

Appendix 1: Our story and suburbs



City of
Whittlesea

Whittlesea
2040

A place for all

Our story

Our distinctive landscape

The City of Whittlesea owes its distinctive landscape to a location spanning the boundary of two major geological regions of Victoria.

The south and west of the municipality is underlain by the eastern extent of the vast volcanic plain where the most recent eruption of Mount Fraser 800,00 years ago cloaked the country in lava flows.

The north and east are defined by the geologically older, lower relief of the eastern uplands. The steep slopes of the Great Dividing Range are situated in our north, and the isolated horseshoe-shaped elevations of Granite Hills and Quarry Hills located in the centre of the City.

Traversing through the municipality from north-south are key waterways including the Plenty River which has cut a gorge through the lava fill from the Mt Fraser eruption, and the Merri, Darebin and Edgars creeks which are all fed by a number of smaller creeks, streams and tributaries.

Aboriginal cultural landscape

Aboriginal people have occupied Victoria from about 35,000 years ago. The Wurundjeri Willum clan of Kulin Nations people are Traditional Owners of 99.83% of the area now known as City of Whittlesea. Small areas of our northeast, where isolated slopes of the Great Dividing Range face the Murray River drainage, are lands of the Taungurung people.

Thousands of archaeological sites are registered for the Whittlesea local government area including subsurface remains, stone and glass artefact scatters, hearths, ancestral burials and Aboriginal scarred trees

Aboriginal connections to Country then and now reflect deep, indivisible associations between land, people and culture. Physical attributes of land and environment, management practices, resource exploitation and subsistence activities combine in a wholistic cultural landscape permeated with Aboriginal oral traditions, ancestral ties, social and cultural behaviours, shared cultural norms and spiritual beliefs. Family groups lived, travelled and gathered across Country, following a cycle of six seasons each year.

Historic cultural period

Beginning from the 1820's, early explorers ventured out along the Merri Creek to the area now known as the City of Whittlesea including Hume and Hovell in 1824, Batman in 1835 and JT Gellibrand in 1836. In 1837, George Sherwin established a sheep station in Upper Plenty, the area surrounding present-day Whittlesea township and in 1838 the Whittlesea and Geelong areas were the first two regions of Victoria to be subdivided for major land sales.

The Plenty and Merri valleys were soon recognised as major agricultural regions of the Port Phillip district from the 1860s, first as centres of wheat growing and flour production, and later as commercial scale suppliers of whole milk from farms located from Thomastown to Epping and Wollert.

The township of Whittlesea was surveyed in 1853 and a rail line connected the town to the south from 1889, until it was removed in 1959. In 1850, the arrival of five German Wendish families who settled along Edgars Creek in Thomastown established the Westgarthtown enclave of houses, a cemetery and a Lutheran church by 1856.

In 1857, the Yan Yean Reservoir and water supply system was completed to supply the burgeoning Melbourne with water, an engineering marvel of its day.

The City of Whittlesea is also noteworthy for the intensity of dry stone walls surviving in areas from Epping through to Wollert and Donnybrook, a direct consequence of land management practices of small farmers who settled after 1850. The walls reflect the agrarian history of our City and are some of our most enduring historic cultural heritage assets.

Growth and Diversity

In the time period after World War Two, suburbs including Thomastown, Lalor and Bundoora became home to many new migrants fleeing Europe for a better life. This has set the tone for the diverse multicultural population in the City of Whittlesea today.

Since the approval of the State Government's Plenty Valley Strategic Plan in the 1980s which designated areas in South Morang, Mernda/Doreen and Whittlesea Township for future residential growth, the City of Whittlesea has been on a defining journey of managing urban growth and change.

The addition of the State significant Cooper Street Employment Precinct in Epping and major residential precincts of Epping North, Wollert and Donnybrook in the western corridor of the municipality in the 2000's has only accelerated the growth in recent years.

This has resulted in the City's population growing by over 100% since 2001 and so diverse that 45 per cent of our residents speak a language other than English at home. Our newer growth areas are dominated by young families moving in whilst our more established suburbs have many older families and couples.

