SHENZHEN

Urban Design Strategy and Preservation of Historical Features

TEXT: SHAN LIANG, JING WANLI, LIU HAO AND ZHOU YING

Shenzhen is looking to rebrand itself, and there are calls to do so by revitalising the city with its natural surroundings, among other things.

SHENZHEN

Shenzhen's new urban design strategy places emphasis on integrating green and blue spaces with the urban landscape.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

25

▌▌
The "glocal" marries concepts of the "global", in terms of building a living and working environment with international standards, and the "local", which seeks to preserve local characteristics and vitality.
▌▌

26

The Chinese city of Shenzhen is on a mission to become a model city that demonstrates the qualities of a powerful and modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics.

The city has a vision of creating what has been called "Glocal Shenzhen: A Shenzhen homeland oriented towards the world". The "glocal" marries concepts of the "global", in terms of building a living and working environment with international standards, and the "local", which seeks to preserve local characteristics and vitality.

This overall urban design plan was in line with research for Land Spatial Planning of Shenzhen (2020–2030), which looks into space management and the construction of physical features and infrastructure. It aims to build a so-called Super Bay Area Metropolis that is:
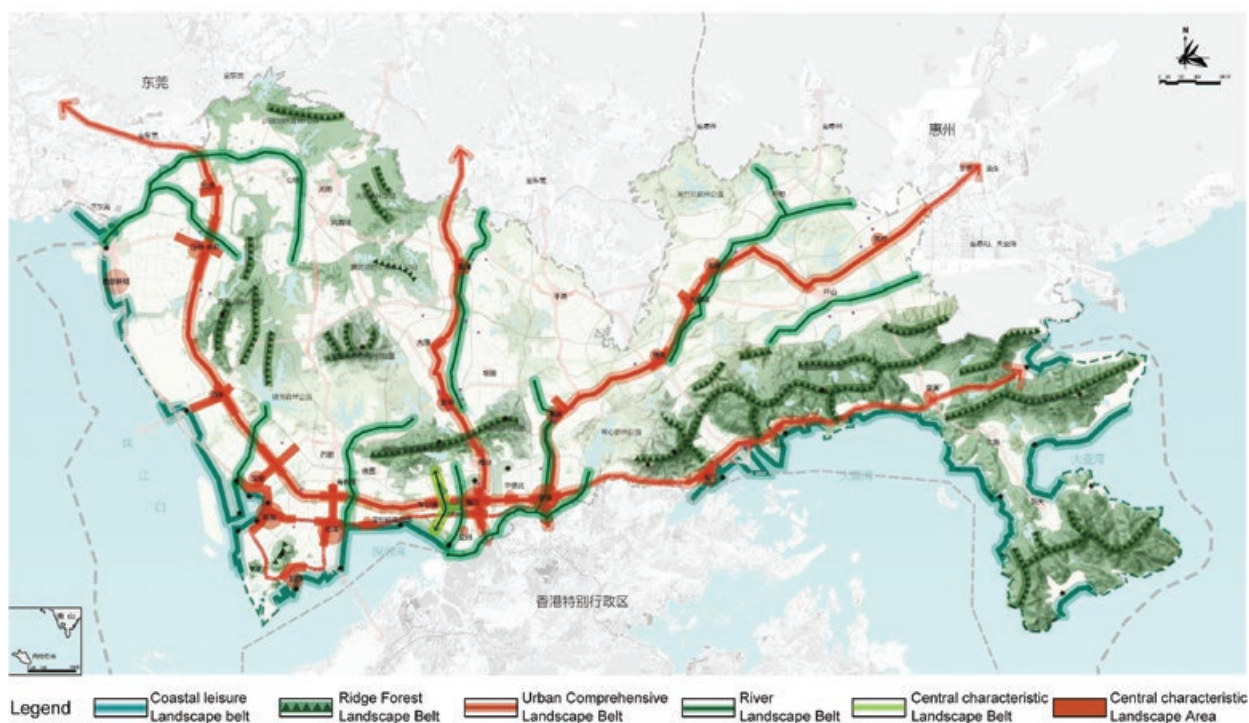
- Dynamic and compact

