COMMUNITY PLAN 2025-2029

Engagement Summary

5 August 2024 – 31 August 2025

Introduction

With a newly elected Council, we are developing a new Community Plan, which is Council's main medium-term strategic planning document. It will expand on the long-term community vision, Whittlesea 2040: A place for all, to include key outcome priorities, services, and initiatives over the next four years. It plays a central role in Council's overall strategic planning and reporting framework.

Each year Council develops a Community Action Plan (CAP) which is an annual supplement to the Community Plan. This action plan outlines the key actions to be completed over the next financial year to build towards achieving the Community Plan and ultimately our Whittlesea 2040 goals. These goals are for a Connected Community, Liveable Neighbourhoods, a Strong Local Economy, a Sustainable Environment, and a High-Performing Organisation.

These key plans were developed considering feedback received during a comprehensive multi-phased Community Priorities engagement program that ran from August 2024 to August 2025 and included feedback online or in-person from over 1,600 participants across 35 community-based pop-ups, two key stakeholder group presentations and four focus groups with 66 participants.

In the final phase of the consultation, the draft plans were presented to community for feedback between 24 July and 31 August 2025, with participants asked whether they supported the plans and if they didn't to explain why. Participation was available online through the *Engage Whittlesea* platform or in-person at a series of 15 community-based pop-up stalls scheduled across the municipality in high foot traffic locations.

Hearing from our community has helped shape the *Community Plan 2025-2029* and the *Community Action Plan 2025-2026.*

Project promotion

The opportunity to participate in the community engagement was promoted through a range of channels to have a widespread reach across the municipality including:

- Council's digital engagement platform *Engage Whittlesea*
- Council's social media channels
- *Engage Whittlesea* campaigns sent four times to around 1,500 platform users each time with an average click through rate of 12%.
- Presentations to the City of Whittlesea Youth Council
- Promotion on screens and with flyers and posters at Civic Centre, community activity centres, libraries and aquatic centres
- Article in the bi-monthly Council newsletter *Local scoop* which is posted to every household across the municipality.

An e-newsletter or personalised email with direct link to the project page was sent to:

- 80 registered senior clubs & 485 contacts of registered multicultural groups
- Over 300 contacts on the Ageing Well database
- Over 70 registered sports and recreation clubs
- Youth Services network
- 200 Library and community hubs user group
- 176 subscribers to the Whittlesea Disability Network newsletter
- First Peoples network
- 66 Community Priorities Focus Group participants.

How we engaged you

The community engagement to inform the Community Plan 2025 -29 was delivered in phases as below:

1: Community Priorities broad community consultation –	2: Community Priorities community check in-	3: Deliberative Engagement Community Priorities Focus Groups	4: Present Proposed Community Plan and Action Plan 2025-29 for community feedback	5: Adoption of the Community Plan and Community Action Plan 2025-29
INFORM, CONSULT	INFORM, CONSULT	INFORM, CONSULT INVOLVE	INFORM, CONSULT	close the loop
(5 August – 4 September 2024)	(1 December 2024 – 31 January 2025)	(11-20 February 2025)	(24 July- 31 August 2025)	INFORM,
			Focus Group 30 July	(23 September 2025)

A mix of online and in-person opportunities were utilised across the five phases of consultation. Community-based pop-up stalls were held in high foot traffic areas across the municipality, presentations were made to key targeted stakeholder groups and facilitated community focus groups were undertaken to offer an opportunity for deliberation at a deeper level on the topic. Digital engagement was hosted on the *Engage Whittlesea* platform which utilises an accessibility add-on ensuring that it is as accessible as possible for all users. The platform also has an in-built translation tool to mitigate any language barriers to participation, allowing the page to be translated into the top fifteen languages spoken within the municipality.

As the draft plans shared in the final phase of consultation are quite detailed, we sought to make it easy for community to understand them. Activity boards (viewable in Appendix 1) were used at in-person engagement activities that presented the 12 themes that reflect different aspects of community life which we highlighted to the community throughout the consultation period. These 12 themes form a blueprint for how we will work with the community to make the City of Whittlesea a more connected, inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant place for all. This information was mirrored on the project *Engage Whittlesea* page.

Highlights from across the four phases of consultation are as below:

Hosted 35 community-based pop-ups

Three stakeholder group presentations

66 participants across four community focus groups

877 digital contributions

790 in-person contributions

Below is a snapshot of the participation in the four phases of consultation, which is representative of our broader community.