The City of Whittlesea has been at the forefront of strategic planning for its new communities and actively engaged in shaping the City's future. This has included leading the structure planning for its growth areas and key activity centre, leveraging development to deliver community benefits. This is highlighted by the development of the bunjil nganga Parkland Quarry Hills, an open space of regional significance which will ultimately be over 1000 hectares in size. It will protect significant ecological and cultural values and provide significant open space for both the growing population of the City of Whittlesea and for visitors across greater Melbourne.

Council has also been a strong advocate for affordable housing to meet an increasing need for more affordable homes in our growing community and has successfully incorporated affordable housing outcomes in a number of precincts.

As the population has grown, Council has also been at the forefront of planning for new employment precincts and local job opportunities. We have prioritised the designation and planning for dedicated employment areas in Thomastown and Epping and within our town centres. This has supported our residents having opportunities to work close to where they live. Improvements to the transport network highlighted by rail line extensions to South Morang in 2012 and Mernda in 2018 have also provided our residents with greater access to jobs and services further afield.

We have also ensured the neighbourhoods are well designed to ensure that residents have easy access to local services including schools, shops, community centres and open space. The planning and design for new areas has sought to create walkable town centres, attractive streetscapes, residential neighbourhoods characterised by tree lined boulevards, active street frontages, high quality built form and protection of Whittlesea's significant environmental and heritage assets.

Protecting our Environment and Heritage

The City of Whittlesea has an incredibly rich landscape and heritage, highly valued by our community. As growth has occurred, we have needed to balance competing interests and look to maximise opportunities to achieve the best possible outcomes for our current and future residents and the environment. Our environment and heritage continues to be what makes the City of Whittlesea special and which connects the community to the places where they live.

Our majestic River Red Gums, many hundreds of years old, are our signature landscape character element. The creeks and waterways flow through the municipality providing corridors of biodiversity habitat and recreational pathways. Our remnant grasslands, forests and eucalypt woodlands are home to many endangered species and ecological communities.

Our ancient stony knolls and dry stone walls characterise the rich heritage of this place. Our rural and green wedge areas provide panoramic landscapes, areas of environmental significance and intersected with agriculture and other rural activities. And our distinctive neighbourhoods reflect the waves of development, the people who live there and the environmental and heritage features unique to each place.

Our Future

The future is becoming increasingly dynamic. As our growth areas continue to develop our established areas will begin to regenerate. This is likely to see a densification of our established suburbs, which will see more people living close to existing services, facilities and

transport options. This will consequentially place additional pressure on our existing infrastructure and evolve the appearance of our neighbourhoods.

As our suburbs grow, we will aim to ensure that new development is sustainable, integrates with its surroundings and is of high quality. We will also continue to advocate and support opportunities to provide more well located affordable housing for those in our community who need it. New and expanded employment precincts such as the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct and the Epping Activity Centre will provide many more opportunities for people to work locally within the municipality. We will also take action to increase tree canopy coverage, enhance our open space areas and improve our transport network to make it easier for people to get around our City.

While managing growth and change will continue to be a significant challenge facing the community, the impact of short to medium term issues such as changes in government policy, demographic change, fiscal constraints and increasing environmental risks such as bushfire and flooding, coupled with broader strategic issues including climate change and technological change, will add to the complexity.

It will necessitate finding and developing innovative solutions and partnerships to support the future quality of life for our community and to protect our natural environment and significant assets.

Our Municipality

The City of Whittlesea is located in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, about 20 kilometres from the city centre. It is one of Melbourne’s largest municipalities, covering a land area of approximately 490 square kilometres.

Council has captured the priorities and values of people living in the City of Whittlesea’s established, growth and rural areas based on almost 5,800 pieces of feedback from people across the municipality. Council also considered relevant health and demographic data about our community and other feedback received through broader engagement. Priorities differ across areas and precincts and reflect the **wide-ranging community aspirations are addressed in this Council Plan 2025-2029.**



Bundoora (established) – Located at the southern end of the municipality, Bundoora is an established suburb which is shared by two other municipalities Darebin and Banyule. The Whittlesea part of the suburb has an existing population of 14,361 and is expected to grow slowly to around 19,000 in 2040. The suburb is flanked by Plenty River on its eastern edge and the Darebin Creek on its western edge. Existing residential development to the south dates back to the 1960’s with more recent developments located north of the Metropolitan Ring Road including the Rivergums Estate and University Hill. The part of the suburb in the City of Whittlesea is serviced by two neighbourhood activity centres being University Hill and Bundoora Square shopping centre. The suburb also has two university campuses including RMIT university which is located in the City of Whittlesea. Owing to its two universities, Bundoora has a high number of 18 to 24 year olds (11.3% compared to CoW 8.5%) who are renting alone or living in group households. Students share the suburb with older families and couples, many of whom have called Bundoora home for several decades.

Donnybrook (growth) – The suburb of Donnybrook is located in the west of the municipality adjoining the Merri Creek and City of Hume. The suburb is the source of the Darebin Creek which runs from north to south through the western part of the suburb. The suburb is currently undergoing rapid change with many new housing estates developing along Donnybrook Road. Propelled by this recent surge in greenfield housing development, Donnybrook is transforming from a small rural town into an urban community that will grow from 3,763 to a population of more than 45,000 people by 2040. Donnybrook is dominated by young families moving into the area and housing stock which is primarily single storey detached dwellings on small lots. Donnybrook has an existing train station currently supported by V-Line train services which will be upgraded when the rail line is electrified in the future. Council is currently in the process of delivering the Murnong Community Centre to service this growing community which will include kindergarten rooms, maternal and child health, community hall and kitchen. At full development the suburb will be serviced by five new local town centres and seven new local convenience centres. The suburb will also have access to higher order services which will be delivered in the new Cloverton Metropolitan Activity Centre which is located at the junction of the City of Hume, City of Whittlesea and Shire of Mitchell.

Doreen (recently established) – Doreen is a suburb that has developed over the past 25 years and is renowned for its landscape character, river red gums, public spaces and educational facilities. The suburb is split over two municipalities. Its urban area is located in the City of Whittlesea while its rural area is located outside the urban growth boundary in the Shire of Nillumbik. The urban area is serviced by four local neighbourhood centres including Laurimar and Ashley Park. With 28,604 residents now calling Doreen home, it is expected to have around the same number of residents in 2040. Doreen has a high number of primary and secondary schoolers compared to other age groups (22.8% compared to CoW 17.5%). The suburb is also home to the Costa Mushroom exchange which is one of the largest employers in the municipality and is located on the eastern bank of the Plenty River. The Plenty Gorge park adjoins the river to the south of Bridge Inn Road and protects significant environmental values in the vicinity of the river.

Epping (established) – This vibrant precinct plays a critical role in the City of Whittlesea's economy and will continue to attract investment into the future. At the heart of the suburb, is the Epping Central Activity centre which is identified as a Metropolitan Activity Centre in the State Government's *Plan for Victoria (2025)* and services the wider region with higher order services. The activity centre supports a significant health precinct anchored by the Northern Hospital and also includes two private hospitals, the Northern Centre for Health Education Research and other health services. The activity centre also supports educational providers including a campus of Melbourne Polytechnic and an established retail, dining and entertainment precinct within Pacific Epping shopping centre. The activity centre has recently had new planning controls applied through the State Government's Activity Centre program which aims to provide additional opportunities for higher density housing and commercial development close to existing public transport and services. At the western edge of the activity centre is the New Epping development which is one of the largest urban renewal developments in metropolitan Melbourne and upon completion will support over 2,000 new homes, a new health precinct, commercial development and open space along the rehabilitated Edgars Creek. The suburb also has a state significance employment precinct including the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit Vegetable and Flower Markets and a number of high profile industrial estates lining Cooper Street. The employment area is home to many large businesses across the food and

beverage, advanced manufacturing, transport and logistics and waste recovery sectors. With a current population of 34,354 residents, Epping is currently forecasted to grow marginally to around 47,000 residents in 2040 however this is likely to be accelerated as a result of the new planning controls introduced by the State Government in and around the activity centre.

Lalor (established) – Lalor is a diverse and vibrant established suburb which developed in the post war period. Until 1945, Lalor was a part of Thomastown when Leo Purcell, a patient at a military hospital on the Atherton Tablelands, devised a scheme to provide low cost homes for ex-servicemen. In February 1947 he formed the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society with a group of ex-servicemen and a program of house building began. This continued until 1954 when it was taken over by the War Service Homes Commission. Heritage listing of parts of the Peter Lalor Estate in Lalor, which was developed as part of this program, commemorate this important social history. Today, the hub of Lalor remains the Lalor Shopping centre; a vibrant and thriving shopping precinct with around 100 specialty shops which front onto Station Street, May Road and the Peter Lalor walk. The precinct is also home to Lalor library. The suburb has a high number of senior residents aged in their 70s and above (13.9% compared to CoW 8.9%) but is also popular with young couples and families, many of whom were born overseas from countries including India, Iran and Iraq. 62.3% of Lalor residents speak a language other than English at home (compared to CoW 45.1%). Lalor's population of 23,701 is not expected to exceed 28,000 residents by 2040. Lalor is also home of the Whittlesea Public Gardens located in the western part of the suburb.

Mernda (recently established) – Mernda is a historic township first settled in the 1850's, with many original buildings and heritage sites protected. These include the Bridge Inn Hotel on the corner of Plenty Road and Bridge Inn Road, Mayfield Farm and flour mill and Turners bakehouse. The suburb is located in the Plenty Valley between the Plenty River on its eastern border and the Quarry Hills to the west. The suburb has developed rapidly over the past two decades with a current population of 27,500. The residential areas which sit in the foothills of the Quarry Hills are embellished by tree lined streets, remnant river red gums and high quality open space areas. The Mernda Train Station re-opened in 2018 following the completion of the Mernda rail extension project. In the vicinity of the station, a major town centre is beginning to emerge. The first stage of the retail development is now open and includes a supermarket, specialty stores and the Mernda library. The new Whittlesea Community Hospital which is located on Riverdale Boulevard is also nearing completion. Mernda continues to attract young families to the area with the population expected to hit 31,000 by 2033 and plateau around the same mark through to 2040.

Mill Park (established)– This established suburb which has developed since the 1970s. Mill Park's residential areas follow a curvilinear subdivision pattern. The neighbourhood is centred around the Stables shopping centre located on Childs Road. Nearby to the shopping centre is the Peter Hopper Lake which is a significant waterbody in the area. The lake is currently undergoing an extensive revitalisation project, led by Council to improve its water quality. The community is characterised by mature families and empty nester couples aged in their 50s and 60s (28.6% compared to CoW 16.1%). With a population of 28,935, Mill Park has limited opportunity for new housing growth and is forecast to reach just over 30,000 residents by 2040. At the northern end of the suburb is the regionally significant Plenty Valley Town Centre which is anchored by the Westfield Plenty Valley Shopping Centre.

Rural north (including Beveridge, Eden Park, Humevale, Kinglake West, Woodstock and Yan Yean) –

The City of Whittlesea's rural north, containing a mix of natural biodiversity, agricultural businesses and rural residential properties, is home to older families and retirees. Much of the land in the rural north is also covered by national park and the catchment for the Yan Yean Reservoir which is a major water storage for Melbourne. The rural North currently has a population of 3,129 which is forecast to grow marginally to 3,350 in 2040. In 2023, Council adopted a Green Wedge Management Plan to help guide its management of the 'green wedge' or rural parts of the municipality. The plan reaffirms the communities' priorities in protecting biodiversity, natural landscapes and rural characters of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. The rural north is also significant to Whittlesea's economy in respect to its local food production and the visitor economy. Planning is also underway for the Beveridge Intermodal Precinct located in the northwest corner of the municipality adjoining Mitchell Shire Council and when completed will be a major employment generator providing local jobs for residents across both municipalities.