- A pioneering cultural city

- A world-class city that is more open and diverse

- A city that possesses vitality and attraction

The urban design research applied big data analysis to accurately understand the needs of citizens, and effectively collect their voices by processing and analysing such information. And it precisely and carefully sorted out the most pressing areas to be improved, such as landscape perception experience, public space, urban patterns and activities.
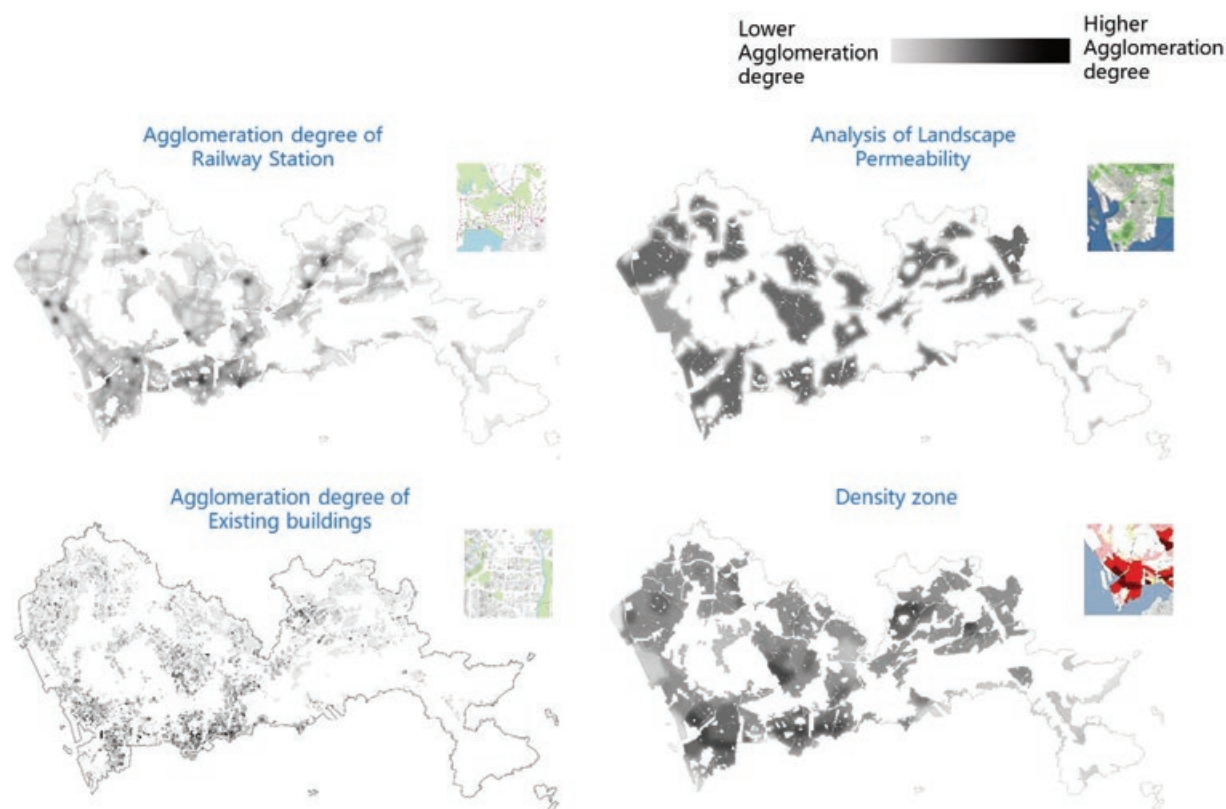
The research had proposed four core strategies:

1. **Integrate the urban landscape with the natural**

   Create interconnectedness between Shenzhen's natural surroundings such as nearby mountains and the sea with the city. The research suggested building an overall urban landscape pattern of "two wings, four ridges, four belts and 10 corridors":

Legend
| | Coastal leisure Landscape belt | | Ridge Forest Landscape Belt | | Urban Comprehensive Landscape Belt | | River Landscape Belt | | Central characteristic Landscape Belt | | Central characteristic Landscape Area |

Overall urban landscape pattern of "two wings, four ridges, four belts and 10 corridors".
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

