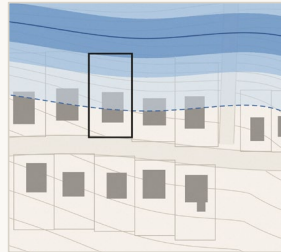
Check which constraints apply, how significant they may be, and whether more information or specialist advice is needed. Not every block is affected by all eight.



Bushfire

Bushfire Attack Level (BAL)

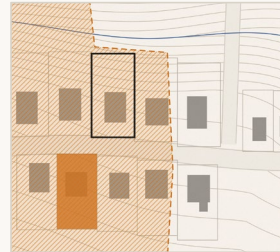
BAL may affect external materials, detailing and cost.



Flood

flood levels

Sets minimum floor levels and limits lower-level uses.



Heritage

conservation areas, items

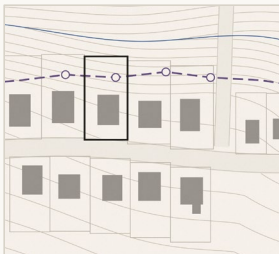
Whether you can demolish, extend or add a storey.



Trees · Ecology

trees and habitat

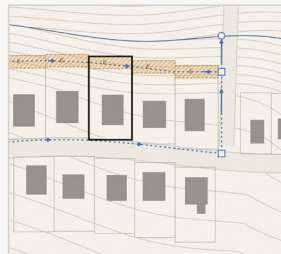
Arborist: tree protection.
Ecologist: habitat zones.



Sewer

pipes and mains

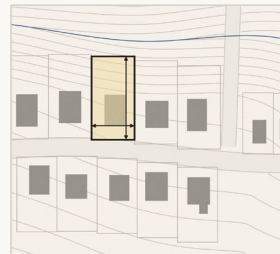
Rules for building over or near sewer infrastructure.



Stormwater · Easement

drainage and rights

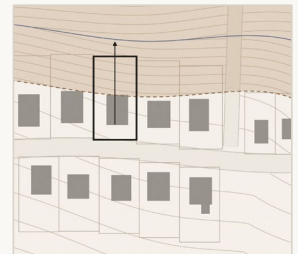
Drainage paths and any rights others hold over the land.



Frontage · Shape

lot dimensions

Minimum sizes for a duplex or subdivision.



Slope · Geotech

fall and ground

Footings, retaining walls and cost depend on the ground.