48% female, 48% male and 3% prefer not to answer

All ages groups were represented with the largest being those aged 35-44 years (22%)

97% of participants live in the City of Whittlesea with 15 suburbs represented

11% indicated they are a person with a disability or an unpaid carer of a person with a disability or older person

2% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

5% identified as members of the LGBTIQA+ community

41% speak a language other than English at home

Phase 1: Broad community consultation

Between 5 August and 4 September 2024, the community were invited to share their priorities for the future through an online survey or in-person at one of 13 community-based pop-up stalls. The online survey required participants to select the three service areas most important to them from the possible thirteen and were then asked additional questions based on their selection. The additional questions were designed to delve deeper into the communities' priorities to understand the specific areas of importance for each of the priority areas they selected. There was free text space provided for participants to add further comment as part of the additional questions.

The in-person consultation activity mirrored the information being sought through the digital consultation survey activity; specifically, capturing their top three priorities with participants asked to place a sticky dot on their choices and then encouraged to complete a hard copy survey or complete the survey on an available iPad to provide a deeper level of insight.

Details of the community-based pop-ups are below:

Date	Time	Where	Address/location
Friday 9 August	10am- 1pm	Galada Community Activity Centre (Immunisation session)	10a Forum Way, Epping
Tuesday 13 August	10am-1pm	Outside Whittlesea Service Hub	63 Church St, Whittlesea
Thursday 15 August	10am-2pm	Lalor Library	2A May Rd, Lalor
Thursday 15 August	5.30pm-7.30pm	Mill Park Library	394 Plenty Road, Mill Park
Friday 16 August	11am-2pm	Coles Uni Hill	224 Plenty Road, Bundoora
Tuesday 20 August	1.30pm-4.30pm	Mernda Town Centre	180 Riverdale Blvd, Mernda
Wednesday 21 August	5pm-7pm	Kirrip Community Activity Centre (Immunisation session)	135 DeRossi Blvd, Wollert
Friday 23 August	2.30pm-4.30pm	Laurimar shops, outside Woolworths	95 Hazel Glen Rd, Doreen
Monday 26 August	9.30am-12.30pm	Olivine Estate outside Shared Cup Café	995 Olivine Blvd, Donnybrook
Tuesday 27 August	1.30pm-4.30pm	Westfield Plenty Valley	415 McDonalds Road, South Morang
Wednesday 28 August	9am-12pm	Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre	52 Main St, Thomastown
Friday 30 August	2.30pm-4.30pm	Mill Park Stables Shopping Centre	314-360 Childs Rd, Mill Park
Saturday 31 August	6pm – 9pm	Walking Thomastown	Main Street Recreation Reserve, Thomastown

Phase 2: Broad community pulse check consultation

Throughout December 2024 and January 2025, we shared with the community the priorities we had heard through phase one consultation in order of priority and asked them if they agreed with the order, if we had missed anything and for any other comments.
This phase was conducted online through the *Engage Whittlesea* platform; however, we also held the same activity in-person at Council's Carols by Candlelight event on 13 December.

Phase 3: Deliberative engagement – Community Priorities focus groups

To involve the community in shaping these key plans, focus groups were established to provide opportunity for valuable insights to be shared that will help identify, assess, and prioritise community interests. This approach enabled us to achieve balanced outcomes that are informed by the community's perspectives.

We held three identical community focus groups at different locations across the municipality reducing travel for participants and enabling a place-based lens to the feedback captured. Recruitment for the focus groups took place via an Expression of Interest (EOI) from 5 August 2024 to 13 January 2025 with recruitment placed on hold during the official caretaker period between 17 September and 26 October 2024. Participants were chosen to reflect the diversity of the City of Whittlesea community, including ages, genders, abilities, cultural backgrounds, suburbs and household structures.

Details of the community focus groups are below:

- Whittlesea Community Activity Centre, Tuesday 11 February, 6-9pm
- Civic Centre, South Morang, Saturday 15 February, 9am – 12pm
- Lalor Library, Thursday 20 February, 6-9pm.

Each focus group ran for three hours and included two small group activities. The first activity centred on development of the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Disability Action Plan and saw table groups generate ideas for three key questions with participants able to place dots on the ideas they supported.