Lower Agglomeration degree ▬▬▬ Higher Agglomeration degree

Agglomeration degree of Railway Station

Analysis of Landscape Permeability

Agglomeration degree of Existing buildings

Density zone

Big data analysis of multiple urban factors.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

- Two coastal leisure belts in the east and west of the city, and four groups of Ridge Forest Landscape belts. The idea was to create a semblance of proximity between the city and the hills and seas, further opening up possibilities for leisure, recreation and sports for citizens;

- Four urban comprehensive landscape belts and 10 river landscape corridors that bring nature into the city while retaining its character.
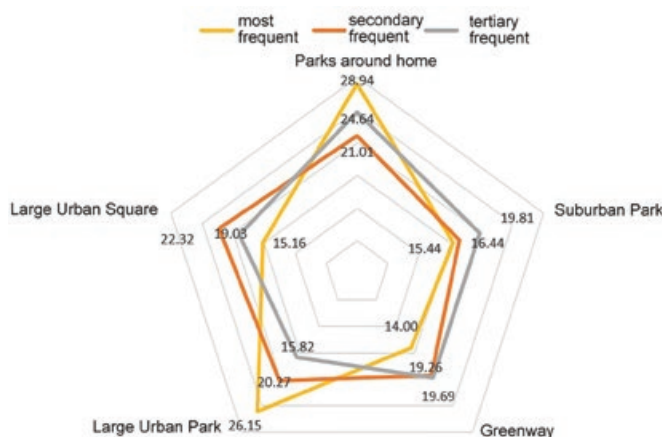
2. **Improve the quality of public spaces**

   Activate, connect and extend public spaces, while ensuring they are of high quality, dynamic, friendly, inclusive and highly accessible.

   For instance, the research proposed 46 urban green belts, equipped with sports, leisure and cultural facilities, renovating the roads with reconstructing potential and adding pockets of green spaces in the streets.

3. **Create urban grids with logical density and high-quality spatial development**

   Through big data analysis of multiple factors such as existing railway infrastructure, natural landscape and the built environment, the research advocated for compact and quality development. For instance, it called for the creation of an overall spatial order that uplifts and integrates key nodes in the bay area.
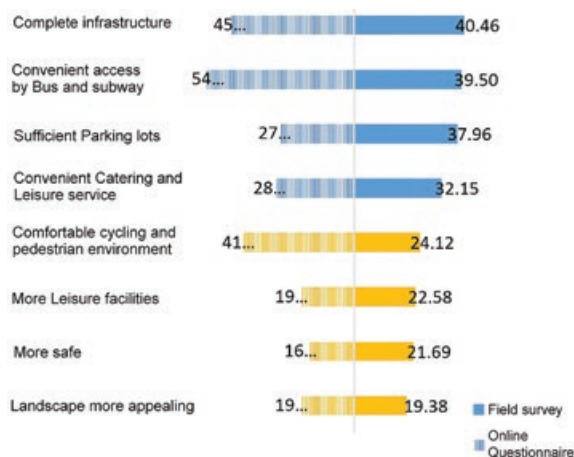
4. **Define five types of natural feature conservation areas**

   A feature conservation area is a space that reflects and records the history of a certain period in time, in terms of its architectural elements and distinctive cultural characteristics. These include urban villages that are steeped in the local character of Shenzhen, and old industrial districts. The plan was to earmark such areas while retaining the communal memory of the special zone development.

A Multi-faceted Shenzhen

There were four additional aspects to the project. First, it called for the urban design to take on a more organic character. This meant taking into account ecological protection areas, forest parks and other natural features such as mountains and rivers to build what has been described as a "multi-faceted Shenzhen" with a distinctive landscape.

Second, it sought to be oriented by the logic of governance. The project took the approach of viewing public space as the site of consensus-building for public values and how urban districts can be improved. It called for reassessing the value of such urban districts by looking into areas that are thought of as "negative space", while improving the quality of public spaces for people to socialise and interact.

