

Unlocking business growth and innovation

Discussion paper

We're planning for the City of Whittlesea's economic future, and ready to lead the next wave of business growth, innovation and resilience. This paper explores the bold ideas, emerging trends and transformative opportunities that will shape our economy over the next ten years. A draft strategy will be shared for public feedback in 2026 — but we'd love to hear your thoughts now on the possibilities and opportunities ahead.

Building a future-focused innovation economy

Scale innovation through population growth and infrastructure

Australia's infrastructure investment and urban growth presents new opportunities for innovation. The City of Whittlesea can take advantage of this growth, attract investment and support industry growth by proactively facilitating the development of key precincts.

Opportunities:

- National infrastructure strategies are prioritising mixed-use innovation precincts that bring together housing, employment and advanced industries.
- Urban centres worldwide are leveraging population growth to create precincts that increase clean technology, which attract anchor tenants in health and logistics sectors.
- Federal and state governments are investing in employment hubs that support long-term economic transformation in growth regions.

Activate local entrepreneurship and innovation networks

Inclusive businesses and creative industries are growing around the world and changing local economies. By supporting emerging businesses, fostering a culture of creativity and collaboration, the City of Whittlesea can empower local entrepreneurs and drive sustainable growth across the region.

Opportunities:

- Investment in co-working hubs, maker spaces and pop-up activations to startups and creative enterprise is growing.
- International and national trends show growing support for migrant, First Peoples and youth entrepreneurship through targeted programs, delivered online via digital platforms.
- The global shift toward social enterprise and purpose-driven business models is creating new opportunities within local communities.

Position cultural diversity as a gateway to global markets

Cultural industries and migrant communities are helping to grow global trade and innovation. The City of Whittlesea's diverse population provides a strong advantage in connecting with international markets.

Opportunities:

- Multicultural cities are growing export-ready sectors in food, fashion, media and technology by supporting cultural entrepreneurship.
- Leveraging migrant networks to build international trade relationships, attract talent and foster inclusive innovation.
- International development agencies and trade bodies are increasingly recognising cultural diversity as a key asset in economic development and global engagement.

Build a digitally enabled, climate-ready business community

Digital change and climate resilience are now key to staying competitive worldwide. The City of Whittlesea can take the lead by aligning with national and global efforts to build these skills.

Opportunities:

- Governments are funding AI, cybersecurity and clean technology adoption across small businesses to drive innovation and resilience.
- Approaches that help to protect the climate are being supported through grants, toolkits and pilot programs in cities worldwide.
- Global markets are demanding low-carbon, digitally enabled supply chains, creating new expectations and opportunities for local businesses.

Promote local procurement and investment attraction

Inclusive procurement and regional branding are gaining traction globally, and the City of Whittlesea can use these trends to retain local value and attract strategic investment.

Opportunities:

- Governments are leveraging social procurement practices to support First Peoples' businesses, social enterprises, sustainable businesses and local suppliers.
- Investment attraction is increasingly driven by coordinated branding, easy-to-use digital tools and cross-municipality collaboration.
- International investors are seeking regions with clear value propositions, strategic infrastructure and clear economic identities.

THE FACTS



22,808

local businesses^{1a}



85,195

local jobs^{2a}



\$12.2bn

Gross Regional Product (GRP)^{2a}



13,405

new jobs created from 2018-2024^{2a}

Data sources:

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits 2024
 2. National Institute of Economic and Industry Research 2024
- a. City of Whittlesea

Barriers to unlocking business growth

Service access barriers and network gaps

Infrastructure development has lagged behind population expansion, limiting access to essential services and reducing the competitiveness of key employment precincts.

- Industrial areas face delays in power upgrades, while telecommunication black spots and unreliable internet hinder digital operations.
- Inadequate public transport and road congestion reduce access to jobs, training and commercial hubs.
- These gaps weaken investor confidence and restrict the sectors to grow.

Financial pressures and business resilience

Rising operational costs and economic uncertainty are placing pressure on local businesses, particularly small and home-based enterprises.

- Energy, insurance, rent and wage increases can affect profit margins and limit continued investment.
- Rising costs from inflation and global supply chain challenges are encouraging businesses and consumers to adjust their spending and sourcing strategies.
- Without targeted support, some businesses risk stagnation or closure, reducing local employment and innovation.

Digital capability and cybersecurity risks

As industries digitise, many local businesses are struggling to keep pace with technology adoption and cyber resilience.

- Limited digital literacy and access to training hinder uptake of e-commerce, AI and cloud-based tools.
- Small and multicultural businesses are particularly vulnerable to cyber threats and digital exclusion.
- These gaps reduce competitiveness, market reach and the ability to adapt to changing consumer behaviours.

Limited access to affordable innovation spaces

The demand for flexible, affordable workspaces is growing, but supply remains limited across the municipality.

- Startups, sole traders and creative enterprises face barriers to accessing co-working, maker and incubation spaces.
- Underutilised buildings and precincts remain disconnected from innovation ecosystems.
- A lack of inclusive, strategically located co-working hubs can result in missed entrepreneurship and collaboration opportunities.

Procurement practice and regional coordination

Local procurement and regional branding are yet to be fully leveraged, which may be limiting the City of Whittlesea's ability to retain economic value and attract investment.

- Procurement processes can provide better support for local suppliers, social enterprises and First Peoples' businesses – these processes can strengthen inclusive economic development.
- While regional cross-municipal border collaboration is strong, a clear regional identity and positioning of collective strategic advantages could attract further investment.
- Regional collaboration for delivery of infrastructure and public agencies adopting a more commercial mindset may enable increased private sector investment.

Global insights that inspire local action

Across Australia and internationally, governments have shown how strategic leadership, targeted investment and collaboration can unlock economic potential and strengthen business engagement. Valuable insights can be gained to shape the future for the City of Whittlesea.

Strategic sector focus, City of Moreton Bay (QLD)

Moreton Bay has shown how a bold focus on high-value sectors can attract investment, create jobs and build regional identity.

- The city prioritised advanced manufacturing and agribusiness, aligning land use, infrastructure and workforce planning to support growth.
- Dedicated investment in sector-specific precincts helped attract anchor tenants and catalyse local supply chains.
- Moreton Bay's approach demonstrates that targeted sector strategies can transform regional economies and attract long-term private investment.

Global Tampa Bay, USA

Tampa Bay demonstrates how cross-municipality collaboration can elevate a region's economic profile and attract global investment.

- Local governments worked together to promote shared infrastructure, talent and export opportunities under a unified regional brand.
- The collaboration enabled coordinated investor engagement and stronger advocacy at the state and federal level.
- Tampa Bay's success shows that unified regional branding and collaboration can unlock greater visibility and investment opportunities.

Partnerships for sustainable cities, Europe

European cities are using international partnerships to share knowledge, attract investment and co-develop sustainable economic solutions.

- Programs like Partnerships for Sustainable Cities support peer-to-peer learning and joint innovation between local governments.
- These partnerships have helped cities build resilience, improve governance and accelerate climate-smart economic development.
- The European experience highlights that global city partnerships can fast-track sustainability outcomes and strengthen local innovation capacity.

Imagining the City of Whittlesea's future:

- How might we harness the City of Whittlesea's infrastructure, population growth, and sector strengths to unlock business innovation and attract anchor industries and emerging markets?
- What would it take to transform the City of Whittlesea into a nationally recognised hub for inclusive entrepreneurship—supported by vibrant innovation spaces, digital capability, and purpose-driven enterprise?
- In what ways can we position the City of Whittlesea as a global-facing economy—powered by cultural diversity, climate-smart business models, regional identity and strategic trade relationships?



HAVE YOUR SAY

For more information and to tell us what matters to you, visit engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au

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131 450

Arabic خدمة الترجمة الشفوية المجانية

Chinese Simplified 免费电话传译服务

Chinese Traditional 免費電話傳譯服務

Greek Δωρεάν τηλεφωνική υπηρεσία διερμηνέας

Italian Servizio di interpretariato telefonico gratuito

Macedonian Бесплатна телефонска услуга за преведување

Persian/Farsi خدمات مترجم شفاهی تلفنی رایگان

Punjabi ਮੁਫ਼ਤ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਸੇਵਾ

Turkish Ücretsiz telefonla tercümanlık servisi

Vietnamese Dịch vụ thông dịch qua điện thoại miễn phí



City of
Whittlesea