

Understanding CDC vs DA: What Type of Approval Will You Need to Build in NSW?

Trying to understand the difference between CDC and DA for building a home in NSW? Learn what these approvals mean, how they differ, and why your project's specifics will determine which one applies.

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Understanding the Two Main Approval Pathways

When building a new home in New South Wales, one of the first hurdles to navigate is planning approval. There are two main pathways for gaining this approval: a Complying Development Certificate (CDC) or a Development Application (DA).

It's not a case of choosing the one you prefer—it's about which one your specific property and design can qualify for. Each pathway has its own process, criteria, and timeline, and the right one depends entirely on your land, your design, and any planning rules that apply to your site.

This guide breaks down the basics of CDC and DA approvals, how they differ, and why working with professionals is key to getting it right.

What Is a Complying Development Certificate (CDC)?

A CDC is a fast-tracked planning and construction approval that combines both planning consent and building approval into one process. It's assessed by a private certifier or council and can be approved in as little as 20 working days—if your proposal meets all the required criteria.

CDC is only available to developments that fully comply with a range of state-wide planning controls set out in the [State Environmental Planning Policy \(Exempt and Complying Development Codes\) 2008](#).

This includes strict requirements around:

- Land zoning
- Building setbacks
- Site coverage
- Height limits
- Flood or bushfire overlays
- Heritage restrictions
- Access and services

If your land or design does not meet every single requirement, CDC is not an option and you'll need to proceed via a DA.

What Is a Development Application (DA)?

A DA is a formal request for development consent submitted to your local council. It is assessed under your council's Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP), and often involves more documentation, public notification, and a longer timeframe for approval.

DA is typically required when:

- The proposed development doesn't meet CDC criteria
- The site has constraints such as flood risk, bushfire risk, or heritage listings
- Variations are needed from planning controls
- Council input or neighbour consultation is necessary

The approval process can take anywhere from several weeks to several months depending on the complexity of the application and whether public submissions are received. In fact, approval timeframes can vary significantly, which is why early guidance is critical.

You can check your property's zoning and planning constraints by ordering a Section 10.7 Planning Certificate from your local council.

CDC vs DA: Key Differences

Feature	CDC	DA
Approval Authority	Private certifier or council	Local council
Speed	Around 20 working days (if compliant)	Several weeks to months
Criteria	Must meet all set codes (no variation)	More flexibility allowed on merit
Public Notification	Not required	Often required
Use Cases	Straightforward, fully compliant developments	Sites with overlays, constraints, or custom features

So, Which One Will You Need?

This isn't something you decide—your project's eligibility will determine the path.

If your home design and site fall entirely within the CDC rules, then a CDC might be possible. But if even one condition isn't met, you'll need to go through the DA process. This is why it's so important to get professional advice early on.



Why You Need the Right Experts on Your Side

Understanding whether your project qualifies for a CDC or requires a DA isn't always straightforward. In fact, trying to figure it out on your own can lead to delays, rework, or unexpected costs if you go down the wrong path.

That's why it's essential to work with a builder or designer who:

- Understands the planning rules and zoning requirements
- Can assess your block and design for CDC eligibility
- Has access to certifiers and planners who can provide accurate guidance
- Will support you through the correct process—whether it's CDC or DA



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A good builder will have this knowledge in-house or access to trusted consultants. If your situation is complex, they can also connect you with subject matter experts like town planners, bushfire consultants, or certifiers to help smooth the process.

For a deeper comparison of the two, [DMR Designs offers a helpful overview](#).

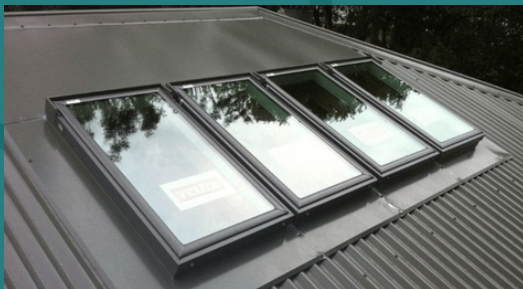
Final Thought

Whether you end up going down the CDC or DA path is not a matter of personal choice—it's a matter of compliance. Each project is unique, and so are the planning rules that apply to it.

Take the time to understand what your site allows, lean on the experience of professionals, and make sure you have the right people in your corner from the start.

Getting the approval right is the first big step toward building your future home—with confidence and without surprises.

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