South Morang (established)– The village of South Morang located on Plenty Road dates back to the late 19th century. The area was opened up for development in the 1990's and was the first major development precinct in the Plenty Valley growth corridor. The suburb is flanked by parklands including the Quarry Hills Parkland to the north and west and the Plenty Gorge Park to the east. At Granite Hills in the larger Quarry Hills Parkland, a major community park is currently under development. Nearby, the Aboriginal Gathering Place is also under construction which will be an important community hub for our aboriginal community. At the southern end of the suburb is the Plenty Valley Town Centre which straddles the border on adjoining suburbs Mill Park and Epping. The South Morang Train station was reopened in this location in 2012 after the train line was extended from Epping. The civic centre of the City of Whittlesea and Plenty Ranges Arts and Community Centre are also located in South Morang within the Plenty Valley Town Centre. This community is largely made up of families who have lived in the area for more than 10 years, with children who are at, or approaching, secondary school age. The current population is 25,268 residents which is forecast to grow slightly to 28,400 in 2040.

Thomastown (established) – Thomastown is home to the historically significant Westgarthtown enclave established by German Wendish families and comprising houses, a cemetery and a Lutheran church by 1856. The precinct is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. The suburb grew significantly in the post war period particularly in the 1950's and 1960's and the current character of the suburb is defined by the post-war residential development. Today, Thomastown is our most culturally diverse community, more than half of Thomastown's residents were born overseas (51.6% compared to CoW 37.6%). One in four residents are aged over 60 years (27.4% compared to CoW 17.6%), making it an ageing community. The current population of 22,200 is likely to grow steadily to 27,900 people in 2040 subject to the rate of regeneration of older properties. The main shopping precinct in Thomastown is the retail strip on High Street located opposite the Thomastown Train Station. There are some new developments currently underway in this area including a new apartment building on High Street close to the station. The suburb also has a state significant employment precinct including a number of high profile manufacturers, established eco-system and a cluster of various dairy manufacturers which are all attracted to the precinct due to the proximity to the Metropolitan Ring Road and freeway access including local, national, and international trade gateways.

Whittlesea Township – The township of Whittlesea is located on the Plenty River, at the foot of the Great Dividing Range. It is located within the Whittlesea green wedge area and nestled between the Whittlesea Hills to the west and Eastern Hills to the east. This service hub for the City’s rural north and green wedge areas has a distinctive regional character in its main street and residential areas. Some of the early heritage buildings constructed from 1860 onwards still remain including various public and commercial buildings, and residences and ruins from the earliest pastoral settlements. Council’s Whittlesea Township Plan aims to protect the existing rural ‘country feel’ of the township. Around the township are a number of existing rural residential estates which act as a transition between the township and surrounding rural areas. The township currently has a population of 5,600, which is largely made up of maturing families with teenage children, empty nester couples and is forecasted to grow to just over 6,300 in 2040 via 500 new houses.

Wollert (growth)– A booming suburb located in the west of the municipality; Wollert is set to grow from 28,700 current residents to 59,000 residents in 2040. The area is renowned for its large River Red Gum trees, some hundreds of years old, which are being protected in conservation reserves or integrated into new parks. New development in Wollert integrates around large conservation reserves which have been designated to protection biodiversity and areas of environmental significance. The landscape also features many stony rises which are of significance to the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people. The plan for the development of Wollert includes a number of new town centres, schools, community centres and open space reserves which will be located in close proximity to new residential areas. The plan also includes provision of improved transport options including upgrades to existing roads and the reservation for a future train line to the proposed Wollert town centre. The culturally diverse community is dominated by first home buyers and young families (Ages 25-34 cohort 21.3% compared to CoW 15.6%). 64.4% of Wollert residents speak a Language other than English at home compared to CoW 45.1%.