The second activity looked at various Council service areas and participants explored which were their particular focus for increased Council priority and investment. The group also weighed up the cost of delivering services and an understanding that all could not increase and remain within the budget amount.

Phase 4: Draft Community Plan 2025- 29 and draft Community Action Plan 2025-2029 presented for community feedback

Between 24 July and 31 August 2025, the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 and draft Community Action Plan 2026-2026 was be presented for feedback.

The draft Community Plan 2025-2029 is built around 12 themes that reflect different aspects of community life which we highlighted to the community throughout the consultation period. These 12 themes form a blueprint for how we will work with the community to make the City of Whittlesea a more connected, inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant place for all.

There are 55 strategic priorities that Council have committed to delivering over the next four years. The Community Action Plan 2025 - 2026 shows the priorities Council will focus on in the first year. The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Disability Action Plan have been embedded into these 55 strategic priorities to ensure community health and wellbeing is at the core of our work.

Community had the opportunity to read the documents in full (online or printed copies available) or refer to key highlights presented on the project *Engage Whittlesea* page and information boards at a series of 15 community-based pop-ups.

Online, participants were asked to identify which of the themes presented in the Community Plan they identified with and if the strategic priorities Council have committed across the themes reflect what the community told us through previous engagements that they wanted us to work towards. They were also asked if the health and disability priorities are appropriately addressed in the Community Plan. Participants were then asked to identify overall whether they supported the Community Plan 2025-2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026. If they responded that they did not support one or both plans they were prompted to provide a reason for their response. There was a free text section where they could add any other feedback they had about the draft plans.

In person, participants were asked to identify overall whether they supported the Community Plan 2025-2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026. There was a free text section where they could add any other feedback they had about the draft plans. Details of the community-based pop-ups are below:

Date	Time	Where	Address/location
Thursday 24 July	10am-1pm	Whittlesea Services Hub (street front)	63 Church St, Whittlesea
Thursday 24 July*	10am-12pm	Laurie's Field	1W Gosford Crt, Doreen
Friday 25 July	2.30pm-4.30pm	Mill Park Stables SC	314-360 Childs Rd, Mill Park
Wednesday 30 July	9am-12pm	Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre	52 Main St, Thomastown
Thursday 31 July	10am-1pm	Mill Park Library	394 Plenty Road, Mill Park
Friday 1 August*	2.30-4.30pm	Doreen Laurimar Woolworths	95 Hazel Glen Rd, Doreen
Saturday 2 August	10am – 12.30pm	Shared Cup Cafe	995 Donnybrook Rd, Donnybrook
Tuesday 5 August	10am-1pm	Westfield Plenty Valley	415 McDonalds Road, South Morang
Friday 8 August	10am -12pm	Galada CC (Immunisation)	10a Forum Way, Epping
Friday 8 August	2.30pm-4.30pm	Laurimar Woolworths	95 Hazel Glen Rd, Doreen
Tuesday 12 August	10am-1pm	Lalor Library	2A May Rd, Lalor
Wednesday 13 August	11am-2pm	Coles Uni Hill	224 Plenty Road, Bundoora
Tuesday 19 August	1.30pm-4.30pm	Mernda Town Centre	180 Riverdale Blvd, Mernda
Wednesday 20 August	5pm-7pm	Kirrip CAC (Immunisation session)	135 De Rossi Blvd, Wollert
Thursday 28 August	10am-1pm	Mill Park Lakes	The Promenade, South Morang
Saturday 30 August	6pm – 9pm	Walking Thomastown	Main Street Recreation Reserve, 54-76 Main Street, Thomastown

*Co-locating with Lauries Field Master plan consultation, flyers to promote the project were available.
Note – Caretaker Period of Lalor By-Election 24 June to 2 August 2025.

During this final phase of consultation, we also invited previous focus group participants to join us to delve deeper into the draft plans at a Community Focus Group. Held on 31 July at the Civic Centre, 20 community members spent 2.5 hours discussing in detail the two draft plans.

We also presented the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 and draft Community Action Plan 2025-2026 to 81 representatives of 48 registered Seniors Clubs that attended their Club Liaison meeting on Tuesday 12 August 2025.

Council also hosted a hosted a community focus group at the Civic Centre, South Morang, Thursday 31 July, 6.30pm – 9pm.

