DUPLEX GUIDE

SNL BUILDING

Plan Your Duplex With Confidence



BEFORE YOU BUILD A DUPLEX

Own a block of land? Sitting on a house with room to spare? Or thinking about your next investment? A duplex can turn one property into two homes, and what you do with them is up to you. Live in one and rent out the other, keep both as investments, bring family closer without giving up your own space, or sell one to free up equity.

This guide covers the key considerations for duplex projects across Newcastle, the Hunter, Central Coast and Port Stephens, including planning approvals, budgeting and assessing potential rental returns against project costs. It provides a practical starting point to explore your options with SNL Building.

THINK BIGGER. BUILD SMARTER.



IS A DUPLEX RIGHT FOR YOU?

A duplex (also called a dual occupancy) is two homes on one block, either attached or detached.

Your starting point might be to:

- Build two homes to hold as rentals
- Live in one and rent the other
- Sell one or both, where separate titles are achievable
- Create independent homes for family members
- Downsize on land you already own

Decide what you want to do with the completed homes early. Renting both, selling separately and living in one can call for different layouts, ownership arrangements and funding plans.

If separate sale is part of your plan, check subdivision eligibility before committing to a design or buying a site. **Approval for two homes does not automatically give you approval for two titles.**





COULD YOUR BLOCK SUPPORT TWO HOMES?

NSW planning rules allow dual occupancies in a variety of zones across much of the state, subject to approval and site-specific requirements.

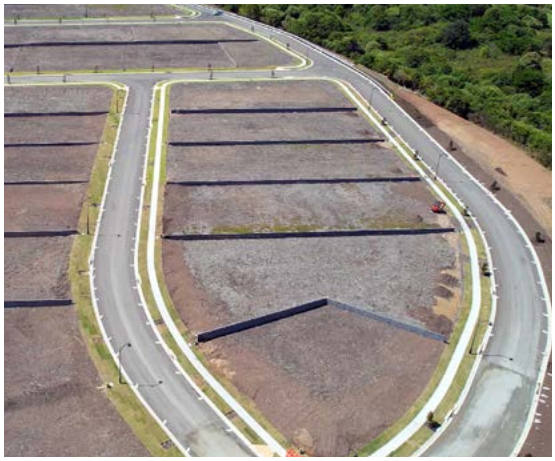
Depending on your site and design, approval may be possible through a development application (DA) or the faster complying development certificate (CDC) pathway. A CDC is only available where the proposal meets all applicable eligibility criteria and development standards. The requirements for your block depend on its location, site conditions and approval pathway.

WHAT WE CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
ZONING	Your block usually needs to be zoned R2, R3 or similar residential zoning. You can check your property's zoning and initial planning controls online HERE using the NSW Planning Portal Spatial Viewer.
LOT SIZE	Minimums vary by council and pathway. For a CDC, the block must be at least 400m^2, or your council's minimum if that is larger. In the City of Newcastle, the minimum is generally 400m^2. Near selected town centres and train stations (Low and Mid-Rise Housing areas, such as around Hamilton, Kotara, Mayfield and Wallsend), council cannot refuse a DA on lot size if the block is at least 450m^2.
FRONTAGE	For a CDC, at least 15 m at the building line, or 12m if parking is accessed from a secondary road, parallel road or lane. For a DA, it depends on your council and location. In Low and Mid-Rise Housing areas, 12m is enough.
SITE CONDITIONS	Slope, soil, flood, bushfire and mine subsidence all affect design and approvals (see the next section).
SERVICES	Water, sewer and power capacity for two homes. Water and sewer are supplied by Hunter Water across most of the lower Hunter, or by council in areas such as Singleton and Muswellbrook. Power is supplied by Ausgrid.

RESTRICTIONS	INFORMATION
EASEMENTS, COVENANTS AND ESTATE DESIGN REQUIREMENTS	May limit building, access or subdivision.
SLOPE, SOIL & RETAINING	Affect the design, footing system, stormwater design, earthworks and construction budget.
FLOOD, BUSHFIRE, HERITAGE AND MINE SUBSIDENCE	Can affect what you're allowed to build, the approval process, required reports, construction requirements and overall costs.
SUBDIVISION	If you intend to sell the two homes separately, confirm whether subdivision is permitted and whether separate titles can be created through Torrens title or strata title subdivision.
VEGETATION	Trees on your site or adjoining land will need to be assessed and may impact development outcomes.