Illustration © WWAA

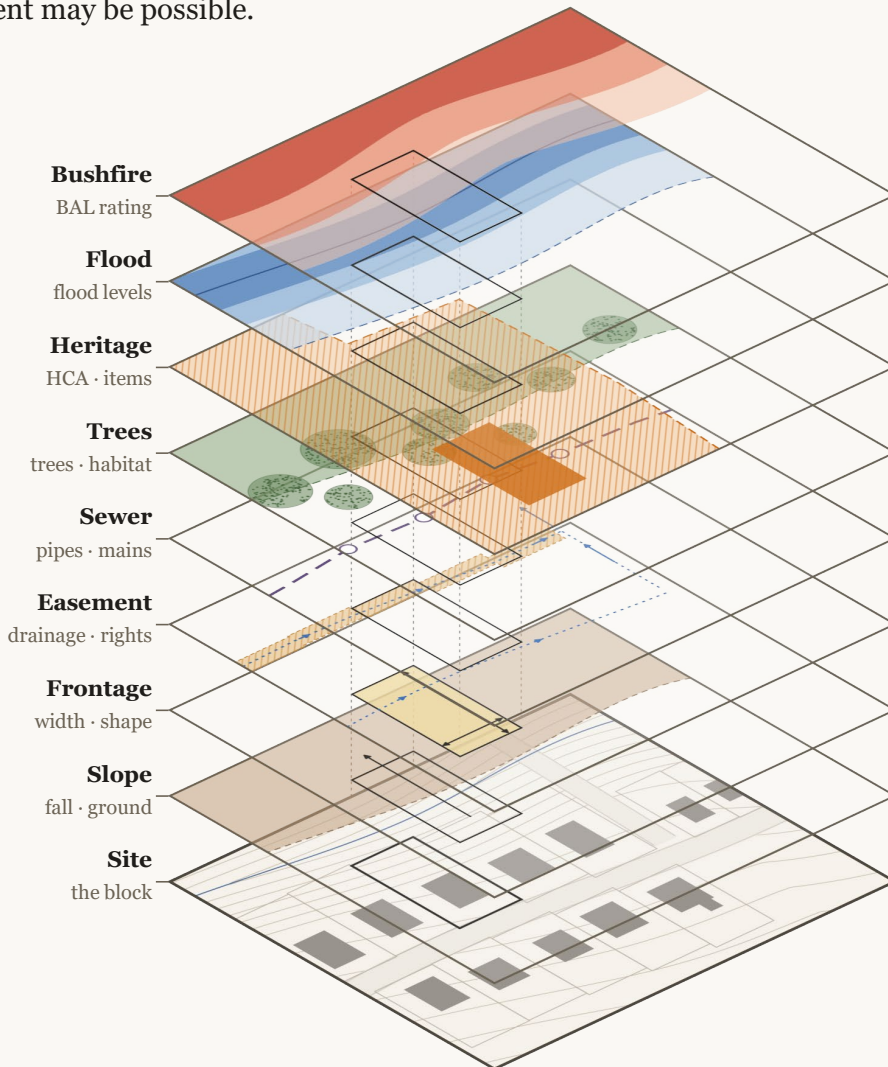
The problem isn't necessarily the constraint — it's discovering it after you've bought.

WWAA NOTE

A constraint doesn't necessarily rule a block out. What matters is whether it gets in the way of your plans, and only the layers together show the full picture.

Step 1: scan for the key hidden risks

No single map tells the whole story. Overlaying the layers helps reveal where development may be possible.



Eight layers, one block · Illustration © WWAA

WWAA NOTE

Mapping each constraint and overlaying the layers draws on landscape architect Ian McHarg's method in *Design with Nature* (1969).

Step 2: lay every option on the table

A feasibility study doesn't just screen risks. The same property may offer several development possibilities; the key is identifying which are worth pursuing.

SIX POSSIBLE PATHS · INITIAL ASSESSMENT

	Keep & improve	No new approval expected; relatively simple	Priority review first
	Minor extension	Likely to need a DA, depending on scope	Verify further checks needed
	Duplex	Worth exploring; layout not yet settled	
	Subdivide	Set aside until the key evidence is available	Unlikely set aside for now
	Rebuild	Not viable on current evidence	
	Townhouses	Not supported under local or state pathways	Very unlikely not supported by controls

Findings from a WWAA report on a creekside house in Parramatta. Another property would rank these differently.

For every pathway, the report identifies the opportunity, risk, missing evidence and next action.

Do your plans fit the real options?

Does the price include potential that isn't there?

WWAA NOTE

List every possibility without bias, identify the real options, then decide whether they're worth more time and money to investigate.

Step 3: run the numbers on the options

For this sloping, bushfire-prone property in a heritage conservation area, we compared estimated cost, end value and indicative ROI for five options.



THE SITE



Heritage conservation area

Demolition is uncertain; alterations are easier to approve



Bushfire-prone land

A duplex may not be permitted on bushfire-prone land



Sloping site

Structure and earthworks cost more than on flat land

OPTION	COST (WORKS + FEES)	END VALUE	ROI RANGE	VERDICT
A Alter + extend	\$0.50–0.95M	\$3.05–3.45M	–3% to +8%	Easier approval; low cost
B Rebuild	\$2.30–2.85M	\$4.40–5.20M	–11% to +6%	Low ROI; heritage risk
C Duplex	\$2.10–2.50M	\$5.20–5.80M	+5% to +21%	Bushfire rules may bar it
D Subdivide	\$0.28–0.45M	\$4.05–4.45M	+35% to +50%	Low planning feasibility
E Granny flat	\$0.22–0.32M	+\$0.25–0.35M	≈ 0–3%	Low ROI; an add-on

ROI (return on investment): early estimate for this case, from the report's land, construction, fee and sale-price assumptions.

Source: Development Economics — Comparison, WWAA report · indicative early-stage ranges, not a valuation

C and D look strongest on paper.

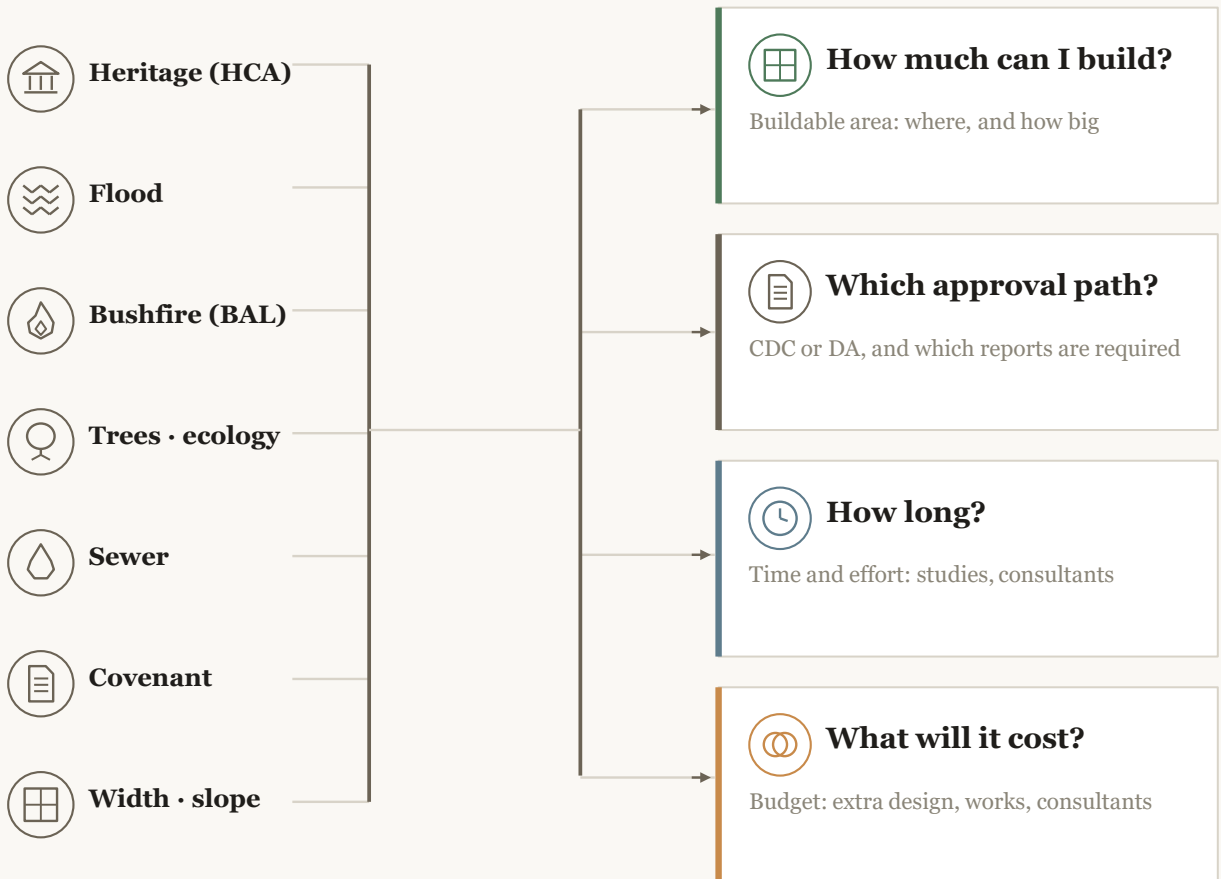
Check the BAL and planning feasibility before relying on the ROI.