Above: Project team presenting at the Senior Club Liaison meeting

Phase 5: Adoption of the Community Plan 2025-2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026
The final Community Plan 2025-2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026 will be presented to Council for endorsement at the scheduled Council meeting on 23 September 2025.

Community voices - what we heard and how we have responded

Phases one and two
A total of 4,181 community comments helped shape the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 and draft Community Action Plan 2025-2026 that was shared for community feedback.

Our community told us that their top three priorities across the municipality were:

1. Roads, public transport and footpaths including road safety, local roads, shared user paths, cycling infrastructure and parking.
   "Yes, it would be great to have roads completed before allowing so many new estates pop up. Make the developers contribute more towards the roads necessary to facilitate their estates."

2. Parks, playgrounds and open space including maintenance, development of new and renewal of old playgrounds.
   "Parks and kerbside in Doreen need much more attention and more clean up on a more regular basis."

"Love the work that you have already done in Granite Hills."

3. Community facilities including aquatic facilities, community activity centres, libraries and sporting facilities.
   "Yes, please, please provide us with a Library in Epping Central asap. 54 years as an Epping resident is a very long time to wait for Library services close to home!"

Phase 3

Participants of the community focus groups deliberated with other community members and project staff, gaining a better understanding of the service categories level expectations and challenges faced. Overall, the group emphasised local business, youth services, public health, waste management, ageing well, children and families and biodiversity as their key priority areas.

Participants, working in small groups, generated 192 ideas related to health and wellbeing priorities. These ideas predominantly centred around the below:

- awareness campaigns, support services and infrastructure are the most effective ways we can improve mental wellbeing for individuals in our community.
- housing options, support services and infrastructure can help us prevent homelessness in our community.
- activity and programming, infrastructure, information & promotion would help people be socially active and connected with our community.
- local business, youth services were the service areas they'd like to see more of.

Council considered the feedback captured through the three phases of community engagement as we drafted the Community Plan 2025-2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026. The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Disability Action Plan items feature in all Strategic Priorities of the Community Plan and provide a platform for action within the Community Action Plan. The table below identifies the top five priorities community shared and illustrates how they are incorporated into both the Community Plan 2025-2029 and the Community Action Plan 2025-2026:

Top priority service areas captured from community during phase 1	**Addressed as strategic priorities in Community Plan 2025-2029**	**Addressed as actions of Community Action Plan 2025-2026**
Roads, public transport and footpaths including road safety, local roads, shared user paths, cycling infrastructure and parking	Theme 3: Strategic Priorities 6,7,8	• Complete design for Edgars Creek Shared Path from Main Street to Kingsway Drive in Lalor • Commence construction of the Yan Yean Shared Path from Childs Road to Centenary Drive in Mill Park • Commence the signalisation of the intersection of Findon Road and The Great Eastern Way in South Morang to improve safety, ease congestion and improve local access to surrounding community facilities.

Parks, playgrounds and open space including maintenance, development of new and renewal of old playgrounds	Theme 4: Strategic Priorities 9 -12 Theme 6: Strategic Priorities 17-26	• Commence the bunjil nganga Parkland (Quarry Hills) tree planting program • Deliver the annual tree planting programs for main roads, residential streets, parks, creek corridors and conservation reserves • Deliver education modules to sports clubs and undertake an Expression of Interest for usage of the Regional Sports Precinct as part of the implementation of Council's Fair Access Policy • Complete the Granite Hills Playground featuring an adventure park and playground, open-air pavilion, public barbecues, giant slides, nature and water play, boardwalks and connecting paths, landscaping and public toilets with a Changing Places facility • Continue construction of Stage 2 of the Regional Sports Precinct including the indoor stadium and outdoor netball courts • Commence the design of a new sports reserve in Wollert (Edgars Creek) • Complete the Granite Hills Playground featuring an adventure park and playground, open-air pavilion, public barbecues, giant slides, nature and water play, boardwalks and connecting paths, landscaping and public toilets with a Changing Places facility • Commence the redevelopment of the Huskisson Recreation Reserve sports facilities with fencing and lighting, a new community sports pavilion, additional car parking, connecting paths and landscaping • Complete design of Edgars Creek Recreation Reserve in Wollert with a natural turf sports oval and synthetic cricket wicket with lighting, netball courts with fencing and lighting, community sports pavilion, additional car parking, connecting paths, passive open space and landscaping • Complete design of Ashely Park Recreation Reserve in Doreen with soccer pitches with lighting, community sports pavilion, playground, additional car parking, connecting paths, passive open space and landscaping • Commence the design of dog off-leash area, playground and picnic facilities, new public toilet, lighting, upgraded access road and car park, connecting paths, passive open space and landscaping at VR Michael Reserve • Continue upgrading pedestrian bridges over the Plenty River and the construction of connecting paths • Commence design of the park improvements at Nick Ascenzo Reserve.