A Section 10.7 planning certificate, current title documents, a survey and relevant mapping help inform these checks. Further advice or investigation may be needed.

Before buying land: Have the proposed duplex and subdivision pathway checked, rather than relying on an advertisement describing a block as "duplex suitable".





VACANT LAND OR EXISTING HOME?

Vacant land:
Check registration status, services, site conditions, covenants and planning requirements before assuming the block is ready to build on.

An existing house:
Demolition may form part of the project, with costs for disconnection, waste removal and any asbestos work. Retaining the house and adding another dwelling may be possible on some sites, but it needs its own design and planning assessment.

An established property bought for redevelopment should be budgeted at its full purchase price, not at a regional vacant-land median.



LOCAL CHECKS IN NEWCASTLE AND THE HUNTER

Some checks are specific to our region. SNL looks at each of these early, so there are no surprises later.

MINE SUBSIDENCE

Declared Mine Subsidence Districts cover parts of the region. If your property falls within one of these areas, additional approvals and construction requirements may apply before building or subdividing. These requirements help reduce the risk of mine subsidence damage and maintain eligibility for compensation. CLICK HERE to check whether your property is within a declared Mine Subsidence District.

FLOOD AND STORMWATER

Parts of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the wider Hunter region are flood affected. Flood risk and stormwater requirements can influence building design, approvals and costs. Your site may require a DA rather than a CDC, raised floor levels or drainage works. In some cases, stormwater easements through neighbouring properties may also be needed, requiring landowner consent and additional costs.



BUSHFIRE

Blocks near bushland may be bushfire prone. Your site's bushfire attack level (BAL) affects building materials and construction requirements, with BAL-40 and Flame Zone sites ineligible for a CDC, council's local planning controls determine whether a duplex is permitted. Development must also meet NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Planning for Bush Fire Protection requirements, which can be found online HERE.

HERITAGE

If your block is in a heritage conservation area or contains a heritage item, you will need a DA, and the design must meet any heritage specifric controls. Some heritage restrictions could prevent development or subdivision.



HOW APPROVALS WORK

There are two main approval pathways in NSW. The right pathway depends on your block and your design.

	COMPLYING DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE (CDC)	DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION (DA)
WHO APPROVES	A registered certifier (private or council)	Your local council, or the NSW Land and Environment Court if an appeal is required
HOW IT WORKS	The design must meet set state standards. If it complies, it is approved	Council assesses the design against local plans and can apply conditions
TYPICAL TIMING	Within 20 days if the design complies	Timing varies depending on the council, design and site conditions
BEST FOR	Straightforward blocks and designs	Flood, heritage or higher bushfire risk sites, and designs outside the standard rules

SNL will recommend the approval pathway that best suits your site and design preferences, as some design choices may not meet CDC requirements and could require a DA.



DESIGN FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WILL LIVE THERE

A strong investment brief considers tenant demand alongside construction cost.

Review:

- → Bedroom sizes, storage and a practical layout.
- → Privacy between entries, living areas and outdoor spaces.
- → Acoustic separation and comfortable indoor conditions.
- → Parking, access and manageable outdoor areas.
- → Durable finishes and straightforward maintenance.

If you intend to rent out your duplex, a larger floor area or higher-end finishes won't necessarily deliver enough additional rental income to justify the extra cost. Compare your design choices with local rental market data before investing in upgrades.

SNL BUILD PROCESS



01.

FEASIBILITY CHAT & SITE CHECK

We assess your block, discuss your goals and review local requirements to determine what's possible and guide your next steps.

02.

SURVEY & DESIGN

We design a project that suits your block and how you plan to use it, with layouts balancing space, comfort and functionality with cost.

03.

CONSULTANT/TECHNICAL REPORTS

Depending on your site and design, you may need reports from an arborist, civil engineer, landscape architect, flood engineer, BASIX assessor, surveyor, bushfire consultant or geotechnical engineer.

04.

APPROVALS

We can manage your CDC or DA approvals, including a CC (construction certificate) where required, to get your project construction-ready.

05.

CONTRACT AND FINANCE

A clear fixed-price building contract with Home Building Compensation Fund (HBCF) insurance, ready for your lender.

06.