Survey on leisure activities of citizens.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

Survey of demand on public space.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

Lianhuashan Park in Shenzhen.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

The project called for amplifying the history and culture of Shenzhen's pioneers to retain an urban memory of the city's specific characteristics.
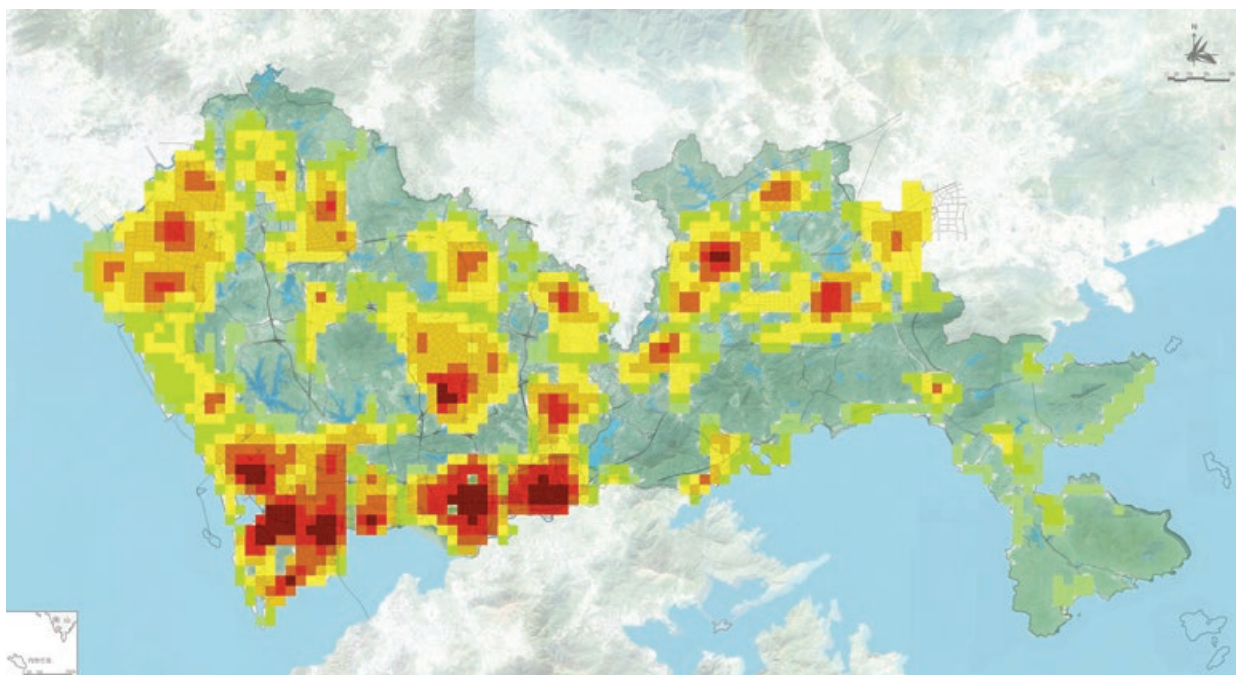
Third, there was a need to protect the urban characteristics of the city. Since 1978, China has embarked on a policy of economic reform that was centred on a socialist market economy and "socialism with Chinese characteristics". With this in mind, the project called for amplifying the history and culture of Shenzhen's pioneers to retain an urban memory of the city's specific characteristics.

Finally, the project proposed pioneering a detailed guide for the control of spaces with a major focus on "zoning by compact levels". This was carried out with consideration for the following: degree of function mixing, pedestrian network density, building height and coverage, and degree of diversity and differentiation of building volume, patterns and features. Among other things, the aim was to create a space where a high variety of functions and services exist, and where their accessibility by foot is prioritised.
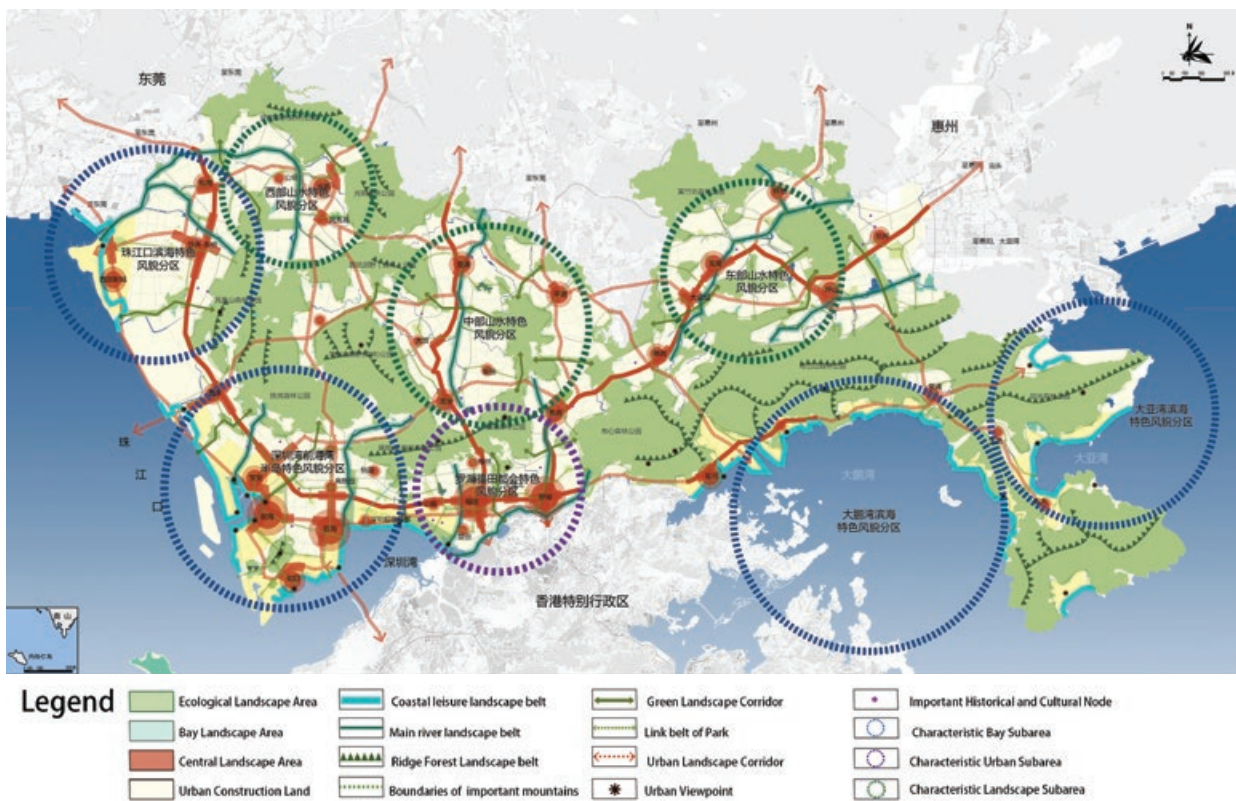
30

Retaining cultural personality is a key consideration in the rejuvenation of areas such as Nantou Ancient City.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

31

Zoning by compact levels.
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

Urban structure of "Four bays, three cities, and one Metropolis" .
Image: Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen

❚❚

It puts emphasis on creating a unique city experience based on local environmental contexts, with humanised public spaces, high-quality urban expansion, innovative vitality, and cultural personality.

❚❚

Implementation

The research vision and core strategy have been effectively incorporated into the next round of Land Spatial Planning, and going forward, it will be the guiding principle for urban design.

The core proposals have been transformed into action plans by the planning management department of Shenzhen to enhance top-level planning and to promote follow up implementations. This involves, among other things, two types of institutional innovation in regulations and design techniques. Another element of this action plan involves "connecting the hills and seas", which was prepared and written into the Government Work Report of Shenzhen in 2020. It effectively pushed ahead the rejuvenation of areas such as Nantou Ancient City

and Dapeng Suo City. It has become an important reference point to showcase the urban culture and old memories of Shenzhen.

"This round of overall urban design is different from the previous constructive blueprint. In an urban context where spatial patterns are relatively stable, this novel approach has a stronger focus on transitioning to the modern era and improving quality of life. It puts emphasis on creating a unique city experience based on local environmental contexts, with humanised public spaces, high-quality urban expansion, innovative vitality, and cultural personality" said Shan Liang, the Associate Dean and Chief Urban Designer at the Urban Planning and Design Institute of Shenzhen (UPDIS). 🔎

33