Community facilities including aquatic facilities, community activity centres, libraries and sporting facilities	Theme 6: Strategic Priorities 17-26	• Deliver education modules to sports clubs and undertake an Expression of Interest for usage of the Regional Sports Precinct as part of the implementation of Council's Fair Access Policy • Continue construction of Stage 2 of the Regional Sports Precinct including the indoor stadium and outdoor netball courts • Commence the design of a new sports reserve in Wollert (Edgars Creek). • Continue construction of the West Wollert Community Centre • Complete the construction of the Murnong Community Centre and commence operations of the new community facility including a library.
Community safety including school crossings, immunisations, community local law, public lighting and prevention of violence against women	Theme 7: Strategic Priorities 27-30	• Complete the Mill Park Place Framework identifying opportunities to address the distinct needs for the area, including safer streets, enhanced public places and improved infrastructure and develop an implementation action plan • Deliver a feasibility assessment for a Safer Neighbourhoods Expo to enhance community education and awareness of available services • Partner with local health services to pilot a program that engages men to help stop gender-based violence and promote gender equity.
Arts, culture and events including events, workshops, public art, venues, collections and exhibitions.	Theme 10: Strategic Priorities 39-51	• Partner with First Peoples communities to co-design and establish programs and activities at the Aboriginal Gathering Place • Partner with health providers to develop local awareness about gambling harm • Partner with external agencies to pilot a homelessness outreach program • Advocate and partner for better access to fresh, healthy, safe, affordable and culturally appropriate food systems to increase healthy eating • Partner with local organisations to increase access to services that are culturally safe, inclusive and accessible to diverse communities including marginalised groups • Support service providers to develop a work readiness program that will engage local employers and community organisations to build awareness and capacity to create viable work and volunteer opportunities for young people with disability • Develop an industry prospectus to promote local function and event spaces through tourism networks and support PRACC to position itself as a venue of choice for the performing arts and creative industries

		• Deliver a feasibility study on the development of an accessible neighbourhood pilot project to better meet the needs for people living with a significant disability and their carers • Continue to consider the future arrangements for the delivery of Library Services, including opportunities for collaboration with other Councils

Phase 4

A total of 370 community members participated in this final phase of consultation, with 88% supporting the draft Community Plan 2025-2026 and 89% supporting the draft Community Action Plan 2025-2026. Those that were not supportive of the draft plans stated the main reasons being a lack of information on how it will support LGBTIQA+ community, road cyclists, opportunities for people with ADHD and Autism, housing, community safety and supporting infrastructure upgrades.

'Lack of information on how Council is supporting and improving the lives of LGBTIQA+ community and individuals'

'It is not inclusive towards road cyclist.'

'More opportunities for people with ADHD and Autism'

'Areas such as housing diversity are lacking in ambition.'

'We do not feel safe in our community'

'Need a dog park in Hawkstowe.'

Twenty community members participated in a Community Focus Group on 31 July 2025 at the Civic Centre. Through the first activity Council was able to delve deeper into each theme and understand what participants liked about each as well as parts they found confusing or unclear. This was achieved through a red pen, green pen exercise.

Participants found the majority of each theme clear and easy to understand, welcoming the content.

Theme 1: 'The deliver home support services paragraph provides concrete examples of the services, very good!'

Theme 7: 'This is an important theme and simple to understand

Theme 11: 'Ability to show how Council has improved the daily lives.'

The focus group provided feedback on opportunities to make the language clearer in relation to the theme titles. It was also recommended that some of the language used require more explanation and or examples to assist them to better understand.