WWAA NOTE

Early estimates show which option deserves more work. Investment decisions need cost advice from a quantity surveyor (QS) and builder, plus a valuer's input.

Every constraint, four questions

Most site constraints come back to four practical questions: how much can I build, which approval path applies, how long might it take, and what could it cost?



Weigh all four together to judge whether the site suits you.

WWAA NOTE

The same constraint can affect buyers differently, depending on whether they plan to live in, renovate or develop the property. Know your goal and budget first.

Case 1: faster isn't always better

Some buyers avoid properties that need a DA; others opt for a CDC too quickly. On this Inner West site of about 1,034 m², an early check of the controls showed about 117 m² more potential GFA under a DA.

Development Controls	CDC	DA
Max building height	8.5m	8.5m
Max GFA	400m ² (Area including garage = 400 + 18 = 418m ²)	1034.3x 0.5 = 517.15m ² (Area including garage = 517.15 + 36 = 553.15m ²)

Extract from the report table · maximum gross floor area (GFA), CDC vs DA

Living 36	Main 16	Bed 14	Study 12	Bath · hall 39
CDC 400 m ²				

DA 517 m²

**The additional 117 m²:
more living and bedroom space**

CDC	vs	DA
About 2–6 weeks	vs	About 4–6 months
Prescribed standards	vs	Merit-based assessment
Certifier or council	vs	Council

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

The DA option offered about 117 m² more potential GFA, but a slower and costlier approval.

THE CHOICE

**Speed: CDC at 400 m². Space: DA at 517 m².
Weigh the trade-offs, then decide.**

Don't rule out a promising block just because it needs a DA



Bushfire · but BAL-19 or lower

Confirm the construction and cost impacts.



Flood · only at the edge

A civil review may confirm the main house is unaffected.



Heritage area · not contributory

Demolition may still be possible; check the rating.



Biodiversity · small no-build zone

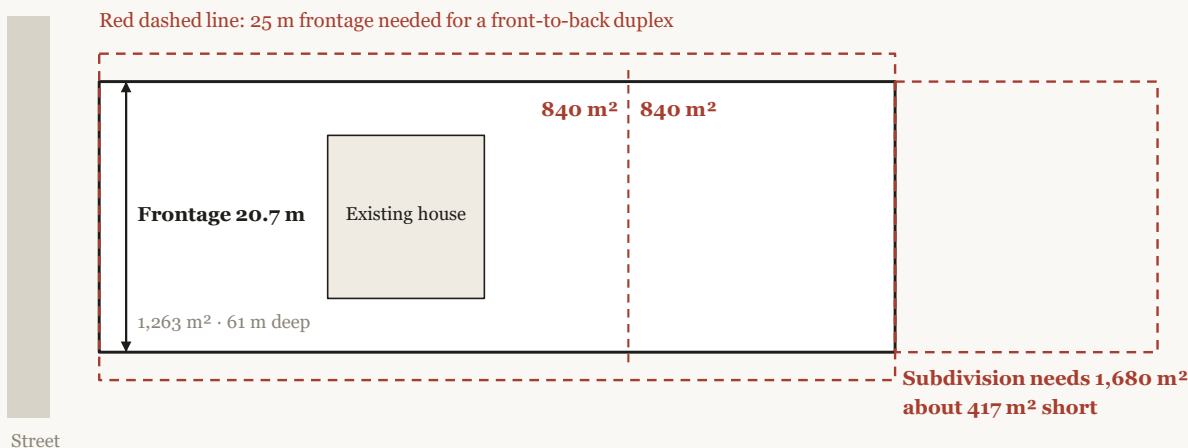
An ecologist should confirm the no-build boundary.

WWAA NOTE

Complying development (CDC) is usually quicker and cheaper upfront. A development application (DA) takes longer but may allow more floor area or design flexibility.

Case 2: big isn't always usable

At 1,263 m² and 61 m deep, this Upper North Shore block looked ripe for subdivision or a duplex. Checked against the controls, neither option measured up.



THRESHOLD	REQUIRED	THIS SITE	RESULT
Subdivide · two lots	≥ 840 m ² each	1,263 m ²	✗ about 417 m ² short
Duplex · site area	≥ 1,015 m ²	1,263 m ²	✓ Passes
Duplex · front-to-back width	≥ 25 m	20.7 m	✗ about 4.3 m short
Duplex · side-by-side	Not permitted in HCA	Inside the HCA	✗ Not permitted

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

Duplex: frontage 4.3 m short; side-by-side not permitted. Subdivision: 417 m² short.

→

THE CHOICE

Value it as a house to keep and extend, not for potential the controls rule out.

Check every threshold. Don't pay for potential that isn't there.

WWAA NOTE

Duplex and subdivision thresholds vary from council to council across NSW, and controls change over time. Check each property against its current controls.

Case 3: can it be knocked down?

This single-storey house isn't a heritage item, but it sits in a heritage conservation area (HCA). Whether it's classified as a contributory building strongly affects how demolition, additions and street-facing changes are assessed:



— HCA boundary Heritage item Other lots

Ku-ring-gai Council HCA public map · 2020

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

Contributory status shapes what can be demolished or added; a DA is usually needed.

THE CHOICE

Retaining and extending is the realistic path. If you must rebuild, look elsewhere.



01 Can it be demolished?

Whether a knock-down rebuild is possible.

02 Can you add a storey?

Height and position of additions.

03 Can the façade change?

Roof and street-facing elements.

WWAA NOTE

An HCA can rule out the complying development pathway for some works. It doesn't rule out good contemporary design that respects the character of the street.

Case 4: does flood risk rule it out?

A flood notation doesn't automatically rule out a property. Check the applicable flood levels, the area affected and the impact on where you'd build.

AEP · annual exceedance probability

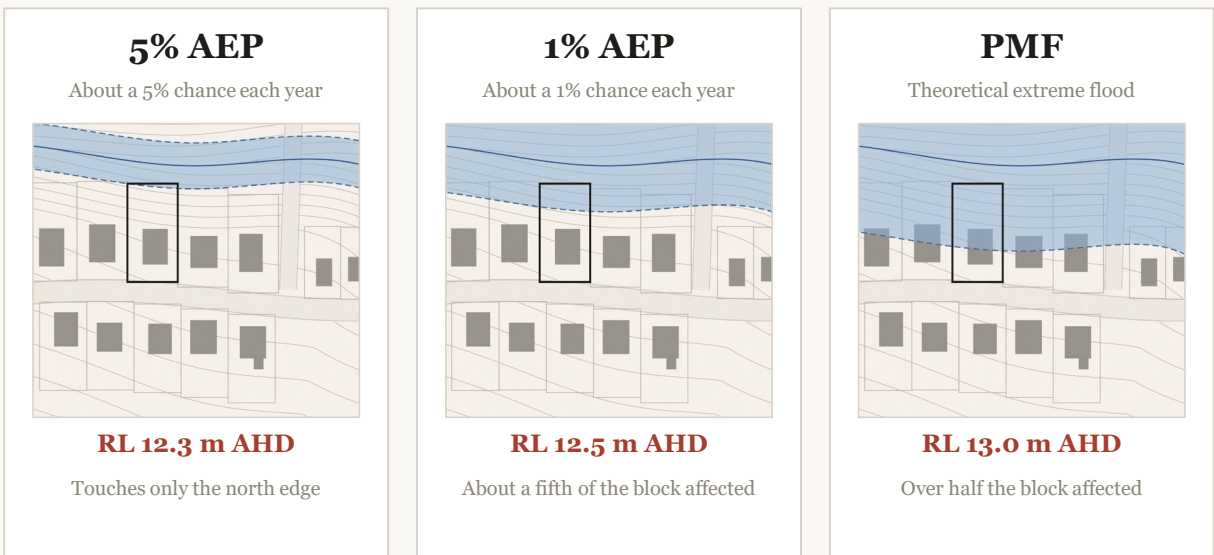
The chance each year of a flood this size or larger, not 'once in so many years'.

PMF · probable maximum flood

The largest flood that could conceivably occur at that location, used to assess safety in an extreme event.

More frequent · smaller extent

Extreme event · larger extent



Levels and extents for all three events are from the site's Council Flood Enquiry (July 2024)

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

The 1% AEP flood (RL 12.5 m) covers about a fifth of the block; the PMF, over half. RL is a level (elevation), not a depth.

THE CHOICE

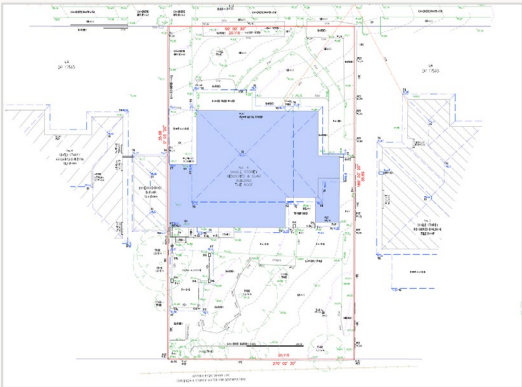
Build on higher ground and confirm the FPL. Lower areas may suit parking or storage. Allow for flood-related costs.

WWAA NOTE

Flood risk rarely rules a property out on its own, but flood-related constraints can reduce the buildable area, limit design options and increase construction costs.

Case 5: a check can find opportunities

On this Ryde property, six of the seven screening checks passed. The one that didn't (standard subdivision lot size) doesn't by itself rule out a CDC duplex.



THE SITE



About 720 m² · about 20 m frontage

Passes the duplex area and width thresholds



A 1945 covenant

Requires masonry walls and a tiled roof



Six of seven screening checks passed

Only the standard subdivision lot size failed

TEST	THIS SITE	REQUIRED	MARGIN	RESULT
SITE AREA	720.8 m ²	580 m ²		PASSES
FRONTAGE	20.115 m	15 m		PASSES
CDC PARENT LOT	720.8 m ²	580 m ²		PASSES
CDC LOT WIDTH	20.115 m	15 m		PASSES
EACH LOT ON SUBDIVISION	360.4 m ²	290 m ²		PASSES
EACH LOT FRONTAGE	10.06 m	7.5 m		PASSES
PLAIN SUBDIVISION, PER LOT	360.4 m ²	580 m ²		FAILS SHORT BY 219.6 m ²

DUPLEX → PASS

Duplex threshold check for a house in Ryde

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

Six of seven checks passed. Failing standard subdivision doesn't rule out a CDC duplex.

THE CHOICE

A CDC duplex may be feasible. Confirm the remaining constraints before relying on it.

WWAA NOTE

The study isn't a valuation, but it provides evidence to help you assess whether the asking price reflects the property's development potential.

Before you offer, ask five questions

Any unanswered question points to what needs checking next.

01 What's my plan for this property?

PURPOSE · P. 11

Live in it as is, renovate or develop? Each goal has its own critical limits.

02 What do the documents say?

DOCUMENTS · P. 6

Planning certificate, title, covenants and sewer diagram: check these first.

03 Does my plan meet the key controls?

THRESHOLDS · P. 13

Site area, frontage, height, floor space ratio (FSR): check each one.

04 Which approval path, and how long?

PATHWAY · P. 12

CDC or DA? Which consultants and reports? Weigh time against floor area.

05 Am I paying for unproven potential?

PRICE · P. 16

Subdivision, duplex or extension: confirm what's possible before you offer.

**Confirm the key issues. Check the unknowns.
Then decide whether to make an offer.**

WWAA NOTE

These five questions help you find the unknowns and manage the risk. That's also what a feasibility study is for.



Your dream home starts with land that suits your plans.

Understanding Before Design.
Architecture for Life and Time.

William Wang Architect & Associates

Nominated Architect William Yen-Wen Wang · NSW 9897
Master of Environmental Design in Architecture, University of Cambridge
BArch (Hons 1) UNSW · PMP · LEED Green Associate
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WWAA