CONSTRUCTION

Your SNL project manager coordinates the build, while your site supervisor oversees on-site construction, keeping you updated throughout.

07.

HANDOVER

Two finished homes, with support for strata or Torrens title subdivision if you plan to sell them separately by giving each its own title.



YOUR BUILD. YOUR FUTURE.

WHAT AFFECTS THE COST AND TIMELINE

Every duplex is priced to its site and design.

The main factors are:

- **Site conditions:**
  Slope, soil type, access, retaining walls, mine subsidence, flood or bushfire prone
- **Existing home:**
  If you're knocking down an existing home, demolition costs may increase if asbestos removal is required
- **Design and finishes:**
  Size, layout, attached or detached, and the level of finish
- **Approvals and fees:**
  Certifier or council fees, BASIX certificates (the NSW energy and water efficiency requirements) and any consultant reports
- **Services:**
  Water, sewer and power connections, telecommunications, gas
- **Subdivision:**
  Survey, legal and title costs, plus a water authority compliance certificate (a Section 50 certificate in Hunter Water areas), if you subdivide the land

YOUR OPTIONS AFTER THE BUILD

OPTION	WHO IT CAN SUIT
LIVE IN ONE, RENT THE OTHER	Owners who want to stay on their land and add rental income
LIVE IN ONE, SELL THE OTHER	Owners who want to release some value from their land
FAMILY IN ONE OR BOTH	Families who want to live close while keeping their own space
RENT OR SELL BOTH	Owners and investors building two new homes to hold or sell

You can live in or rent out both homes without subdividing. To sell them separately, or give each home its own title, you will need to subdivide by strata or Torrens title. In Low and Mid-Rise Housing areas, council cannot refuse a Torrens title subdivision on lot size if each lot is at least 225m^2 and 6m wide. Elsewhere, your council's minimum lot size applies.



UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS: TWO DUPLEX INVESTMENT EXAMPLES

A duplex can provide two rental incomes from one block. Whether those incomes cover your repayments depends on the total project cost, how much you borrow and the rent each home achieves.

The example below shows how these figures can work together. The example is an illustrative scenario, rather than a quote, verified market average or guaranteed rental returns.

PROJECT COSTS AND INCOME	EXAMPLE	YOUR PROJECT
LAND PURCHASE	$410,000	$
CONSTRUCTION OF BOTH HOMES	$900,000	$
OTHER PROJECT COSTS ALLOWANCE*	$200,000	$
TOTAL ESTIMATED PROJECT COST	**$1,510,000**	**$**
ASSUMED WEEKLY RENT PER HOME	$600	$
COMBINED WEEKLY RENT	**$1,200**	**$**
ANNUAL RENT, ASSUMING BOTH HOMES ARE RENTED ALL YEAR	$62,400	$

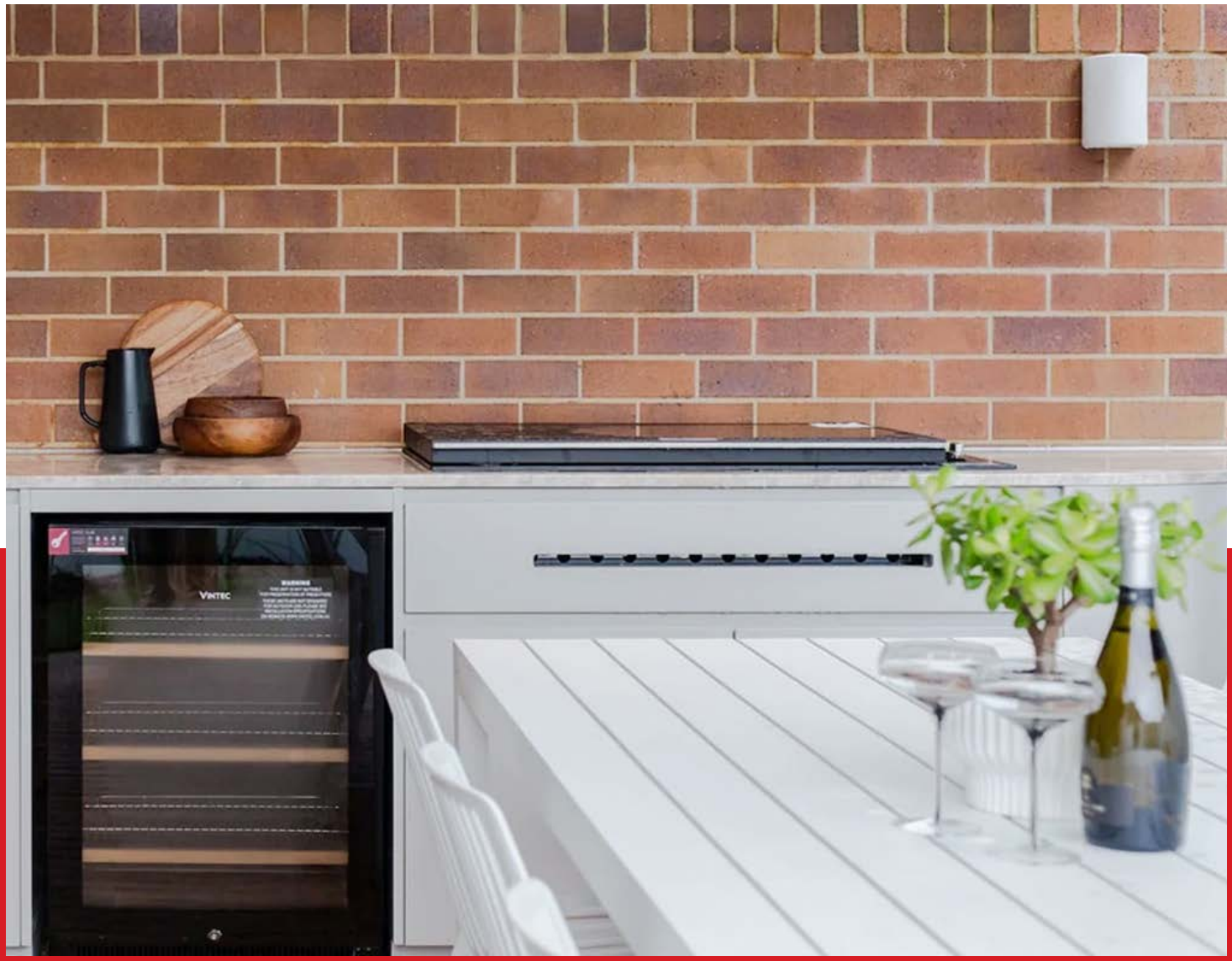
Other project costs may include purchase costs, stamp duty, design, approvals, consultants, site works, service connections, subdivision and contingency. The scope needs to be checked against the building quote to avoid counting costs twice. These allowances are assumed to cover the construction period's finance and holding costs; actual amounts will depend on the project and loan.

POTENTIAL TAX BENEFITS OF BUILDING NEW

Building a duplex may offer tax benefits alongside the opportunity to earn two rental incomes. If your rental income is less than your loan interest and other deductible property expenses, you may be able to use that loss to reduce the tax you pay. This is known as negative gearing.

From 1 July 2027, this benefit against wages will generally be limited to eligible new builds. This may be another consideration when comparing a new duplex with an established investment property.

Tax benefits can help reduce holding costs, but they don't cover the full loss. Independent financial advice can help you understand how the rules apply to your circumstances and investment plans.



DUPLEXES BUILT BY SNL

HOBART RD, NEW LAMBTON

Designed by Habitat Studio Architects, this two-storey duplex embraces coastal living, with each residence featuring open-plan living spaces, private courtyards, alfresco areas and a second-storey balcony. Cool white cladding, natural timber accents and blackbutt flooring create a modern coastal aesthetic, complemented by practical storage and spacious interiors.

Key elements of this home include:

- Urban Luxury: Architecturally designed with elegant finishes, these townhouses epitomise effortless designer style.
- Open Plan Living: Downstairs living flows to a north-facing covered alfresco deck, perfect for entertaining in any season.
- Chef's Kitchen: Stone-topped island bench with timber accents, butler's pantry, and premium Miele appliances, including an induction cooktop and dishwasher.















DUPLEXES BUILT BY SNL

DUNBAR ST, STOCKTON

This contemporary boutique duplex in Stockton combines modern luxury with thoughtful design, featuring premium finishes, designer kitchens, custom bathrooms and light-filled open-plan living spaces. Covered alfresco areas, dedicated study nooks and private outdoor spaces create a balance of architectural style, functionality and relaxed coastal living.

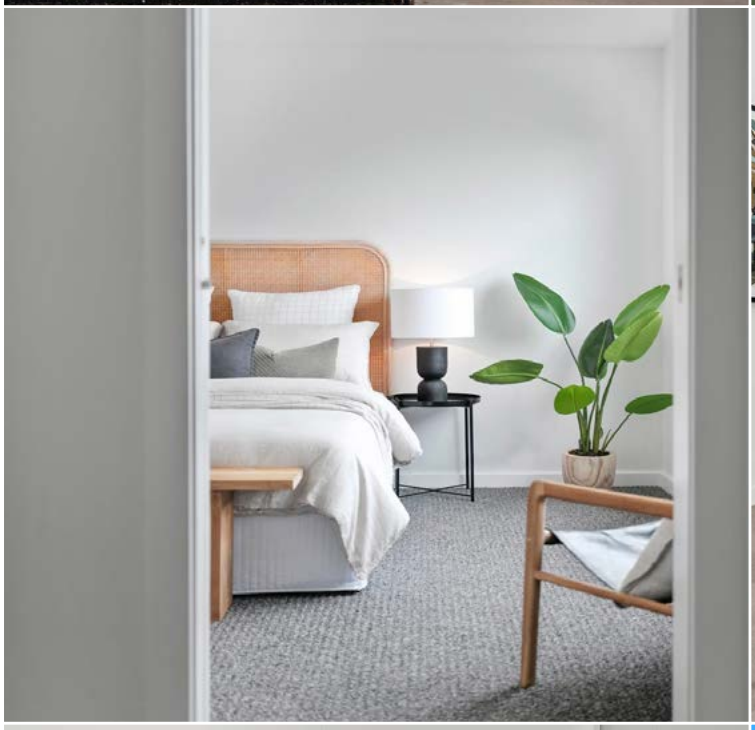
Key elements of this home include:

- Frosted entry door
- Extremely spacious master bedroom, with walk-in wardrobe and built-in storage
- Ensuite following walk-in robe, with double timber vanity and chevron feature wall
- 2 bathrooms (3 toilets in total)
- Torrens title
- Raked, high ceilings
- Built-in BBQ area in covered alfresco with sink, fridge and storage
- Single car garage, with additional covered carport















DUPLEXES BUILT BY SNL

KING ST, STOCKTON

Designed by CKDS Architecture, these two-storey homes combine contemporary style with functional family living. Featuring light-filled interiors, designer kitchens, premium finishes and spacious bedroom retreats, each residence offers open-plan living and seamless indoor-outdoor entertaining.

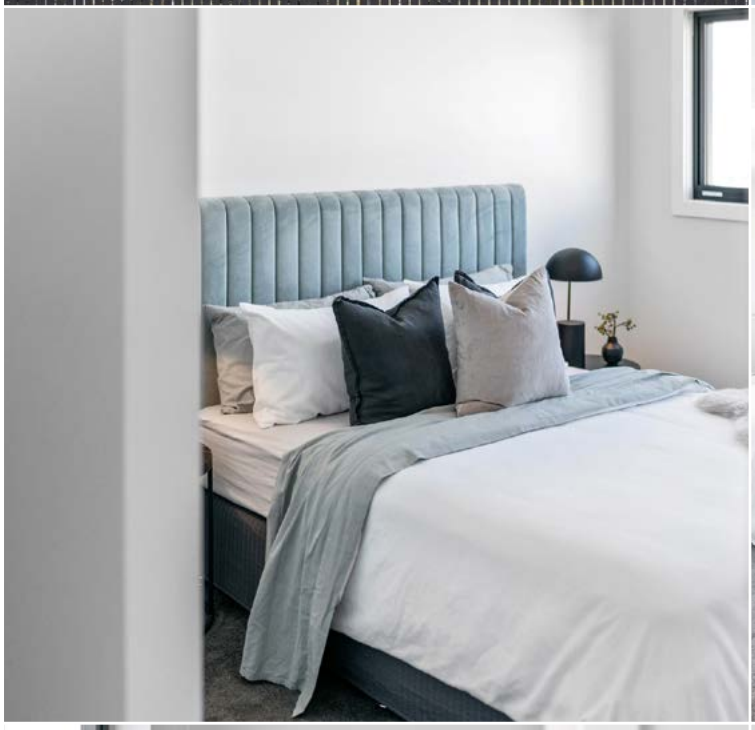
Key elements of this home include:

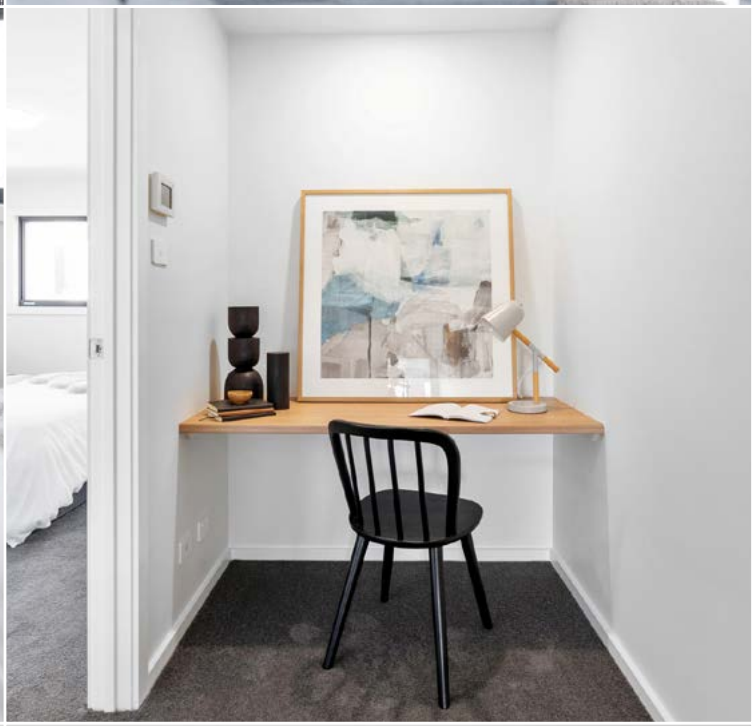
- Security system
- Caesarstone Deluxe range stone benchtops to kitchen and laundry
- Downlights throughout the ground floor
- 2700mm high ceilings to the ground floor
- Full height bathroom and Ensuite tiling
- Brushed brass tapware and accessories
- Study nook















FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Q. **CAN I FIND OUT WHETHER MY BLOCK IS SUITABLE BEFORE PAYING FOR A FULL DESIGN?**

A. An initial review can identify the main questions and potential constraints. A firm answer may require a survey, planning advice and specialist reports. Confirm the scope and cost of that assessment before proceeding. A free feasibility chat with SNL is the quickest way to find out.

Q. **DO I NEED A HOUSE ON THE BLOCK ALREADY?**

A. No. Vacant blocks and blocks with an existing home can both work. With an existing home, the build usually includes demolition, although sometimes the home can be kept and a second home added.

Q. **HOW LONG WILL THE PROJECT TAKE?**

A. Allow for investigation, design, approvals, finance and construction. Subdivision may add further work. Ask for a project-specific program rather than treating a fast approval timeframe as the total delivery time.



Q. **CAN I LIVE IN ONE HOME AND RENT THE OTHER?**

A. Yes, where both homes are approved for occupation. Discuss ownership, finance and the allocation of expenses with your advisers.

Q. **DO I HAVE TO SUBDIVIDE?**

A. No. You only need to subdivide if you want to sell the homes separately or give each its own title.

Q. **DO I NEED MINE SUBSIDENCE APPROVAL?**

A. Only if your block is in a declared Mine Subsidence District.

Q. **CAN I BUY LAND SPECIFICALLY FOR A DUPLEX?**

A. Yes, but check the proposed development and subdivision options before committing. Size alone is not enough; title restrictions, access, services and site constraints also matter.



YOUR VISION. OUR EXPERTISE.



NEXT STEP: FREE FEASIBILITY CHAT

Tell us about your block and what you'd like to achieve. We'll discuss its potential, the key planning and site considerations, and the next steps for exploring your options, with no obligation.

Important information: This guide is general information only, current as at November 2026. It is not financial, legal or planning advice. Planning rules, minimum lot sizes and approval requirements vary by council and site and can change. Always confirm requirements for your block with SNL Building, your council or a certifier, and speak to a qualified financial adviser or accountant before making investment decisions. Images are artist's impressions unless stated otherwise.

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SNL BUILDING



CUSTOM HOMES