Theme 7: Under the responsibility of others – 'Change the word and the approach from enforcing to preventing'

Feedback was captured in the second activity through a reflections and evaluation survey. What we heard through the survey was that:

- 90% of participants could see themselves in the plan
- 100% of participants commented on the themes they could identify with, meaning that each identified with at least one theme
- 85% agreed the strategic priorities reflected what community told us we should work towards during this four-year period
- 85% of participants felt health and disability priorities were appropriately addressed in the draft Community Plan 2025-2029
- 100% of participants supported both the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 and draft Community Action Plan 2025-2029

Council also presented the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 and draft Community action Plan 2025-2026 to 81 community members representing 48 seniors' clubs at the Seniors Club Liaison meeting on Tuesday 12 August 2025 at Civic Centre. There was strong overall support for the draft Community Action Plan 2025-2026, with the document well received. Although some found the draft Community Plan 2025-2029 too wordy and detailed as many attendees were from culturally diverse backgrounds, which made it challenging for them to follow certain parts of the plan and engage with it. They appreciated the visible alignment of the Community Action Plan with Council's vision and goals, finding it more relatable and engaging than the four-year Community Plan. The group felt the strategic priorities could be clearer in outlining our intended actions in the Community Plan 2025-2029.

Youth Council

On the 4 August, Youth Council broadly endorsed the strategic direction and presentation of the Draft Community Plan 2025–2029. They highlighted strong alignment with youth values in areas such as early years support, youth engagement, and inclusive transport and safety initiatives. The structure and layout of the document, including the use of community quotes and visual elements, were seen as effective in communicating key messages and enhancing accessibility and engagement.

Key areas for improvement mentioned enhancing clarity, relevance, and accessibility for diverse audiences. Feedback included simplifying technical language, including visual aids of infrastructure, and ensuring youth-specific content is more prominent across all themes. Youth councillors also recommended reducing repetition to improve readability and provide clearer information around program access and eligibility.

Next steps

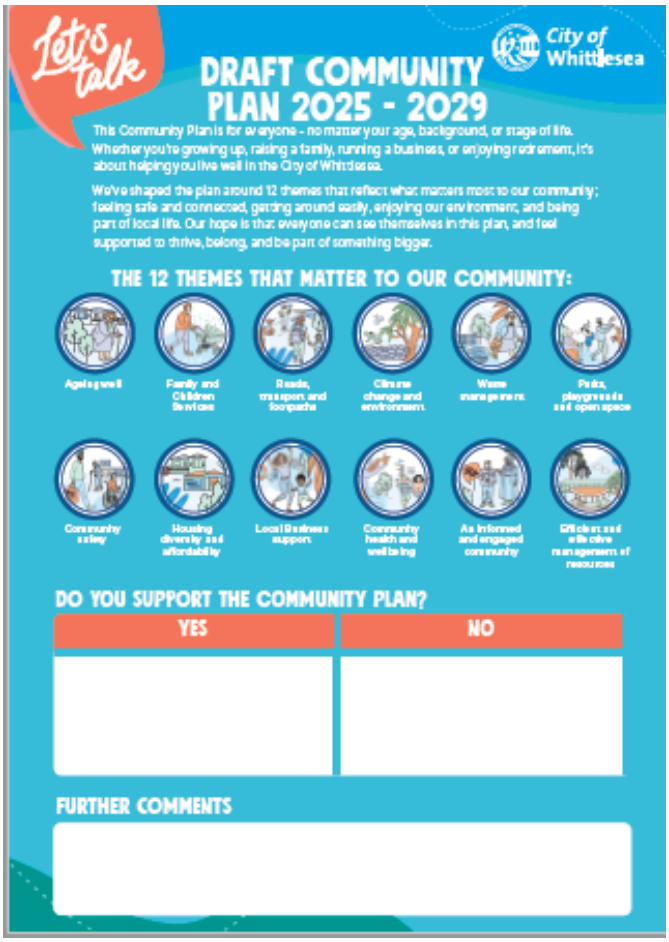
We thank all those that participated in this yearlong community engagement program and for sharing their feedback and ideas. Your voices are helping shape a City of Whittlesea that is more connected, inclusive and ready for the future.

We are finalising the Community Plan 2025 -2029 and Community Action Plan 2025-2026 that will be presented to Council for consideration and adoption at the Council meeting scheduled for 21 October 2025. We will share the final documents and encourage you to follow the project Engage page (engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/communityplan25) to be kept up to date as these are finalised.

Appendix 1: sample materials for in-person engagement activities

Phase 1 dot boards:

Phase 4 dot boards:



Phase 4 flyer: